



2020 Hampton Street · Room 3063A  
 Columbia, SC 29204  
 (803) 576-2083

**Minutes**  
**August 15, 2022**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room**

**Attendance**

Commissioner	District	Present
Charles Weber	1	Yes
Tim McSwain	2	Yes
Wayman Stover	3	Yes
Glenice Pearson	4	Yes
Kip Dillihay	5	Yes
John Grego	6	Yes
Robert Squirewell	7	Yes
Deborah DePaoli	8	Yes
Khali Gallman	9	Yes
Darrell Jackson Jr.	10	No
Gail Rodriguez	11	No

Staff & Visitors	Affiliation
Quinton Epps	Conservation Division
John McKenzie	Conservation Division
Aric Jensen	County Administration
Geo Price	Community Planning and Development Department

**Call to Order**

Grego welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order with a quorum at 3:31pm. Members, staff, and guests met in-person or by telephone.

**Approval of Agenda**

- ⇒ **Pearson moved to approve the agenda which was seconded by Weber. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Approval of Minutes**

- ⇒ **Weber moved to approve the minutes of the July meeting which was seconded by Pearson. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Report of the Chair**

- **Lower Richland Tourism Plan (LRTP) – update:** Grego reported he will be presenting to the Planning Commission on September 8 and the Richland County Conservation Committee (RCCC) will ask them to make a recommendation to include the LRTP as an appendix to the Comprehensive Plan and we will ask Council to accept that recommendation.

- **Land Development Code – Letter to Planning Commission – update:** Grego announced, after getting RCCC, Administration, and staff input, he will send the letter to Geo Price, who will then distribute it to the Planning Commission.
  - **Heritage Tourism Marketing Plan – update:** Grego reported the plan was not presented to the Development and Services committee on July 26, 2022 because Procurement requested the item be deferred so portions of the Agenda Item could be provided in a confidential packet at the next scheduled meeting to ensure compliance with procedures. Epps stated Procurement would provide it in a confidential packet for the next scheduled meeting.
  - **Greenway Advisory Committee (GAC) – discussion:** Grego reported the committee had a meeting on August 2. The City of Columbia (CoC) is doing restoration work on Gills Creek along Crowson Rd and will eventually run the greenway from Ft Jackson Blvd. to Mikell’s Ln, not Timberlane, with the current funding. They also talked about the Rocky Branch Greenway segment and it is confusing with multiple entities working on that. The Crane Creek Greenway, near the Diversion Dam at Riverfront Park, has been denied crossing over or under the railway so they are considering bridges across Smith Branch and Crane Creek. They hope to connect with the Palmetto Trail at this point. Weber stated the Palmetto Trail wants to go up the Broad River, under the railroad track and on up to the brickyard. On the Three Rivers Greenway Phase 1B, CSX railway is requiring a fence near Boyd Island to keep people from crossing the tracks. Phase 2 will go under the railway and I-126 and will cross the Broad upstream of I-126.
  - **5-Year Strategic Plan Update – discussion:** Grego reminded the plan expires this year. Separate sections of the plan were sent to the Natural Resources Committee and the Historic Preservation Committee for review and discussion and both included the general Commission sections. Updating the plan will also inform the Annual Plan that is presented each March to Council. Grego encouraged commissioners to review and discuss the plan to prepare for a dedicated meeting, an hour before the regular RCCC meeting in September. Epps stated the fresh look at the plan from new staff and new commissioners will help and we will need to decide which objectives should stay, go, or be changed and what new objectives are needed. The recent budget crisis highlighted how important the plan’s goals of better communication with Council is.
- ⇒ **Weber moved to have a one-hour Strategic Plan work session before the regular RCCC meeting on September 19 meeting which was seconded by Gallman. Motion passed unanimously.**

### **Report from Community Planning and Development**

- **Update:** Jensen stated there are three new Planning Commissioners so there will be a training/orientation meeting later in the month. September 8 at 3pm is the next scheduled regular Planning Commission meeting. Price added it may include a work session for the Land Development Code.

### **Treasurer’s Report**

- FY22 General Budget status – update: Squirewell reported the only spending is salary, a utility bill, and copier lease payments. To date, only 2% of the budget has been spent.

### **Historic Preservation Committee Report**

- **Historic Tourism Marketing Plan - update:** Pearson stated she wrote a letter to County Administrator Brown about the administrative error that led to the delay of approval and did not want to share it because it was directed to him. She reminded this project is connected to the opening of the International African American Museum on January 21, 2023 in Charleston. She hoped to get the chosen vendor started on their work and to be able to notify public entities so that they can better prepare for marketing local resources and businesses. Pearson stated when she was on a recent behind-the-scenes tour of the museum construction, there were features pointed out to her that were for the protection of the museum and patrons from possible attacks. Pearson requested each commissioner speak with their Councilmember about the importance of this plan and to make constituents aware of the possibilities to take advantage of increased tourism in Richland County. DePaoli agreed and stated there are so many creative ways for residents to create income from these opportunities with increased support. Weber reminded everyone about the small-business incubator program in the LRTP, how the RCCC was committed to carry it out, and how recent land acquisitions may be useful in that task.
  - **African-American Tourism Conference – action item:** Pearson explained the upcoming conference on October 7-8, 2022 in downtown Charleston and her goal of having at least three members attend with the use of RCCC funds. McKenzie stated the room price for the recommended hotel is not yet announced but the conference fee is only \$50.00. Using estimated costs, it may total about \$650.00 per person for a total of \$1,950.00 for three. Gallman noted it leans toward tourism in the Lowcountry and that our presence is important to point the movement in Richland County’s direction.
- ⇒ **The Historic Preservation Committee moved to use up to \$2,000.00 from the Travel and Training budget line for conference attendance which was seconded by Weber. Motion passed unanimously.**

Price asked about having someone from the Office of Small Business Opportunity attend a RCCC meeting to talk about available County services for start-up businesses and the commission agreed.

Grego added the Post and Courier news had a lengthy article about the LRTP and relayed how Cliff McCreedy, the coordinator of Biosphere Regions for the National Park Service (NPS), is very interested in the LRTP. His office is prepared to use resources to help with the initial parts of the plan, particularly the branding and wayfinding portions and will be willing to pay for new logos. McCreedy is also talking with the federal Economic Development Agency about how they may be able to assist. Weber added this information needs to get the Planning Commission as they prepare to look at the LRTP. There was discussion about who takes the reins on the LRTP as it becomes part of the Comprehensive Plan now and Price stated it was ultimately the County Council and the Planning Commission, who manages the Comprehensive Plan. Weber stated his concern that no one is in charge of the LRTP now that it has moved on. Epps added RCCC and

staff will work with Planning staff to put together, propose, and complete individual components of the LRTP as directed by RCCC and funding availability.

### **Natural Resource Committee Report**

- **Lake Elizabeth donation acceptance – works in progress/no action needed**
- **Columbia Rowing Club --- works in progress/no action needed**
- **Bates Old River – work in progress/no action needed**

Weber reported all agenda items were works in progress with no action needed.

### **Conservation Program Analyst's Report**

- **FY2022-2023 RCCC Grants** – McKenzie reported, with the exception of Sandy Level Baptist Church, all grant agreements have been signed and returned and the grantees can begin work on their projects. Sandy Level Baptist Church is still working to determine what they can complete with \$31,000 award as opposed to the \$50,000 requested. Grego asked about grantees making changes in the grant as Olympia-Granby Historical Foundation has requested. McKenzie explained Olympia wanted to change the \$1,000 rental of video editing tools budget item to the purchase of these tools for less than \$1,000. Changes in the agreement of \$1,000 or less can be considered and approved by staff and any greater changes must be reviewed and approved by the respective committees and then the RCCC.
- **Fabel Conservation Easement – update:** McKenzie reported the easement was on track. McSwain and McKenzie had a recent visit to the Fabel Farm to tour and discuss the requirements and potential boundaries of the protected parts of the property. Josh Fabel is trying to work out a few details with neighboring property owners and we are giving him some time to communicate with them. McSwain added it was a great property and there was a concern about an access easement that a landlocked neighbor uses to get to their property and Fabel needs to get more information lined up for us to proceed. Grego asked if the RCCC has worked on a conservation easement since Ken Driggers left and Weber answered that we had not. Grego stated he wondered if Legal will be helping us. Grego asked about tax advantages on these easements and McKenzie answered that the RCCC and the Conservation Division offer no advice except the property owner should get it from their own legal and financial advisors.
- **Easement Monitoring – update:** McKenzie showed a website front-page story about the new drone-assisted conservation easement monitoring program taking place with the assistance of our GIS division. McKenzie then showed an example of the photography available from this method using an image from above the Pebble Creek grouping of easements. Many members of this small rural neighborhood got together and encouraged each other to place their properties in easements. Drone monitoring can indicate unapproved actions like clearing of tree and vegetation or trash dumping and can alert us of impacted waterways or problems like pine beetle outbreaks. McKenzie added we are still trying to meet with property owners to continue communication and to update contact information and to establish contact with new owners. Grego reminded raising awareness of our conservation easement program, to Council and the public, is one of the goals in

our Strategic Plan. Grego asked if there were any problems yet and McKenzie answered there was only positive feedback so far and reminded that monitoring is required in the easement agreements.

### **Conservation Manager's Report**

- **Staff vacancies – update:** Epps updated we have had more interviews for the Administrative Assistant position and we have expanded the announcements for the Land Program Planner position to other websites because there have not been any well qualified applicants to date.
- **Reserve Fund – discussion:** Epps reported there was about \$2.8 million in the Reserve Fund that has been building up for about 10 years to be expended on larger, more complex conservation initiatives and he recommends we develop plans to spend the funds. Expenditure of funds requires RCCC approval and directions based on approved motions. We have a \$1.4 million liability for the loan of the Mill Creek upper tract. If we choose to, we could pay back the loan and still have \$1.4 million in the Reserve Fund but that loan, provided by the County, has a low interest rate. In our upcoming work with the Strategic Plan, we need to consider how the Commission wants to use these funds. For example, we could fund historical projects identified in the HTMP or the LRTP, like the small business incubator program or the road improvement and bridge replacement projects. Other considerations could include the Timberlane properties, the Greenways, or purchasing more land. Epps encouraged commissioners to send him their ideas so that he can estimate costs and include them in Strategic Planning discussions. DePaoli asked if there was a distinction of how much could be used for Natural Resources Committee projects or Historic Preservation Committee projects. Epps answered there was not. Because actions will involve Procurement or Council, we need to get started soon to complete in a timely manner. Grego asked if the Natural Resources Committee has been considering any mitigation banking opportunities and Weber answered there were no specific projects. This is an option for the Reserve Fund and requires time and up-front investment.
- **Mill Creek Bridge design – update:** Epps stated we received the permit late last week. We now need to update the construction estimate. We have the “no-permit-needed” letter meaning no permit from the Corps of Engineers is needed, only land disturbance permits.

### **New Business**

- **Heat Mapping project – discussion:** Grego noted the project was in the paper and was getting attention. Epps stated it was on the front page of the State newspaper. He added getting information out about our efforts was a goal in the Strategic Plan and while time-consuming and requiring back-and-forth for approval, it was worth it.

**Jubilee festival – discussion:** Epps reported the Jubilee festival was coming up on September 17.

- ⇒ **At 4:53pm, Weber moved to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Squirewell. Motion passed unanimously.**