



2020 Hampton Street • Room 3063A
P.O. Box 192 • Columbia, SC 29202
(803) 576-2083

Minutes September 23, 2013

Attendance:

Members present: Carol Kososki, John Grego, Margaret DuBard, Ann Furr, Becky Bailey
Virginia Sanders, Mildred Myers, Sam Holland

Absent: Jim Lawracy, Gary Atkinson, Glenice Pearson

Others present:

James B. Atkins (Buddy), Conservation Department
Nancy Stone-Collum, Conservation Department
Charlie Fisher, Conservation Department
Ken Driggers, Contract Legal Counsel
Bob Perry, SC DNR
Shannon Bobertz, SC DNR
Anna Lang, RC Office of Sustainability

Chair Carol Kososki called the meeting to order at 4:00pm with a quorum present.

Agenda: Becky Bailey made a motion to approve the agenda and was seconded by Ann Furr. Motion was unanimously approved.

Minutes: A motion was made by John Grego and seconded by Becky Bailey to approve the minutes of August 26, 2013 as written. Motion was unanimously approved.

Report of the Chair

Carol reported she, Ann Furr, Glenice Pearson, and Nancy Stone-Collum participated in a Cowasee Basin Tour of Lower Richland sponsored by Still Hopes Episcopal Home. The group toured Goodwill Plantation, a portion of which is proposed as part of the Haile Gold Mine Mitigation plan. Two RCCC grant funded projects were viewed and stops were made at Congaree National Park and St. John's Episcopal Church.

Treasurer's Report

Virginia Sanders explained FY13 funds have still not been rolled over into the FY14 budget so there is no change from last month's report.

John made a motion to defer the GIS Mapping Demo until the October meeting due to today's shortened meeting schedule. Margaret DuBard seconded the motion which was unanimously approved.

Conservation Director's Report

Haile Mitigation Plan

Buddy reported Administration, Stormwater staff and he recently met with Chairman Washington regarding the County's response to the proposed Haile Gold Mine Mitigation Plan. The mitigation proposal by Romarco Minerals Inc. includes the purchase of three properties for preservation, Rainbow Ranch in Lancaster County and Cook's Mountain and a portion of Goodwill Plantation in Richland County. These properties would be conveyed to the SC Department of Natural Resources' (SCDNR) Heritage Trust Program.

There are two issues of concern. First, the Army Corps of Engineers' (USCOE) standard operating procedure (SOP) requires 50% preservation credits and 50% restoration credits for mitigation impacts. Should the USCOE accept the proposed mitigation plan, it could have a profound impact on Richland County's mitigation efforts. On September 10, Council directed staff to enter into contracts to purchase two large parcels to mitigate future Transportation Penny projects. The County could save tens of millions of dollars if the County were allowed to follow the same "preservation only" procedure proposed by the Haile Gold Mine. This would not only save millions in restoration costs, but could also impact how the RCCC conducts its land acquisition program.

Second, staff and Chairman Washington are concerned about the level of public access to the property under the Heritage Trust Program. There are a number of public access models under the Heritage Trust Program with varying degrees of access. On September 10, 2013 County Council approved a motion directing staff to negotiate with Romarco, file comments on the 404 Permit from the USCOE's and DHEC's 401 Water Quality Certification, and to appeal if necessary. After an article appeared in *The State* regarding the motion, Council withdrew the authority for staff to appeal the permits. That does not mean that the County may not decide to appeal the permits in the future.

County administrators and staff had two separate productive meetings with Romarco Minerals and with Col. Alvin Taylor, Director of SCDNR. In particular, Col. Taylor looked forward to working with both the County and the Richland Soil and Water Conservation District on public access to the properties. Staff has requested the Commissioners provide input on what kind of public access should be provided and how these properties can be used to maximize eco-tourism opportunities. In particular, Chairman Washington hopes to maximize the eco-tourism opportunities under any mitigation plan to address the long-standing environmental issues in Lower Richland.

Owens Field Trail Project

The contract with Fuss & O’Neill for Owens Field Trail will be signed this week and work will begin in October. The design work on the trail improvements and Stormwater Best Management Practices will be completed by April, 2014.

Richland 2 School Project-Jackson Creek

Buddy submitted comments to DHEC concerning Richland School District Two’s proposal to build an elementary school on the Hugh Palmer property at Decker Blvd. and Jackson Creek. Gills Creek Watershed Association requested denial of the wetlands permit and Cary Lake Homeowners Association submitted comments. A FEMA grant obtained by Quinton Epps, Richland County Stormwater Division Manager, will be used to purchase the old Zorba’s restaurant, raze it and restore the floodplain it occupied.

Community Gardens

Councilwoman Julie-Ann Dixon is interested in creating a County-wide community garden program. To create this new program, the Planning and Sustainability Departments have developed a Request of Action for County Council’s consideration. Consideration needs to be given to who will take care of the gardens and what the educational aspects of the new program will be if County Council gives their approval. Since this will be a new program it will require a new source of funding.

Committee Reports

Conservation Committee

Opinion Survey

John received the raw data from 431 respondents to the Conservation Opinion survey conducted by USC in early September. John will need to analyze the data before presenting results to RCCC members.

Hunter’s Run Easement

Nancy referred everyone to the map in their packet of a 47-acre property in NE Richland County. The developer is placing the property under a conservation easement as mitigation for Hunter’s Run subdivision which surrounds the property. 43 acres of the property is unaltered upland buffer and while there are no wetlands on the property it does encompass 8,025 linear feet of Twenty-five Mile Creek. The creek is on DHEC’s 303d impaired list and the easement will provide some water quality protection for the creek. John made a motion to accept the donation of the easement. Sam seconded the motion which was unanimously approved.

Historic Committee

Sam reminded everyone about the upcoming tour on Monday. Properties to be visited include the Whaley House, The Y on Wayne Street, Granby Mill Village and the Curtiss Wright Hanger.

Outreach Committee

Becky passed out a marketing proposal for RCCC members to look at and consider for discussion at next month's meeting. Virginia Sanders and Sam agreed to meet with Becky before the next Commission meeting.

Conservation Coordinator's Report

Nancy explained grants projects are all on schedule and interim reports are due October 15. RCCC members are invited to a five year anniversary party at 701 Whaley on October 3rd.

Buddy said Kim Murphy, former Chair of the now defunct Appearance Commission, called to report authority has been received from Washington DC to proceed with the tree planting project at Ft. Jackson.

Public Input

Bob Perry, Director of Office of Environmental Programs at SCDNR, was raised in Kershaw County and has been with SCDNR for 35 years. He has been intimately involved with the Haile Gold Mine discussions for five years including with "early review and consultation with the applicant before the permit was solicited." He explained SCDNR conducts a science-based, balanced review of applications and provides comments back to the permitting agencies.

Bob argued Haile Gold Mine is not a routine project because of the tremendous environmental impacts; therefore the mitigation plan should not be routine. In addition, Haile is putting forward a \$9.9 million endowment which is not routine. He dismissed the Transportation Penny projects as routine and not comparable to the Haile Gold Mine impacts. However, he stated should the County come forward with impacts on the order of magnitude as the Haile Gold Mine, it would be a non-routine proposal, and the "USCOE would be in a position to accept a non-routine mitigation plan" to be consistent with the proposed Haile Plan.

Concerning cost, Bob stated Haile initially proposed a \$27 million mitigation plan. Although he is not privy of the cost of the current plan, he thinks it is on the order of \$40 million. He stated the USCOE receives 150-200 individual applications every year with an average impact of 1.5-2.5 acres "which is pretty good impact to waters of the Nation" and 400-500 feet of streams. He stated the 120 acres of wetlands impacts is big and equals a whole years' worth of wetland impacts and three-four years of stream impacts. He again stated this is a very large project and that is "why the USCOE looking at this in a different light, a unique situation that applies only in these type of circumstances."

Regarding the mitigation plan, he stated although "we had a seat at the table, DNR was not in a position to discuss this until after the public notice" because it was "sensitive and ongoing land negotiations." He further stated "I hope you can understand that nobody who was involved in this in a decision-making capacity was willing to talk about it outside the rooms they were in."

As for public access issues, Bob stated there are differences in public access among the Heritage Trust Preserves, depending on the protection of the resource and the allowed uses. He anticipates Cook's Mountain would provide hunting, fishing, bird watching, nature study, tours

of all kinds and an intense education program – a broad-public access. He can envision “three school buses of children” visiting every day, “something the citizens of Richland County can be proud of.” It will be something African-Americans can be proud of because of the unique, historical connections with the African American community. Lastly, the public use is going to be for the average person and much different than now since the properties are privately owned.

Ken Driggers expressed the concern Cook’s would become a state-owned private hunting club with public access in name only, and that most Heritage Trust sites are hunting properties while other public uses are secondary. In response, Bob indicated Botany Bay Heritage Preserve would be the model. Carol requested SCDNR provide the elements of a management plan for comment by the Commission and Council. Bob responded he would.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 pm.

Submitted by Charlie Fisher, Administrative Assistant