

MINUTES

Green Space Advisory Committee

March 4, 2024, 2:30 PM, Executive Conference Room, Beaufort County Administration Building

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair McShane called the meeting to order at 2:30 PM. Chair McShane stated that public notification of the meeting had been published, posted, and distributed in compliance with the SC Freedom of Information Act.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Tom Davis
Timothy Evans
Alice Howard, Vice-Chair
T. Peter Kristian
Carmen Avon Manning
Michael McShane, Chair
Laurel Rhoten

STAFF PRESENT:

Chuck Atkinson, Assistant County Administrator, Development/Recreation
Mark Davis, Deputy Director, Beaufort County Planning and Zoning Department
Amanda Flake, Natural Resource Planner
Brian Hulbert, Deputy County Attorney
Thomas Keaveny, County Attorney Elected Officials
Robert Merchant, Director, Beaufort County Planning and Zoning Department
Juliana Smith, Long-Range Planner, Beaufort County Planning and Zoning Department

GUESTS PRESENT:

Jerry Alcock; Josh Gruber, Deputy Town Manager, Town of Hilton Head; Bob Jones; Tara Lynam; Barbara Pearson; Graeme Philp, Graybill, Lansche & Vinzani; Kate Schaefer, Director of Land Protection, Beaufort County Open Land Trust; Jeff Vinzani, Graybill, Lansche & Vinzani.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Peter Kristian made a motion to approve the agenda. Laurel Rhoten seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JANUARY 31, 2024:

Peter Kristian made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 31 meeting. Tim Evans seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

INTRODUCTION OF GREEN SPACE PROGRAM ATTORNEY:

Tom Keaveny said an RFQ for legal services was advertised last fall. Five firms were interviewed. The firm Graybill, Lansche & Vinzani, LLC, was selected. Tom introduced Jeff Vinzani and Graeme Philp. Jeff Vinzani introduced himself and Mr. Philip. Mr. Vinzani said their firm specializes in commercial real estate. He said Mr. Philp is a tax attorney. They look forward to working with staff and the Green Space Advisory Committee.

FEE SIMPLE APPLICATION: WILLIAM HILTON PARKWAY, HILTON HEAD ISLAND

Mark Davis presented the initial staff summary evaluation using the computer screen and went over the format. Mark reminded the Committee they are not getting into the weeds on applications at this stage; they are simply evaluating if the application has merit and to decide whether or not to recommend to the Community Services and Land Use Committee further consideration to perform due diligence and negotiate terms with the applicant. Mark noted the Greenprint Plan information is now being displayed in chart form rather than narrative form.

Mark presented a map of the property on the computer screen that showed existing properties already owned by the Town in relation to the proposed parcels included in this application.

Peter Kristian asked if these parcels would be impacted by the new bridge design. Josh Gruber said based on the current design, there would be minimal to no impact to these parcels. Josh said this application would eliminate curb cuts and reduce traffic conflicts which is supported by overall County transportation goals in the area. Josh stated the desire is to purchase the properties, remove any ability for development, and preserve them in their natural state.

Carmen Avon Manning asked what is the maximum development allowed; six dwelling units? Josh Gruber said 34 units might be allowed on the parcels as a whole along with some commercial allowances.

Mark Davis stated that while this application has been submitted as a Fee Simple for government ownership, this type of procurement acts a lot like a corridor protection by removing existing curb cuts along a busy road, allowing existing structures to be removed, and offers opportunity for additional vegetation to be planted throughout the site.

Chair McShane asked if the applicant understands that future Town Councils could not resell the property for development. Josh Gruber said yes, the Town understands, and the intended use would be for preservation in perpetuity. Chair McShane said the applicant should also understand that any recommendation for approval today does not indicate that a deal has been cut and that there will be a closing anytime soon.

Peter Kristian said he is very familiar with these parcels and that traffic is a major issue in the area; having an opportunity to remove potential development and make the area safer is a desired goal for the Town.

Peter Kristian made a motion to move the application forward to the Community Services and Land Use Committee with a recommendation to conduct due diligence/negotiate terms, seconded by Tim Evans. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

FEE SIMPLE APPLICATION: JONESVILLE ROAD, HILTON HEAD ISLAND

Mark Davis presented the initial staff summary evaluation using the computer screen. Mark showed aerial maps of the property and existing nearby Town owned property —the old equestrian center.

Josh Gruber said the property could be developed for 50 units, but more likely 30 units, as there are some freshwater wetlands on the property. The property is not currently for sale publicly; the property owners approached the Town regarding the acquisition.

Chair McShane said the challenge with this property would be to prevent it from becoming just an amenity for the adjoining neighborhood. Josh Gruber said he understands that. The Town is looking at this tract for possible water access.

Chair McShane asked for a motion. Peter Kristian made a motion to move the application forward to the Community Services and Land Use Committee with a recommendation to conduct due diligence/negotiate terms, seconded by Senator Tom Davis. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

FEE SIMPLE APPLICATION: NEW RIVER TRACT, BLUFFTON

Mark Davis presented the initial staff summary evaluation using the computer screen and referred to an aerial map. Mark said the application comes from a private property owner and is located in the Town of Bluffton. Mark reminded the Committee that if the County owns the property, public access is required to meet the requirements of the Green Space Program. Mark said staff coordinated with the Town of Bluffton on the application and said the property is zoned Planned Development with an active Development Agreement; and is encumbered by its prior entitlements with minimal development rights.

Mark noted the property has a utility transmission line running through the north end of the parcel. The Town of Bluffton owns the adjoining former rail bed, which is actively used as a pedestrian trail. The parcel has no road frontage.

Peter Kristian asked how public access would occur if the property is only accessed by a trail. Mark Davis said this is something for the Committee to consider in its evaluation.

Mark said the parcel is primarily a forested swamp with a little bit of high ground. Chair McShane stated the property is bottomland hardwood swamp.

Carmen Avon Manning said the applicant keeps referring to the Bluffton Parkway Extension. Mark Davis said this is an unbuilt, unfunded project.

Chair McShane said this application could be preservation of bottomland hardwood; that it wouldn't be cut. There may be a resiliency component and it may enhance the trail. Chair McShane said he is not sure if the threat of development is there today; an appraisal is needed to determine developability.

Tim Evans stated this is a property that better lends itself to a conservation easement, not a fee simple acquisition.

Chair McShane said the coordination letter provided by the Town of Bluffton states they are not interested in owning the property. He said he did not see the County making this a priority for acquisition. Chair McShane said if the applicant would consider an application for a conservation easement, he would be much more enthusiastic.

Tim Evans said he didn't see this application moving along as fee simple. Senator Davis and Laurel Rhoten agreed. Carmen Avon Manning agreed, but said preservation is supported because of the New River; however, she didn't see the potential for development. Chair McShane said that fee simple is only one tool; there are other tools that could be used for preservation.

Chair McShane said we need to take action and the action may be that we decline this application and not recommend due diligence and ask the owner to work with staff on a new application. Peter Kristian made that motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Howard. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous. Chair McShane encouraged the landowner to work with staff on another type of application for the property.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Chair McShane said there will be a presentation to the Natural Resources Committee (now the Community Services and Land Use Committee) on March 11 for the Gregorie Neck Conservation Easement application. Mark Davis reminded the Committee that this application was recommended for approval to move forward to Natural Resources (now the Community Service and Land Use Committee).

Chair McShane provided a quick update on the other three applications currently in the process and Mark Davis said that staff will place them on a future agenda once the recommended due diligence has been completed.

Senator Davis asked about the status of the Town of Hilton Head Mitchelville Road application. Josh Gruber said due diligence is underway while they continue to work through known title issues. Senator Davis expressed support for a preservation outcome.

Vice-Chair Howard said at the recent SoLoCo meeting, local governments expressed great interest in the Green Space Program.

The Committee discussed a possible future meeting date on Monday April 22 (Earth Day).

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 3:16 PM.

Minutes compiled by Libby Anderson, Beaufort County Planning and Zoning Department