

MINUTES

Green Space Advisory Committee

April 11, 2025, 10:00 AM, Public Works Conference Room, 120 Shanklin Road

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair McShane called the meeting to order at 10:09 AM. Chair McShane said that public notification of the meeting was published, posted, and distributed in compliance with the SC Freedom of Information Act.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Senator Tom Davis
Timothy Evans (virtual)
T. Peter Kristian
Carmen Avon Manning
Larry McElynn, Vice Chair
Michael McShane, Chair
Laurel Rhoten

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chuck Atkinson, Assistant County Administrator, Development/Recreation
Bryan Bauer, Director, Beaufort County Engineering Department
Christina Bryant, Green Space Planner, Beaufort County Planning and Zoning Department
Mark Davis, Green Space Program Manager, Beaufort County Planning and Zoning Department
Brian Hulbert, Deputy County Attorney
Graeme Philp, Attorney, Graybill, Lansche & Vinzani (virtual)
Jeff Vinzani, Attorney, Graybill, Lansche & Vinzani (virtual)

GUESTS PRESENT:

Carol Crutchfield, Director of Facilities Planning & Construction, Beaufort County School District
Richard Geier, Chair, Beaufort County Board of Education
Alice Howard, Chair, Beaufort County Council
Grant McClure, Project Manager, South Coast Office, Coastal Conservation League
Ethan James, Applicant, Sea Island Parkway Tracts
Mary Ryan Krieger, Deputy Community Plans and Liaisons Officer, MCAS
Kate Schaefer, Director of Land Protection, Beaufort County Open Land Trust

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Chair McShane asked that the agenda be revised to add a discussion regarding accelerating conservation under Other Business. The Committee agreed to amend the agenda to add the discussion. Peter Kristian made a motion to approve the amended agenda. Lauren Rhoten seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – MARCH 7, 2025:

Peter Kristian made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 7 meeting. Senator Davis seconded. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

Chair McShane asked if there were any public comments. There were no public comments.

Chair McShane welcomed County Council Chair Howard to the meeting.

FEE SIMPLE APPLICATION: SEA ISLAND PARKWAY TRACTS, BEAUFORT:

Mark Davis said this application had been deferred from the March meeting and it is now back for consideration. Mark briefly reviewed the application using the computer screen. The application is for two parcels totaling 6 acres. The site is directly adjacent to property owned by the School District. Another moving piece is the road improvements that have been in the works for some time. The existing plans shows Cougar Drive access being eliminated and realigned with a new road. Mark showed the new road alignment. Bryan Bauer confirmed that the engineering design has been mostly completed, and they are in the ROW acquisition stage. In response to a question from Chair McShane, Bryan said the proposed road alignment will have some impact on the subject property.

Dick Geier introduced himself as chair of the School Board. Colonel Geier said this application has been discussed in the Operations Committee and at the full School Board. We like the idea of having green space to the south of the school. The school is being demolished, and a new school will be built behind it. The existing school will remain until the new school is built. There could be green space from the existing school site all the way to the road. Colonel Geier said, however, they have an issue with the new road; they do not feel it is sufficient to carry the school traffic. There can often be traffic backed up to Sea Island Parkway and we would like to keep the existing Cougar Drive there, but for right-turn only, no left turn. We don't want to see commercial development in front of the school. He has talked with Council Member Bartholomew and said we can share this space; perhaps a farmers' market or park could be located there. On the weekend, any overflow parking could park in the school parking lot.

Carol Crutchfield said they are currently in schematic design for the new building and should be going into design development soon, so we should know how much space we will be using. The intention is to leave as much green space as we can. The existing footprint of the school will be converted to pervious surface and some additional parking.

Colonel Geier said they will be reducing the footprint of the school. Right now, it is 1-story spread out over a large area and the new school will be 3-story to reduce the footprint.

Chair McShane asked if there had been any thought of incorporating this into an academic program. Colonel Geier said we already have classes going to the marsh all the time. If we could have the area for forestry, it might be used for outdoor recess.

Bryan Bauer said they could look into existing Cougar Drive.

Chair McShane said the Town of Mount Pleasant holds their weekly farmer market at Moultrie Middle School.

Senator Davis asked if a farmers' market would be consistent with Green Space requirements. Mark Davis said the farmers market could be held on the existing Cougar Drive if that remains. Chair McShane said there would be clarity on that issue in the grant agreement. He said we need clarification on who would own the property—the County or the School Board.

Chair McShane asked Colonel Geier if the School Board had considered owning the property. Colonel Geier said the School Board would prefer not to own it. Peter Kristian questioned why they would not want to own it and control it. Colonel Geier said if the property was given to us, he felt the Board would look favorably on that as long as there was an MOU regarding maintenance.

Colonel Geier said another point about keeping Cougar Drive is having additional access in case of emergency. Chair McShane said the Cougar Drive discussion is really between County Engineering and the School Board. What Green Space can debate is do we provide funding for acquisition of that property and if we do, who will be the owner. The grant agreement would provide expectations on the manner in which the property would be maintained.

Chair McShane said we may be in a position to facilitate acquisition of the land, but in that discussion, we need to know if the School Board would want to take ownership. Colonel Geier said he would need to go talk to the Board, but he could personally support it. Chair McShane said he could see a lot of benefit to the expansion of the grounds for academic purposes. We also need to have an understanding from Engineering on what the impacts could be on the subject property. Bryan Bauer said some of the impact would be drainage and some of that might be easements, not right-of way acquisition. Chair McShane said that should be reflected in the appraisal.

Ethan James, the applicant, said about 0.7 acres would be impacted by the road improvement. Chair McShane said in any recommendation to Council, we want to be clear that Engineering will be paying for some of this.

In response to a question from Vice Chair McElynn, Colonel Geier said the response from the School Board will address both ownership and maintenance.

Mark Davis said that maintenance means keeping it in its natural form. Chair McShane said that it could include trails or an outdoor classroom.

Carmen Avon Manning thanked the applicant and said she hoped this would inspire other people to do similar things. She thought people in the area would prefer green space verses a gas station.

Peter Kristian asked if by the next meeting, they could have an estimate of the impact from the ROW acquisition on the property.

Peter Kristian made a motion to defer action on the application so that the School District can provide their input and so an estimate for the financial impact from the ROW acquisition could be determined. Laurel Rhoten seconded.

Graeme Philp said, if the idea is to have a farmers' market on a portion of the property, we could reserve that right in the grant agreement, but there will be insurance issues. We should also make sure the School District is not going to have an issue hosting a farmers' market because of an insurance issue. Colonel Geier said this issue comes up all the time and we have a process for addressing this. Carol Crutchfield said the user needs to have insurance and that the School District is also an insured.

Chair McShane called for a vote on the motion. The vote to approve the motion was unanimous.

Colonel Geier said the School Board will provide Green Space with an answer within the next few weeks.

In response to a question from Vice Chair McElynn, Ethan James said the property is listed for \$2.4 million. The Green Space application requests \$2.25 million— which is less than asking price.

Chair McShane outlined the approval process for Colonel Geier; it could take 90 to 180 days.

UPDATE ON PROJECT FUNDING DISTRIBUTION BY GEOGRAPHIC REGION:

Mark Davis gave an update on funding distribution by geographic region.

Senator Davis asked what we can do to accelerate things in the pipeline. We want to be wise in use of the money and do our due diligence, but development is happening as we are speaking. Are we actively approaching owners? Kate Schaefer said Open Land Trust is actively approaching owners.

Chair McShane said he would like to see the financials on properties that have closed; what we have authority under resolution to spend; and forecasting what that would be if those projects closed.

Peter Kristian asked if the additional grant for the Mitchelville tract has been funded yet. Jeff Vinzani said the amended grant agreement has been sent to the Town's attorney. This is also true for the Beach City Road project.

Senator Davis asked Kate Schaefer how we can help you be more proactive. Kate said it is important to publicize what the program is capable of; you are ambassadors for using this money to solve problems. We are also actively talking to our peers about the program. We have several active applications and four pre-applications for the next quarter.

Chair McShane said our committee members can help multiply the program. We need to accelerate conservation because development is accelerating.

Mary Ryan Krieger said there might be opportunities with the upcoming 5-year update of the Beaufort REPI plan.

Chair McShane said he would like to look into grants that could be reimbursed. We are doing this now at the state level. That way we could expedite the process. Kate Schaefer said federal money is in a new process, but investing local money to bridge that gap would be a game changer.

Chair Howard said Council Member Bartholomew worked very hard on the Sea Island Parkway parcels, so all the Council Members need to be more proactive in their own districts; they can be accelerators.

Chuck Atkinson said as long as Council is clear about what money may or may not come back to them, nothing in the ordinance needs to be changed; however, if we get into loans, that is a whole different issue.

Senator Davis said he would like to hear about any amendments that should be made to the State Green Space law.

Tim Evans asked if you have considered an in-lieu fee. It would be similar to a line of credit to municipalities so they would have assurance the money is there. The money would be time limited. Brian Hulbert noted we already do that through the geographic region's distribution. Chuck Atkinson noted that County Council would still need to approve allocations.

Chair McShane said he would like a status update on projects in due diligence on a regular basis. Chuck Atkinson said we could add a spreadsheet in the drop drive that is updated regularly.

Kate Schaefer gave an update on the Buckfield project. There are four pieces of property; two of the four are in Beaufort County. The same owner owns all four parcels. At the time of the October application, it was imagined as a cooperative project with the Beaufort County

Economic Development Corporation. Since then, due diligence indicated a higher percentage of wetlands and unbuildable land than originally thought. It is now a wholesale conservation opportunity. The appraisals have been completed, and the contract is being renegotiated under conservation price per acre.

Carmen Avon Manning asked how the recent Supreme Court decision regarding wetlands is affecting South Carolina, because that is going to be very significant moving forward. Chair McShane said South Carolina uniquely has the Pollution Control Act that provides some protection of those isolated wetlands. Chair McShane said the state has taken the lead in understanding the value wetlands provide in resilience.

OVERVIEW OF GREEN SPACE PROGRAM DOCUMENT – GRANT AGREEMENTS:

This item was deferred.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Carmen Avon Manning said the tree removal along Bluffton Parkway is pretty nasty. People know I am on the Green Space Committee and ask me about tree removal. They ask, “what are they doing? We voted for Green Space. Why aren’t you just going in and buying it all?” Chair McShane said you need to start with a willing landowner. Carmen said we always need to come back to the main goals of the program—preventing flooding, preventing runoff, and farmland preservation. An acre or two is not doing that; we are looking for big tracts. We are going to have to show we have done some really good stuff. We need to encourage people like the Sea Island Parkway applicant; even if it’s only six acres, the people in that community will appreciate that. Local governments have lots of ability to regulate, but they are not taking advantage of it; they just want to pave everything.

Senator Davis said it’s not only addressing a problem that exists now but also instilling confidence in the public that it is working because I want to go back and get another one.

Senator Davis asked about the status of due diligence for the Buckwalter PUD application. Mark Davis said the Town of Bluffton is the applicant and they are in the process of getting title work completed, which is needed to assist with the appraisal. Senator Davis said the appraisal should take into account that there is currently no development rights assigned to that tract. Mark Davis said he has communicated this multiple times to the Town.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 11:36 AM.

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