



2020 Hampton Street • Room 3063A
 P.O. Box 192 • Columbia, SC 29202
 (803) 576-2080

Minutes
April 8, 2021

Attendance

Commissioner	District	Present	Staff & Visitors	Affiliation
Charles Weber	1	Yes	Quinton Epps	Conservation Division
Tim McSwain	2	Yes	Chanda Cooper	Conservation Division
Sam Holland	3	No	Tyler Brown	SCDNR
Glenice Pearson	4	Yes	Marc Cribb	SCACD
Buddy Atkins	5	Yes	Jeff Laney	RSWCD
John Grego	6	Yes	Kenny Mullis	RSWCD
Robert Squirewell	7	Yes		
Carol Kososki	8	Yes		
Vacant	9	--		
Darrell Jackson, Jr.	10	Yes		
Gail Rodriguez	11	No		

Call to Order

Grego welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order with a quorum at 5:04 pm. All members, staff, and guests participated by Zoom video conference due to the closure of County offices as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approval of Agenda

⇒ **Kososki moved to modify the agenda to change the action item from Item #4 to a discussion which was seconded by Atkins. After a discussion and a call for the question by Atkins this motion passed with Weber and Grego voting no.**

FY22 Budget Recommendations – discussion

Grego summarized page 164 of the Administrator’s budget recommendations for FY22 by saying this line item represents the budget for staffing the Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (District) which is \$226,930 although it typically only supports about \$130,000 to \$140,000 in actual expenses. These expenses include all of Cooper’s salary, half of Quinton’s salary and 40% of the Administrative Assistant position salary (all including benefits). These are funds which are proposed to be cut from the General Fund. Grego continued from the biennial budget saying typical costs for the Conservation Commission include \$830,799 taxes and \$23,204 Fee in Lieu of taxes in revenues, and a transfer in of \$143,988 from the General Fund to cover expenses at Pinewood Lake Park and the other conservation tracts. These items are built into the biennial budget. This

accounts for about a \$1 million dollar budget. These are the funds the CP&D Director wants to use to fund all the Conservation Division activities.

Grego described the difference in salaries showing the deduction from Professional Services to cover the loss of the General Fund monies of \$226,930 which covers the District salaries and benefits. Professional Services line item is used to implement all sorts of conservation projects including the Lower Richland Tourism Plan (LRTP). Both the District and the RCCC feel as if we operate with some level of autonomy.

Atkins asked what the total budget adds up to in the spreadsheet which is slightly over \$1 million as it does not seem to represent the \$143,988 General Fund transfer in.

Kosowski added that we need the sources of the funds so that we can understand where the funds are coming from and where they are going as it appears these funds have also been cut.

Grego stated that the CP&D Director said he had not cut the \$143,988 General Fund transfer in.

Atkins stated the General Fund transfer in does not appear to be included, he compressed all these items into one budget item, and it is not clear if we are getting this transfer in or not.

Kosowski stated we cannot see what is coming in with this aggregated budget and we have asked for a disaggregated budget.

Grego stated the CP&D Director cannot disaggregate this budget as it is done by finance after the budget has been approved.

Atkins said it is important to know what funds we have so that we can manage our budget and we believe we need to see the numbers segregated out.

Weber stated we need to move on to other matters although this is important to see when it comes out.

Grego stated to summarize we feel the CP&D Director did not consult with us, these cuts will have a big impact on our ability to save up for major projects, and at this point he asked Mullis and SCDNR about the lack of support for the District in this proposed budget.

Mullis said it shows a lack of respect for the people working for the county. We would like to see our budget increased not decreased and he had questions in his mind about the District operating under the Commission's budget.

Brown stated he would have to get a legal opinion on doing this since the District is a part of state government.

Cribb added that he agrees.

Atkins stated it could be done through an MOA and if it was considered not inconsistent with our ordinance this could be done although he did not want this to be done and we should request a legal opinion.

Brown stated he thought there were two distinct missions and we should try and keep the funding the way it has been where they are not combined. Keeping them independent will avoid conflicts.

Weber stated that it did not appear consistent with the ordinance as written today, we did not really know what details were included in the budget and we will not know until Monday.

Epps stated he did not think the legality question was very important at this juncture although the idea that one commission was governing another commission will create conflicts in the future and we should focus on the idea we do not want District and Commission funding combined.

Further discussion was had on this issue and all seemed to agree putting these two commissions under one budget will create conflicts, we may be on shaky ground and we do not want to have the budgets combined.

Atkins stated there are several things we want to do (1) argue to keep the funds for the District, (2) make some determination whether it is not inconsistent with the Commission to fund the District, and (3) we want the \$100,000 put back in our Professional Services budget. We also need to make sure the budget is segregated out.

Pearson stated she wanted to return the Commission to its FY 21 budget so we could begin to expand our efforts in African-American communities especially in older areas as we all know these are rapidly going away with the recent examples from our programs. She wants to make sure the letter includes reference to these items. Right now the Commission is the only entity participating in historical preservation and very few African Americans can participate on the side of conservation of land mainly because of the history. Black people did not own the kind of land that white people did and so much of the money goes to land owners instead of preservation of history. She is very upset about losing funds from our efforts as we are rapidly losing sites which could be preserved if we had more funds and this should be a part of our letter.

Laney agreed with her and said this fit perfectly in line with the potential conflicts of funding the District under the Commission since funds would be diverted from historical projects. He stated further this all happened because we were not consulted and bad recommendations were made.

Kosowski also agreed with Pearson and stated we have had large amounts of requests for our historical preservation grant requests.

Grego stated we have some sentences in the letter regarding this and he could certainly add more regarding African Americans.

Atkins stated he wants to see the table put back into the letter and this is a unique opportunity to hire our positions back and for discussion with Council members.

Grego disagreed, felt it would be best in a sidebar, and felt it should be conducted on an individual basis.

Kosowski agreed with Atkins and said we need to have a hard ask in the beginning of the letter as this is a budget conversation and this a watered down version.

Weber stated he had to go through each item with his council member who had many questions about each position and why was the administrative position transferred to a general pool and how are you going to keep track of their work for the half-mil.

Weber wanted to know if there is a budget crunch.

Grego and Atkins replied no there is no budget crunch.

Jackson asked if this is a proposed budget or is it final.

Atkins responded this budget is the Administrator's recommended budget.

Jackson said that we still have time to request the budget be changed.

Epps responded there are 3 readings and a public hearing and there will be many opportunities to bring this before Council.

Grego stated we was working on some talking points for these types of discussions.

Pearson stated there are other areas which have great historical value which are not related to Lower Richland. None of this letter addressed other areas in the county. The letter read to me that conservation is only thing that the Commission does.

Grego stated we can add various items to address Pearson's concerns.

Much more discussion regarding the letter ensued. No actions were taken.

⇒ The meeting was adjourned by Grego at 6:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Quinton Epps