



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

**Minutes**  
**November 16, 2020**

**Attendance**

Commissioner	District	Present
Charles Weber	1	Yes
Tim McSwain	2	Yes
Sam Holland	3	Yes
Vacant	4	--
Buddy Atkins	5	Yes
John Grego	6	Yes
Robert Squirewell	7	Yes
Carol Kososki	8	Yes
Vacant	9	--
Vacant	10	--
Gail Rodriguez	11	Yes

Staff & Visitors	Affiliation
Quinton Epps	Conservation Division
Charlie Fisher	Conservation Division
Michael Ellison	W.K. Dickson
Leonardo Brown	County Administrator
Clayton Voignier	CP&D Director

**Call to Order**

Chair Carol Kososki welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order with a quorum at 3:35pm. 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. At Carol’s request, each of the Commissioners introduced themselves to Mr. Brown.

**Approval of Agenda**

John made a motion to approve the agenda and was seconded by Tim. Motion carried.

**Approval of Minutes**

Tim requested the minutes be corrected to indicate he attended the October 19, 2020 meeting. Based on this correction, Tim made a motion to approve the minutes of October 19, 2020 and was seconded by John. Motion carried.

**Report of the Chair**

Carol discussed her and other Commissioners visit to the new section of the Saluda Section of Three Rivers Greenway which has been completed with Transportation Penny funds. She also indicated the RCCC’s involvement in the Greenway Advisory Committee meetings and her joy over completion of this project. Carol also mentioned the Commissioners who have been volunteering at the Pollinator Garden at Pinewood Lake Park to prepare it for the winter. She thanked everyone for their help and commended Ann Maria Johnson for her

work under the Richland Soil and Water Conservation District's grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Robert Squirewell reported on the purchase of the tractor for work at Mill Creek, the expenditures to W.K. Dickson for the Walden Pond study and discussed the excess salary item due to the Land Planner vacancy and Nancy Stone-Collum's recent retirement and hoped these vacancies could be filled to assist Quinton with the RCCC's work.

### **Report of the Community Planning & Development Director**

Carol introduced the three items Clayton would be covering including refilling Nancy's position (Conservation Program Analyst), a CDBG Mitigation Plan update and the Timberlane Tree Planting Plan along the proposed Gills Creek Greenway.

#### *Conservation Program Analyst Rehire*

Clayton stated he had reviewed this vacancy both with Quinton and Assistant County Administrator (ACA) Ashley Powell. The most important duties associated with position relate to grants, coordination with the RCCC, and the monitoring of easements. Clayton has decided not to refill the position at this time since it does not meet the mission critical criteria adopted by Administration. Those criteria include whether or not the position is essential to public safety, not mission critical, not a leadership (Director) position, does not involve a loss of federal funding or a Council-driven project. Clayton has proposed Meghan Sullivan, the Sustainability Planner to assist Quinton. Clayton has asked Quinton to reach out to Brian Crooks (Planning Director) and Meghan regarding her assistance. Clayton also suggested Robin Carter, the CP&D Budget Director, to assist in financial tasks.

Carol asked specifically about Clayton's recommendation not to refill the position and the process to refill the position. Clayton stated it would not be moving forward to Mr. Brown and that he and ACA Powell had made the decision not to refill the position at this time since it does not meet the previously stated criteria.

Robert asked Clayton when the Conservation Program Analyst position might be rehired and he also mentioned Charlie Fisher's reassignment. Clayton stated the position would not be hired until the pseudo-hiring freeze is lifted. Robert asked Clayton about the hiring of a new assessor since this doesn't seem to meet the public safety criteria. Clayton stated he made decision to refill the assessor's position since it is a critical leadership position. Robert again stated the critical need for this position to be refilled in order for the RCCC to complete its work.

Carol stated she had reviewed the 22 current vacancies listed on the County's HR page. Of those, 12 appear to be essential according to the Clayton's criteria, four are completely non-essential (such as a painter in Public Works) and another six potentially non-essential in Public Works. Since we are a small Division we have reached criticality in our ability to do work due to the three vacancies which staff the RCCC. This is further problematic since we were unable to extend the contract for our specialized outside counsel (Ken Driggers) who assisted us with easements and land purchases. It appears there is inconsistency in the essential hiring policy across departments. Carol stated since we are a millage entity, our funding does not affect the general fund.

Buddy enquired of Clayton how much of Meghan's time (FTE equivalents) would be dedicated to the RCCC. Clayton stated it could be considerable since she is not busy in her current position. Robert suggested the change in Meghan's job duties should be reflected in the County's budget. Buddy stated that due to Quinton's work load associated with both Mill Creek and Pinewood Lake Park Nancy has been carrying the bulk of the work load for the RCCC. He suggested based on his former experience as the Conservation Director, it will take a

considerable amount of effort to manage the grant and easement programs let alone all of the other tasks for which Nancy was responsible. He stated that with the extensive broad experience of the Commissioners, that we have a different view of the current needs of the RCCC. Carol added that the grants, especially the historical preservation grants, takes specialized experience which Meghan does not have and that we need the position to be filled.

Charles asked if the hiring freeze is Council imposed or Administration imposed and how could he assist in convincing Mr. Brown that this position is critical. Mr. Brown stated Council generated the concern to impose a hiring freeze and that he asked all department directors to only hire essential employees. The only departments he has given authority to hire include the Public Defender, the detention center and the solicitor's office or director positions such as the assessor. He further stated that it was not necessary to convince him but instead Clayton since it is his responsibility to make the decision. Charles raised the concern over the administration of the existing \$200K in grants and the new grants pending for 2021. Buddy inquired when the hiring freeze might be lifted. Brown stated he would know more in January 2021. Charles reemphasized that we are a millage entity and that we do not impact the general fund.

In response, Mr. Brown restated that he does not have to be convinced but that he relies on Clayton to make the decision and that we need to provide the hiring justification to Clayton to get him to make a different decision. He stated he would not go over Clayton's head to change his decision to be consistent with our requests. Buddy stated that he and Clayton were playing a shell game with the RCCC passing the decision back and forth and that the RCCC has already provided justification for hiring a new experienced Conservation Program Analyst to Clayton. Buddy stated that we had been unable to convince Clayton despite our best efforts and that Clayton was fully aware of the critical need to fill the position. Buddy stated that we were now asking Mr. Brown to do his job as the administrator and warned him of push-back from grantees and Council over the RCCC's inability to administer the grants program. Brown responded that he had been an effective manager and that he had been following the chain of command. He further stated that he was unaware that we had been unable to convince Clayton of our critical hiring need. Gail added to Clayton that although she is new to the RCCC but based on her 40 years of experience that there is a steep learning curve involved in the RCCC's work and that we needed to hire someone as soon as possible.

Clayton added that other divisions in CP&D are understaffed and that there are capacity issues. If Meghan does not meet our expectations then he would consider other alternatives such as interns or temporary workers. Further, the freeze applies to both general fund and millage entities and is not a permanent funding situation. John added that we have an issue of trust since Clayton's decision not to allow hiring a Land Planner proceeded the pandemic hiring freeze and has left us in desperate straits since we are down over 50% capacity. Buddy stated in actuality that we are actually down three out of four staff members. Carol urged Clayton's consideration on rehiring the position and that temporary or part-time assistance was inadequate.

#### *CDBG-MIT Action Plan*

Clayton stated HUD had approved the action plan last month. The County is awaiting final certifications from HUD before proceeding. HUD will be providing free technical assistance from Capital Access regarding mitigation grant management. Carol suggested the Blue Ribbon Committee should be given an update.

#### *Timberlane Tree Planting*

Clayton reviewed two options to complete the project -a consultant or using graduate students. Meghan will do a mini-community engagement project. Clayton said he had spoken with the Gills Creek Watershed Association to assist in the engagement effort and he would also reach out to the County Transportation Department to ensure consistency with the Gills Creek Greenway design. He will also be reaching out to Clemson regarding graduate student participation.

## **Conservation Committee Report**

John is working on a draft letter for the Committee and looks forward to talking with the Planning Division at our January 2021 meeting. Charles asked that we set aside adequate time at our January meeting.

## **Conservation Manager's Report**

### *Walden Pond*

Quinton introduced Michael Ellison to discuss W.K. Dickson's analysis. Michael provided a detailed overview of the effort. SCDHEC's inspection of the dam prior to the October 2015 flood found severe deficiencies which resulted in the dam failure. SCDOT repaired the road and placed two new culverts which unfortunately were misaligned with the flow path. W.K. Dickson has examined the prior (1950) and existing hydrology and geology to look at the landscape features which will influence any restoration or mitigation project. He reviewed two alternatives for restoration. The first is to replicate the upstream diverse, braided wetlands, which have been naturally reestablished, in the lower portion of the prior pond. The other alternative would be to create a single stream channel consistently with the newly replaced culverts. Each alternative results in various potential wetland and stream restoration credits. Alternative one and two were estimated to have a value of approximately \$2.7M and \$0.91M in stream and wetland credits, respectively. He will provide Quinton the estimated costs for each alternative. A detailed description was provided in a preliminary report. The RCCC will need to determine the best alternative and work with Administration and Council on potential funding sources for restoration.

\* Tim moved to extend the meeting until 5:30, Gail seconded and the motion passed.

### *Holiday Drop-in and December Meeting*

Quinton discussed that we will be unable to have our annual holiday drop-in. In the alternative, he suggested we could send out a card to our grantees, supporters and current and new Council members. Tim moved to develop a holiday card, Gail seconded and the motion passed. Charles moved to have a December meeting, Tim seconded and the motion passed. Carol discussed the need to brief new Council members some of which has already been done.

### *Historic Grant Budget Status*

Quinton reported the consideration of Councilwoman Terracio's request to reinstate the historic grant budget cuts (current fiscal year) is scheduled for consideration on the next A&F Committee meeting.

### *Cabin Branch Property*

Buddy reviewed the letter transmitted to the RCCC from John McAllister on behalf of Horrell Hill LLC describing the 60 acre property (Parcel R24600-01-33) which is up for sale. Buddy stated the property had gone up for auction but no buyers were secured. The letter proposed the RCCC enter into a \$10k option to hold the property while a sale was being negotiated. Based on Buddy's conversation with Mr. McAllister the owner may be willing to sell the property for less than \$300K which was the original offer when the RCCC purchased the other Cabin Branch parcels. The property has important conservation value and Buddy suggested that we move to request a price (offer) from the seller. Charles concluded an option was not a good alternative and questioned whether or not we should make an offer at this time to which John concurred. Quinton stated we have adequate funds in our reserve account and can try to get a "good" deal to take to Council. Charles moved to not accept the option offer and request a price from the owner and our ongoing interest in the conservation value of the parcel. Buddy seconded the motion which passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:25 pm.  
Respectfully submitted,  
James Blake Atkins, Ph.D.