



Richland Soil and Water Conservation District

2020 Hampton Street, Room 3063A

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May 11, 2020

Virtual Meeting • 6:00pm

Commissioners Present

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Jeff Laney, Vice Chair

Jim Rhodes, Secretary/Treasurer

Mary Burts

Others Present

Quinton Epps, Conservation Division Manager

Chanda Cooper, Education Program Coordinator

Charlie Fisher, Administrative Assistant

Mary Hannah Lindsay, Education Program Assistant

Anne Marie Johnson, Pollinator Garden Manager

Marc Cribb, SC Association of Conservation Districts Liaison

Tyler Brown, SC Department of Natural Resources Conservation Districts Program Manager

Tim McSwain, Richland County Conservation Commissioner

Welcome and Call to Order

Ms. Cooper provided a Zoom meeting orientation and introduced participants. Chairman Mullis called the meeting to order and Commissioner Laney gave the invocation.

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Laney and approved unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 13 board meeting. Commissioner Laney seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Oath of Office

Mr. Brown issued the Oath of Office to Commissioners Burts, Laney, and Mullis.

Pinewood Lake Park Pollinator Garden

Ms. Johnson provided an overview of work at the Pinewood Lake Park pollinator garden which is being supported by the RSWCD's new Urban Agriculture Conservation grant from the

National Association of Conservation Districts. The goals of the project are to provide pollinator conservation demonstration, education, and technical assistance to support pollinator habitat creation in farms, community gardens, and home landscapes. Several of the 12 defunct raised beds at Pinewood Lake Park have been rehabilitated; work to date includes bed design, weeding, planting, mulching, and irrigation installation and repair. Challenges have included pests such as aphids, voles, and vigorous blackberry growth. Pollinators are already enjoying the gardens; "If you build it, they will come," Ms. Johnson said. The RSWCD thanked Mr. Jim Johnson for his volunteer service in support of the project.

Financial Report

Commissioner Rhodes reported the bank account balance is \$47,294.50, which includes a contribution agreement payment of \$442.50. Expense and deposit details were not available.

Affiliate Membership

Commissioner Laney reported one honorary affiliate membership was awarded to accountant Ginger Spires in appreciation of her advising the RSWCD on a financial matter.

Conservation Division Report

Mr. Epps reported the Richland County Conservation Commission (RCCC) is preparing comments on Richland County's new proposed Land Development Code, which is a 571-page document.

The RCCC provided comments on the \$21.9 million CBDG award. The RSWCD and RCCC submitted comment letters on the Holy Grail project discussed at the RSWCD's April meeting; both entities opposed Lexington County's plan to perform permittee-responsible mitigation in lieu of using credits from the Mill Creek Mitigation Bank.

The RCCC and Conservation Division have been pursuing an amendment to the Walden Pond feasibility study to add an additional survey to the project; the consultant now proposes moving forward with the project without the survey. This will result in less precise information but will allow the project to move forward. The RCCC will decide whether to move forward with this option at their May 18 meeting.

Richland County Council approved the Columbia Rowing Club contract, but administration and the Club continue to negotiate.

The Mill Creek Bridge and Road Enhancement Request for Quotes is being developed and the RCCC may approve it on May 18.

Mr. Epps is working with Richland County Fleet Services to obtain equipment in lieu of hiring someone each year to maintain the Mill Creek and Cabin Branch properties; the Conservation Division may be able to purchase a Kubota tractor for \$37K and get a decommissioned backhoe from Roads and Drainage at no cost. Maintenance currently costs \$10-20K/year, depending on whether the properties are mowed once or twice, and the maintenance work must be contracted out through Procurement annually; having our own equipment will result in a quick recovery of costs and a more streamlined process, and it will also allow for faster clean-up

following storms. Peterson Land Services has been providing the maintenance services. There are 10-20 miles of roads and 25-30 acres of land to mow.

Petition for Candidacy

Commissioner Burts has been appointed to complete Commissioner Laney's elected term of office, which expires in January, 2021. Commissioner Burts needs to run for election in November, 2020, and therefore must gather 100 signatures on her petition for candidacy. She asked fellow commissioners for assistance in reaching her target of 125 signatures.

Letter to Administration

Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to send a letter drafted by Commissioner Mullis to Richland County Administrator Leonardo Brown regarding the reassignment of Ms. Fisher to a new supervisor, Ms. Robin Carter. Commissioner Burts seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Education Report

Ms. Cooper reported Girl Scout Candidate Odette Seiler cc'd the RSWCD on a letter to City of Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin regarding the need to reduce the use of plastic bags. Commissioner Rhodes recommended a letter be sent to her on behalf of the RSWCD, commending her ecological interest and concern. Mr. Epps recommended a prize pack including one of the RSWCD's reusable shopping bags be sent. Commissioner Laney recommended naming her a Junior Associate Commissioner. Ms. Cooper recommended redeveloping this Junior Commissioner program during strategic plan review/update. Mr. Brown recommended inviting her to participate in the SC Envirothon. Miss Seiler is already involved in the SC Adopt-A-Stream program.

The Environmental Education Association of SC (EEASC) Conference Committee is monitoring the COVID-19 situation and plans to announce a decision on whether the Southeastern Environmental Education Alliance/EEASC conference planned for September 24-26 in Columbia, SC will proceed as planned (with adaptations to accommodate social distancing requirements) or will be postponed until spring, 2021, by June 15. RSWCD continues to partner with EEASC to provide networking and professional development opportunities for environmental educators; Ms. Cooper will host a Midlands-region virtual networking session on May 12 and provided support for an Eastern-region virtual networking session on May 5.

RSWCD is seven months into a twelve-month contribution agreement with the SC Association of Conservation Districts to provide support to SC's Natural Resources Conservation Service and has used approximately \$4K of the allocated \$10K. Ms. Cooper is working with Clemson and NRCS on plans for virtual workshops later this year.

At the request of Councilwoman Chakisse Newton earlier this year, RSWCD agreed to delay promotion of the Urban Agriculture Conservation grant until at least May 15. Ms. Cooper explained that on or after May 15, Commissioner Mullis and RCCC Commissioner Gail Rodriguez may enter discussions with Councilwoman Newton RE: publication of a press release announcing the grant award. Mr. Epps cautioned that publicity of Pinewood Lake Park during the COVID-19 shutdown will be problematic and recommended Ms. Cooper and Ms. Johnson

develop outreach materials that do not mention the Park. Ms. Cooper has submitted the first quarter grant report, and RSWCD has received the first quarter payment.

Ms. Lindsay screen-shared the Seed Sanctuary website. Within two hours of launching, RSWCD had received >200 requests; after 12 days, 1,544 requests had been received. Six packets of seed per household are being mailed to those who register for the program; the first 200 requests were filled last week, and we hope to send 200 more next week. Seed recipients have been asked to share photos of their seeds on social media using the hashtags #ReseedRichland and #RCSeedSanctuary. Fall vegetable seeds will be available later in the year, and the mail-out program may be re-initiated in the fall. WLTX, ColaDaily, Richland County's Public Information Office, and the Richland Weekly Review all publicized the Seed Sanctuary program. This project has raised public awareness about the RSWCD and expanded our audience through social media follows and e-newsletter subscriptions. Commissioner Rhodes praised the program and staff. Commissioner Mullis asked what Ms. Lindsay needs to continue the program; Ms. Lindsay stated volunteers to help pack seed are the biggest current need, and we cannot safely host volunteer events due to COVID-19. At the June meeting, Ms. Cooper and Ms. Lindsay will propose a budget needed to sustain or expand the Seed Sanctuary. Ms. Cooper stated the Seed Sanctuary has generated more publicity than any other effort in recent years; before the Seed Sanctuary launched, the RSWCD's e-newsletter list contained approximately 2K subscribers; approximately 1K more have been added thanks to the Seed Sanctuary.

While class presentations for April and May were canceled due to COVID-19 school closures, RSWCD educators reached 2,641 students with conservation class presentations in the 2019-2020 school year. Ms. Lindsay is drafting the RSWCD's pollinator lesson plan. The 2020 Youth Poster Contest received 45 entries; Commissioner Burts will assist with judging next week. Monthly "plant of the month" articles are being shared on RSWCD's website and social media.

Commissioner Burts recommended RSWCD develop online lessons for students engaged in virtual learning.

Commissioner Laney left the meeting.

Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to send a letter announcing the Seed Sanctuary program and six seed packets to Richland County Councilmembers to raise awareness about the initiative. Commissioner Burts seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

NRCS Report

No report was available.

RCCC Easement Criteria

During the April RSWCD board meeting, Mr. Brown recommended the RSWCD develop criteria to guide conservation easement criteria. Richland County Conservation Coordinator Nancy Stone-Collum provided a copy of the RCCC's easement criteria, which the RSWCD accepted as information.

Strategic Plan Review/Update

Ms. Cooper proposed holding the strategic plan review over the course of three sessions from 4:30-6:00 each evening during one month between now and August. Commissioner Laney's input is needed to select dates.

Education Program Assistant Contract

Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to enter executive session. Commissioner Burts seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously. Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to exit executive session. Commissioner Burts seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously. No actions were taken during executive session. Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to make Hannah Lindsay an employee of RSWCD through the month of August. Commissioner Burts seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously. Commissioner Rhodes moved that RSWCD hire Palmetto Payroll to handle the payroll. Commissioner Burts seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Public Input

Mr. Brown expressed optimism we would be able to meet in person in July.

Next Meeting

The next RSWCD meeting will be at 6pm on June 8 and will likely be held virtually.

Commissioner Rhodes moved to adjourn at 8:05pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Charlie Fisher, Admin. Asst.