2020 Hampton Street · Room 3063A
Columbia, SC 29204
(803) 576-2080
August 17, 2025
4th Floor Conference Room
Richland County Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes

Attendance

Commissioner	District	Present
Charles Weber	1	Yes
James Young	2	Yes
Wayman Stover	3	Yes
Glenice Pearson	4	No
Kip Dillihay	5	No
John Grego	6	Yes
Robert Squirewell	7	No
Lacey Lanham	8	No
Khali Gallman	9	Yes
Kendrick Scott	10	No
Gail Rodriguez	11	Yes

Staff & Visitors	Affiliation
Aric Jensen	Assistant County Administrator
John McKenzie	Conservation Analyst
Alexis Wallraf	Administrative Assistant Conservation
Quinton Epps	Conservation Department Manager
Synithia Williams	Community Planning & Development Director

Call to Order

Grego welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order with a quorum at 3:32 pm. Members, staff, and guests met via Microsoft Teams.

Approval of Agenda

⇒ **Weber moved to approve the agenda which was seconded by Young. Motion passed unanimously.**

Approval of Minutes

⇒ **Young moved to approve the June minutes which was seconded by Stover. Motion passed unanimously.**

Report of the Chair

- **Advocacy – update:** Grego reported none.

- **Goodwill Estates Property – update:** Grego reported the Goodwill Property acquisition had closed, with the property transferred to the Conservation Fund for eventual transfer to the State. Discussion continued regarding development of an intergovernmental agreement among Richland County, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), and South Carolina Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT) addressing future management of the property's historical, cultural, and conservation resources. SCDNR and SCPRT planned to develop an internal operating agreement outlining their respective management responsibilities. The Commission emphasized the importance of County representation in those discussions and maintaining a role

in future decisions affecting the property's conservation resources. The County's $600,000 contribution toward the acquisition had been transferred from FY25-26 funds.

- **Greenway Advisory Committee – update:** Grego provided updates on several greenway projects. The Rocky Branch Greenway continued through right-of-way negotiations and coordination with CSX. Progress continued on the Gills Creek Greenway, including redesign work near Crowson Road and planned relocation of transit facilities, with the current project limits determined by available funding. The Crane Creek Greenway will be re-advertised through Procurement to address contractor licensing requirements associated with the bridge work. The Jackson Creek Greenway remained in conceptual design following challenges securing access through private property. The Saluda River Greenway opening was delayed, with the overall project contract extended to accommodate bridge construction funded by the Boyd Foundation.

Report from Community Planning & Development

- **Community Planning & Development – update:** Williams reported the consultant contract for the Decker Boulevard area was nearing completion and was expected to be presented to County Council in September or October. Two new neighborhood planners had joined the department and begun outreach in Lower Richland, including coordination with University of South Carolina (USC) to support implementation of Lower Richland Tourism Plan recommendations. Work also continued on the Ballentine area Small Area Master Plan in partnership with Councilman Branham and the Town of Irmo. The Planning Commission continued reviewing commercial zoning uses and requirements with residential zoning to follow. Planning staff also began coordination with Conservation staff on development of the Historic Preservation Ordinance to share resources and avoid duplication of efforts.

Treasurer's Report

- **FY26-27 Budget – update:** Epps reported the FY26-27 budget was underway, with purchase orders established for the new fiscal year. Approximately $130,000 was available for land acquisition and $800,000 for professional services, including funds carried forward from the prior year. Professional services funding supported several ongoing projects, including the Conservation Land Management and Open Space Strategy, Jordan Boat Ramp Restoration, Firefly Tourism Grant, Forestry Stewardship Plan, Eastover Solar Project, and Mill Creek Mitigation Bank Phases II and III. Approximately $500,000 was allocated for the Mill Creek Mitigation Bank work, which remained ongoing.

Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) Report

- **Historical Preservation Ordinance – update:** Gallman reported progress continued on the Historic Preservation Ordinance following a committee meeting with Williams.

- **Historical Markers – update:** Gallman reported all current historical marker applications remained active and pending, with no new applications received.

- **Elmwood Lofts Grant – action item:**

  ⇒ **Gallman moved to approve the amendment to the Elmwood Lofts grant for replacement of the existing windows which was seconded by Rodriguez. Motion passed unanimously.**

Gallman provided information on the Elmwood Lofts grant project revision request for window replacement after determining repairs would be costly and potentially ineffective for the long-term. The proposed replacement windows will match the existing historic appearance while improving efficiency. The project received support from the City of Columbia's historic preservation staff, and the Historic Preservation Committee recommended approval of the revised scope.

Natural Resources Committee (NRC) Report

NRC Action Items: None

NRC Active Items Requiring Updates:

- **Fabel Conservation Easement – update:** Weber reported a subordination agreement had been provided to the property owner for review and approval by the lender, as required during the Administration and Finance Committee review. Following lender approval, additional signatures and County Council approval will be required before proceeding with the property survey. Staff noted the property owner hoped to complete the conservation easement by the end of the calendar year for tax purposes and expressed concern regarding the remaining timeline, including pending coordination with the surveyor.

- **Lake Elizabeth Conservation Easement – update:** McKenzie reported the new HOA president continued exploring conservation options for the Lake Elizabeth property, including outreach to conservation organizations and participation in the Conservation Land Management and Open Space Strategy public meeting.

- **Metze Property Donation – update:** McKenzie reported progress continued on the proposed Metze property donation. A title search had been completed and appeared clear. If approved by County Council, the attorney who conducted the title search would assist with the closing process.

- **Conservation Land Management and Open Space Strategy – update:** Epps reported a public meeting was held on August 3rd, with good community participation. A statistically valid survey was underway, with an online survey also available to gather additional public input. Staff attended the meeting to provide information and discuss conservation programs with participants.

- **Jordan Boat Ramp Restoration – update:** Epps reported preparations were underway to issue a solicitation for a design vendor within the next several weeks. The selected vendor will be responsible for developing designs for the full scope of the proposed improvements.

- **Firefly Tourism Grant – update:** Epps reported the Memorandum of Understanding for the Firefly Tourism Grant had been finalized and signed. The project continued to move forward, with limited activity reported since completion of the agreement.

- **Crane Creek Watershed Management Plan – update:** McKenzie reported the project remained in the procurement and negotiation phase. A requested contract change required additional review by Legal before the project could move forward.

- **Mitigation Bank Credits – update:** Epps reported mitigation credit sales from three entities were moving through the County Council approval process. Work also continues on Mill Creek Mitigation Bank Phases II and III, including an appraisal from the purchase of mitigation rights

for Phase II. Staff was coordinating with County Administration to establish a process for funding and departmental participation in future mitigation credit development and sales.

NRC Active Items Not Requiring Updates:

- **Lost Creek/Harbison Property – update:** Weber reported no new updates.
- **Westwood/Abingdon Property-City of Columbia – update:** Weber reported no new updates.
- **Forestry Stewardship Plan Implementation – update:** Weber reported no new updates.
- **Eastover Solar Project – update:** Weber reported no new updates.
- **Bates Old River Landing – update:** Weber reported no new updates.

Conservation Program Analyst's Report

- **FY25-26 RCCC Grants – update**: McKenzie reported all outstanding issues for the FY26-27 grant cycle have been resolved, allowing all grant projects to move forward. No reimbursement requests had been submitted at this early stage of the grant cycle.
- **Events – update:** McKenzie reported upcoming River & Lake Sweeps running through September 27 with the main cleanup day on September 19, 2026. Jensen reported the Transportation Plan Update meeting would be held in an open-house format. He noted the plan is updated periodically to maintain federal funding eligibility and has expanded beyond traditional roadway improvements to include greenways, trails, and other transportation improvements.

Conservation Manager's Report

New Business: N/A

Public Input: N/A

Adjournment

- **At 4:30 pm, Weber moved to adjourn the meeting which was seconded by Young. Motion passed unanimously.**