



Town of Hilton Head Island

Gullah Geechee Land and Cultural Preservation Task Force Meeting

Monday, October 20, 2025, 2:30 PM
1 Town Center Court, Hilton Head Island, SC
Benjamin M. Racusin Council Chambers

The meeting can be viewed on the [Town's YouTube Channel](#), the [Beaufort County Channel](#), and Spectrum Channel 1304.

1. **Call to Order**
2. **Adoption of the Agenda**
3. **Approval of the Minutes**
 - a. Regular Meeting Minutes of August 4, 2025.
4. **Staff Report**
 - a. Historic Neighborhood Permitting & Design Studio Report – Sharonica Stewart, Principal Planner Historic Neighborhoods
 - b. Land Management Ordinance Update – Shea Farrar, Principal Planner - CP
 - c. District Planning Update – Shea Farrar, Principal Planner - CP
5. **Discussion Items**
 - a. Land Preservation Update - Luana G. Sellars, Lowcountry Gullah Foundation
6. **Public Comment - Non Agenda Items**
7. **Adjournment**

FOIA Compliance: Public notification of this meeting has been published, posted, and distributed in compliance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act and the requirements of the Town of Hilton Head Island.

In accordance with the requirements of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 ("ADA"), the Town of Hilton Head Island will not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities on the basis of disability in its services, programs, or

activities. Auditory accommodations are available. Any person requiring further accommodation should contact the Town of Hilton Head Island ADA Coordinator as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours before the scheduled event.

Municipal Association of South Carolina (MASC) Civility Pledge:
“I pledge to build a stronger and more prosperous community by advocating for civil engagement, respecting others and their viewpoints, and finding solutions for the betterment of my city or town.”



Town of Hilton Head Island GULLAH GEECHEE LAND AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION TASK FORCE MEETING Monday, August 4, 2025, 1:00 PM Minutes

1. Call to Order

Chairman Stevens called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. In attendance were: Chairman Stevens, Vice-Chair Simmons, Mr. Henz, Ms. Wright and Mr. Abdul-Malik.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

Mr. Henz moved to approve the Agenda as presented. Vice-Chair Simmons seconded. Motion passed.

3. Approval of the Minutes

a. Regular Meeting Minutes of February 3, 2025

Vice-Chair Simmons moved to approve the Minutes of February 3, 2025. Mr. Henz seconded. Motion passed.

b. Regular Meeting Minutes of June 2, 2025

The Minutes of June 2, 2025 were not approved due to changes in Board membership.

4. Staff Report

a. Historic Neighborhood Permitting & Design Studio Report – Sharonica Stewart, Principal Planner Historic Neighborhoods

Sharonica Stewart reported that the Historic Neighborhoods and Design Studio, established in 2021, serves to assist property owners and residents in the Town's historic neighborhoods with property development permits, conceptual site designs, addressing, business licensing, and connections to resources related to heirs' property, property taxes, and business development.

Ms. Stewart noted that since the last report in June 2025, two new service requests have been submitted through the program. These requests addressed:

- Density allowances and their impact on proposed development
- Allowances for property development
- Manufactured housing placement process
- Conceptual site design

Over the past five years, the program has received 107 service requests, of which 90 have been completed, while 17 remain active.

Providing these services requires collaboration with Town staff from several departments, including Stormwater, Engineering, Natural Resources, Building, Capital Improvement Projects Division and Fire Rescue. Staff also collaborates with outside agencies and nonprofits, including Hilton Head Public Service District, Heritage Library and Lowcountry Gullah Foundation.

Ms. Stewart answered questions from the Task Force.

b. Home Safety and Repair Program Update – Sharonica Stewart, Principal Planner Historic Neighborhoods

Ms. Stewart advised the Task Force that the Home Safety and Repair Program has successfully utilized its full funding allocation of \$1,499,741.00, resulting in the completion of 108 critical home repair projects. Since its inception, the program has addressed critical home repair projects, enhanced livability, and ensured compliance with local building standards to homeowners in need. Effective implementation of the program required close collaboration within the Town's Planning Department, including coordination with planners, permitting staff, building inspectors, and administrative personnel. This teamwork ensured projects met all necessary codes and standards.

The program has exhausted all allocated funding and cannot approve additional projects until new funding is secured. As a result, the acceptance of new applications has been paused.

c. Sewer Connection Program Update – Sharonica Stewart, Principal Planner Historic Neighborhoods

Ms. Stewart reported the Lateral Sewer Connection Program has successfully completed 35 connections to date. Town staff continue to collaborate with the Hilton Head Island Public Service District (PSD) to complete the remaining projects, ensuring that residents have access to essential sewer services. The program was allocated \$369,417.00, which has now been expended; therefore, acceptance of new applications is currently on hold.

Councilman Alex Brown advised the Task Force that the Town is engaging with the Beaufort Jasper Housing Trust to potentially tap into some SC Housing funds that could help with home repairs. Councilman Brown also mentioned that the majority of sewer connections that need to be made are in PSD #1. The PSD has information on who needs to be connected and may have some good reasons as to why they are not being connected, which are all not financial as there are other reasons. I encourage the Town to collaborate with PSD #1 to 1) understand the full reason and 2) there may be opportunities for a joint effort between the Town and the PSD to raise funding through grants and philanthropy to get folks connected.

d. Land Management Ordinance Update – Michelle Mealer, Community Planning Manager

Shea Farrar provided an update on the Land Management Ordinance initiatives, which include priority amendments and the full overhaul projects. The priority amendments are nearing completion and are currently before Town Council for adoption.

Ms. Farrar explained the overall project does not aim to introduce significant changes but rather to enhance existing programs, such as subdivisions and family compounds, by incorporating lessons learned and community feedback.

She noted that Sharonica Stewart and Thomas Boxley have joined the staff team working alongside the consultant, ensuring the Task Force's priorities remain a focus. The project is expected to be presented to Town Council for a workshop in November.

In preparation, staff is coordinating public engagement and outreach with the Planning Commission and the Task Force. Following the November workshop, additional details will be shared regarding the project's structure and next steps. Both the Planning Commission and the Task Force will serve as key stakeholders in reviewing the proposed updates to the Land Management Ordinance.

e. District Planning Update – Michelle Mealer, Community Planning Manager

Shea Farrar reported that a workshop with Town Council is scheduled for October. Staff and the Town's consultant are preparing seven draft plans for the respective districts. A series of public meetings was held from January through March, which resulted in over 700 survey responses and approximately 300 attendees. These meetings included interactive stations that gathered valuable input on zoning, traffic, and neighborhood concerns.

The feedback collected from the meetings and surveys has been provided to the consultant and is also informing the ongoing Land Management Ordinance project. Information gathered from the district planning process is being shared with the Code Consultant, who is concurrently developing the initial modules for the Land Management Ordinance overhaul.

5. Discussion Items

6. Public Comment - Non Agenda Items

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:57 p.m.

APPROVED: _____

The full recording and a transcript of this meeting can be found on the Town's website at www.hiltonheadislandsc.gov



TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND

Gullah Geechee Land & Cultural Preservation Task Force

TO: Gullah Geechee Land and Cultural Preservation Task Force
FROM: Sharonica Stewart, Project Manager Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation
VIA: Thomas Boxley, Executive Director Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation
DATE: October 20, 2025
SUBJECT: Historic Neighborhood Permitting & Design Studio Report

SUMMARY

Monthly Update:

From the last reporting period (August 2025), seven new requests were received through the Historic Neighborhood Permitting and Design Studio. These requests focused on the following topics:

- Family Compound
- Family Subdivision
- Density allowances for property development
- Manufactured housing placement process

Program Overview:

Since the program's inception in October 2021, the Historic Neighborhood Permitting & Design Studio has provided assistance to numerous property owners and applicants within the historic neighborhoods.

The table below presents a year-by-year summary of the program's performance and overall impact from 2021 to September 2025. It outlines the number of requests received, completed cases, and active projects for each calendar year.

Year	Total Request	Completed Cases	Active Projects
2021	19	19	0
2022	18	17	1
2023	36	34	2
2024	21	14	7
2025	20	8	12
Total	114	92	22

Over the five-year reporting period, the program has received 114 service requests. Of these, 92 have been completed, while 22 projects remain active.

Issues Addressed:

Staff have assisted residents with a wide range of issues:

- Drafted conceptual site designs.
- Discussed resolutions to access issues, including access relocation.
- Discussed application requirements for Family Subdivision, Family Compound, and Small Residential Plan Review applications.
- Discussed density requirements.
- Assisted with street name applications.
- Discussed property line boundary adjustments and the Plat Stamp application process.
- Discussed flood elevation requirements.

COLLABORATION

Providing these services requires collaboration with Town staff from several departments, including Stormwater, Engineering, Natural Resources, Building, Capital Improvement Projects Division, and Fire Rescue.

Staff also collaborate with outside agencies and nonprofits, including Hilton Head Public Service District, Heritage Library, and Lowcountry Gullah Foundation.

Note: To preserve residents' anonymity, details of the services provided are described generally.



TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND

Gullah Geechee Land & Cultural Preservation Task Force

TO: Gullah Geechee Land and Cultural Preservation Task Force
FROM: Luana Graves Sellars, Lowcountry Gullah Foundation
VIA: Sharonica Stewart, Project Manager – Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation
VIA: Thomas Boxley, Executive Director – Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation
DATE: October 20, 2025
SUBJECT: Land Preservation Update

SUMMARY

Ms. Luana Graves Sellars, Founder of Lowcountry Gullah Foundation, will give a presentation to the following topics:

1. Redemption Properties

ATTACHMENTS

1. 2025 Hilton Head Heirs Property Workshops Flyer
2. Redemption Property PowerPoint



2025

HILTON HEAD HEIRS PROPERTY

WORKSHOPS

Saturday 11 am to 2 pm*

*Time depending on the session

JULY 12

CENTER FOR HEIRS PROPERTY - LAND/FORESTRY
CENTRAL OAK GROVE BAPTIST
161 MATHEWS DRIVE, HHI

ESTATE PLANNING / LLC / TRUSTS
CENTRAL OAK GROVE, 161 MATHEWS DRIVE, HHI

JULY 26

AUG 23

BEAUFORT COUNTY TREASURER - MARIA WALLS
FIRST AFRICAN BAPTIST CHURCH,
70 BEACH CITY ROAD, HHI

CENTER FOR HEIRS PROPERTY - LAND/FORESTRY
CENTRAL OAK GROVE BAPTIST
161 MATHEWS DRIVE, HHI

OCT 18

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For more information, email info@lowcountrygullah.org
Visit our website for additional workshops at Penn Center
WWW.LOWCOUNTRYGULLAHFOUNDATION.ORG

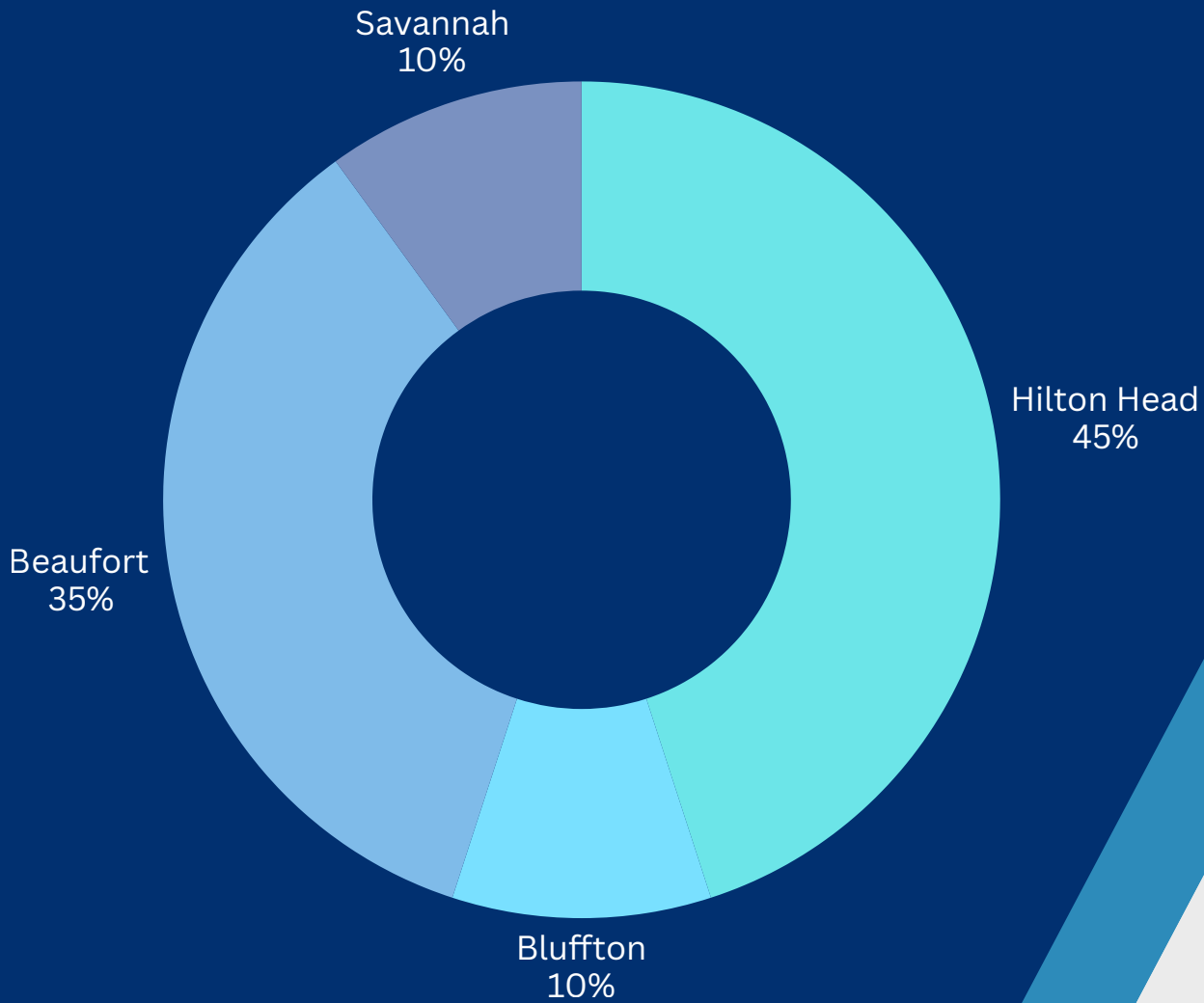
LAND PRESERVATION IMPACT REPORT | HILTON HEAD 2025



lowcountrygullahfoundation.org 843.715.3506

2025

DELINQUENT TAX DISTRIBUTIONS



2025 WORKSHOPS

In addition to financial assistance, the Foundation provides necessary solutions to prevent yearly returns to the tax list and resolve heirs' property for good.

In 2025, the Foundation hosted Untangling Heirs Property Workshops on Hilton Head Island on:

1. Heirs Property and Land Use - Center for Heirs Property - 2
2. Q&A with the Beaufort County Treasurer - 1
3. Genealogy 101 with the Heritage Library - 1
4. Free Will Clinic - 5
5. Succession Planning | Trusts and LLCs - 1

- **100+ people attended our workshops**
- **37+ individuals signed up for a free Will**
- **5 families are working on Trust/LLCs**

FAMILY REFFERALS

In addition to actively reaching out to local Gullah families, the Town of Hilton Head forwarded three heirs' property families to the Foundation. We are providing on going technical assistance, genealogy research and legal assistance referrals to the families.

ATTORNEY REFFERALS

In addition to financial tax assistance, the Foundation provided five families with attorney referrals so that they could further the resolution of their land issues.

Each referral received a free or low bono services from our list of trusted local attorneys.

In 2025, the Foundation referred 30 families to local attorneys for free or low bono legal advice or assistance.

PROGRAMMING

In an effort to expand our programming reach and effectiveness, the Foundation received grants to assist families with succession planning and education.

In October, a marketing campaign will begin by airing TV commercials aimed at educating our community about what heirs' property is as well as the importance of having a will. The spots are an effort to not only educate our community, but for families to have the opportunity to be more pro-active, rather than re-active when facing the issue or a crisis arises.

The Foundation has also received a grant in concert with the Lowcountry Legal Volunteers to provide 225 free wills in the next year.

In 2025 and 2026, the Foundation and the Lowcountry Legal Volunteers is actively working to provide 225 free wills throughout our community.

MARKETING

- Church Announcements / Newsletters / Bulletin/ Flyers
- Mailers
 - HHI – 965 Mailers
 - Beaufort & Bluffton – 1250 Mailers
- TV Commercials WTOC / WSAV – October & February
 - What Is Heirs' Property
 - Do You Have A Will?
- Gaining Ground Documentary Screening
 - May
 - November

DELINQUENT TAX DISTRIBUTIONS

The Foundation was able to assist local Gullah families in the following ways:

Hilton Head – four families who are working on Heirs Property issues and nine families who were struggling to pay their tax bill.

Bluffton – Tax payment assistance for two families.

Beaufort – Tax payment assistance for 6 families and one tax sale purchase assistance.

Savannah – Tax payment assistance for two families.

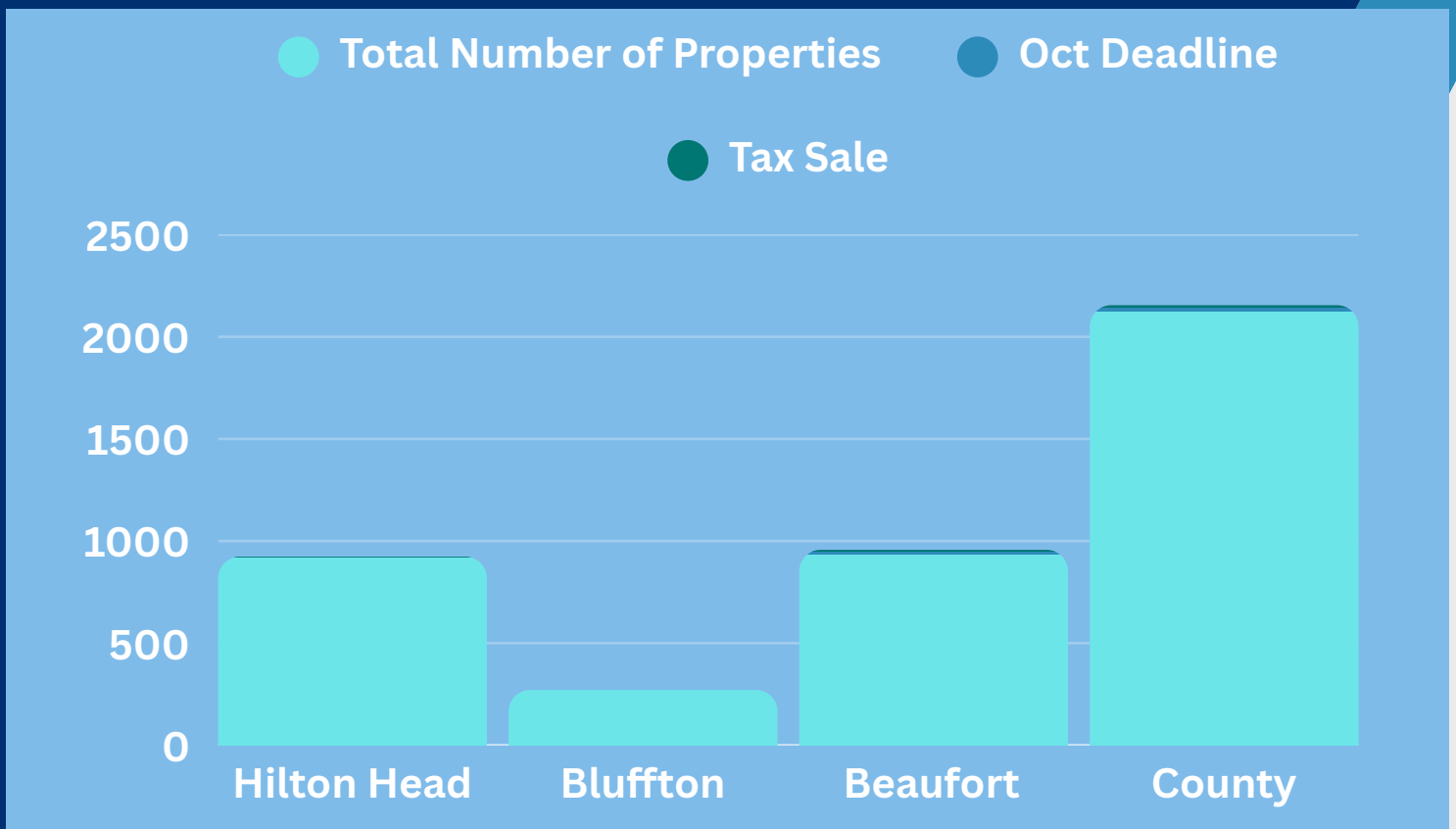
DELINQUENT TAX SALE

As of September 15th, 33 properties were on the delinquent tax list and only 2/3 of them were of interest or concern to the Foundation.

We are very pleased with these results, in that in comparison to the entire county, the number of heirs' properties that went to the sale is very low compared to previous years.

This year, due to family miscommunication, based on our tax list, only one family on HHI went to the tax sale, which we were able to purchase at at the sale at cost.

Regardless of the property being identified as heirs' property, only 2 buyers continued to bid against the families, driving up the properties, which resulted in the redemption amount being raised significantly.



2025

HISTORIC LAND PROTECTED | BY THE NUMBERS

ASSESSED LAND VALUE - \$3,313,000

ACRES PROTECTED - 18.36

AMOUNT SPENT - \$54,764.92

HHI - \$36,545.73

Beaufort - \$8,955.97

Bluffton - \$2,567.92

Savannah - \$4,164.82

ACRES SAVED

HHI - 8.41

Beaufort - 7.22

Bluffton - 1.73

Savannah - 1.0