



Town of Hilton Head Island
GULLAH GEECHEE HISTORIC
NEIGHBORHOODS COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION STRATEGIC
PLANNING WORKSHOP MEETING
Wednesday, July 15, 2026, 6:00 PM
Minutes

Call to Order

Current Vice Chair Peterson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Board Members Present: David Ames, Alex Brown, Shirley Peterson, Andre White, and Dave Byrd (non-voting member)

Board Members Absent: Sara Eisener, Louis Johnson and Melinda Tunner

Adoption of the Agenda

Mr. Ames made a motion to adopt. Mr. Brown seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

New Business

Election of Chairman and Vice Chairman

Current Vice Chair Peterson opened the floor for nominations for Chair and Vice Chair.

Mr. Brown made a motion to appoint Louis Johnson as Chair. Mr. Ames seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

Mr. Brown made a motion to appoint Shirley Peterson as Vice Chair. Mr. Ames seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

Workshop Discussion

Discussion of Fiscal Year 2027-Fiscal Year 2030 Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Strategic Action Plan

Thomas Boxley, Executive Director, introduced the strategic planning workshop and explained that the CDC is entering its third year of operations and is therefore beginning the process of updating its existing Strategic Action Plan for FY2027–FY2030. Mr. Boxley reviewed the process used to develop the current plan, including community and Board participation in 2023, and explained that the existing plan established the organization's mission and five strategic goals. The five goals address stabilization and preservation of Gullah Geechee neighborhoods, cultural sites, and history; strategic partnerships; community education and awareness; access to capital and financial education; and training and employment opportunity

for Gullah Geechee youth. The current plan was developed through community engagement and provided the framework for the CDC's first two years of operations.

Mr. Boxley reviewed accomplishments associated with the existing goals, including the CDC's work related to the William Hilton Parkway Gateway Corridor, community engagement in the Stoney neighborhood, the Experience Gullah website and application, the Land Management Ordinance process, the renaming of the Fishing Cooperative Park, and continued work with the Design Studio. He reported that the Design Studio had opened 25 cases as of June 2026, with 11 cases completed, involving a variety of property development and permitting needs. Under the strategic partnerships goal, Mr. Boxley highlighted relationships with the Community Foundation of the Lowcountry, RBC Heritage Foundation, University of South Carolina School of Law, community development financial institutions, TD Bank, Community Organizations Active in Disaster, and the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce. He also reviewed accomplishments related to community outreach, the Money Talks financial education series, and youth employment and training opportunities.

Board members discussed the relationship between the existing strategies and the accomplishments presented and requested that the updated plan more clearly connect accomplishments, strategies, and measurable outcomes; the importance of establishing key performance indicators and identifying specific, measurable objectives that could demonstrate the CDC's impact and help communicate the value of continued investment in the organization; the importance of maintaining the Town as a strategic partner, developing a more deliberate fundraising strategy, identifying projects that could attract private and philanthropic investment, and potentially establishing Board fundraising responsibilities and committees, including a development committee; and the importance of aligning the strategic plan with the organization's annual budget and establishing shorter-term priorities and milestones within the broader FY2027–FY2030 plan.

The Board further discussed the need to clarify and strengthen the language of the strategic goals. Particular discussion focused on the term "preservation" within Goal One and whether the term adequately communicates the CDC's role in preventing the loss of community ownership and supporting investment and beneficial uses of property in historic neighborhoods. Members discussed reframing the goal to emphasize stabilization and investment in Gullah Geechee neighborhoods, cultural sites, and history. The Board also discussed whether economic development should be identified as a distinct strategic goal, particularly as the CDC considers its role in business development, entrepreneurship, property development, and participation in the local economy.

Members emphasized that the updated plan should clearly distinguish the CDC's economic development role from the preservation and cultural history work of other organizations. Board members discussed Goal Five and the need to broaden the focus from traditional employment opportunities to include entrepreneurship, wealth building, mentorship, internships, education, and long-term pathways for youth. Members emphasized the importance of engaging young people in the CDC's work and developing opportunities that connect youth to Gullah Geechee history, culture, land ownership, entrepreneurship, and community involvement. The Board also discussed the importance of cultural awareness Town of Hilton Head Island Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation

and community engagement, including continued neighborhood-based meetings and outreach rather than relying solely on large public meetings. Members noted that meaningful engagement and measurable outcomes should be prioritized over attendance numbers alone and encouraged the CDC to continue developing relationships and trust within the community.

Additional discussion focused on opportunities related to Gullah Geechee cemeteries, the Capital Improvement Program, neighborhood infrastructure, the Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta, and other potential funding and partnership opportunities. Members emphasized the importance of ensuring that the updated strategic plan reflects the CDC's role in community and economic development and provides clear strategies, performance measures, funding needs, and timelines. The Board supported reformatting the plan to more clearly identify strategies, key performance indicators, accomplishments, committee responsibilities, and fiscal-year priorities.

Mr. Boxley summarized the direction provided by the Board and stated that staff would incorporate the feedback received during the workshop into the updated Strategic Action Plan. He advised that additional community input would be collected through an upcoming drop-in session and an online survey. The public feedback period was expected to conclude August 7, allowing staff time to incorporate the feedback into a draft plan for Board review. The Board discussed the importance of reviewing the draft before the September meeting at which formal adoption is anticipated and requested that additional community recommendations be highlighted for Board discussion.

Public Comment - Non Agenda Items

Vice Chair Peterson opened the floor to public comment.

There was no public comment at this time.

Adjournment

At 7:37 p.m. Mr. Brown made a motion to adjourn. Mr. White seconded. Motion carried 4-0.

Approved: August 19, 2026

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