



Town of Hilton Head Island

Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Meeting

**Wednesday, September 16, 2026, 10:00 AM
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 19, 2026
- 4. Presentations**
 - a. Report of the Executive Director
- 5. Unfinished Business**
 - a. Discussion of Fiscal Year 2027-2030 Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Strategic Action Plan - Thomas Boxley, Executive Director for the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation
 - b. Discussion and Consideration of the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Small Business Funding Opportunity — Thomas Boxley, Executive Director for the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation
- 6. New Business**
 - a. Discussion and Consideration of a Proposed Event Partnership and Memorandum of Understanding Between the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation and Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park - Thomas Boxley, Executive Director, Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation
- 7. Public Comment - Non Agenda Items**

8. Executive Session

- a.** Discussion of Personnel Matters Relating to the Executive Director's Performance Evaluation [Pursuant to the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act 30-4-70(a)(1)]
- b.** Discussion of Negotiations Incident to a Proposed Contractual Arrangement for Legal Services [Pursuant to the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act 30-4-70(a)(2)]

9. Action from Executive Session

10. 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 HISTORIC
NEIGHBORHOODS COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION MEETING
Wednesday, August 19, 2026, 10:00 AM
Minutes

1. Call to Order

Chair Johnson called the meeting to order at 10:00am.

Board Members Present: Chair Louis Johnson, Vice-Chair Shirley Peterson, Alex Brown, Andre White, David Ames, Melinda Tunner and Dave Byrd (non-voting member). Sarah Eisner attended virtually.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

3. Approval of the Minutes

a. Regular Meeting Minutes of June 17, 2026

Mr. Brown moved to approve minutes of June 17, 2026, Ms. Peterson seconded. The minutes of June 17, 2026 were unanimously approved.

b. Workshop Meeting Minutes of July 15, 2026

Mr. Brown moved to approve minutes of July 15, 2026, Ms. Peterson seconded. The minutes of July 15, 2026 were unanimously approved.

4. Presentations

a. Report of the Executive Director

Thomas Boxley, Executive Director, provided an update on the Community Development Corporation programs, community engagement, and upcoming activities.

The strategic-plan community drop-in session drew approximately 12 participants, and the online survey was scheduled to remain open through August 21, 2026. Mr. Boxley shared that survey feedback and Board comments will be incorporated into the draft strategic action plan before it returns for final consideration.

The report also included updates on recent community disaster-preparedness tabletop exercises and plans for future public education and disaster-kit activities, the collaboration of the CIP team with the CDC and anticipated community engagement events in the Jonesville and Spanish Wells areas, recent and upcoming Money Talks small-business

education sessions, and the status of the Land Management Ordinance amendment topics involving wetland protection, tree protection, Jonesville Road, Bradley Circle, and subdivision and residential development standards.

In response to Board questions, Mr. Boxley reported that seven proposals were received for the Bryant Road property Request For Qualifications (RFQ) and that additional stormwater and site-planning work would be needed before a subsequent Request For Proposal (RFP) phase. Mr. Boxley also reported that planning was advancing for improvements and future operations associated with the Jonesville-area equestrian facility.

Board members recognized the value of the Money Talks Small Business Series and the work required to deliver the Corporation's community initiatives.

5. Unfinished Business

- a.** Discussion of Fiscal Year 2027-2030 Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Strategic Action Plan - Thomas Boxley, Executive Director for the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation

Thomas Boxley, Executive Director, reviewed the draft Fiscal Year 2027-2030 Strategic Action Plan. Discussion focused on establishing clear distinctions among preservation, conservation, and mitigation and ensuring that the plan supports the continued presence, stability, and prosperity of Gullah Geechee families and communities on Hilton Head Island.

The Board recommended considering the use of "families" in place of "residents" where appropriate; expressly recognizing historic buildings and structures as cultural resources; and incorporating family-compound development, generational resettlement, population retention, expanded land ownership, and opportunities for former residents and descendants to return, live, work, invest, and operate businesses on the Island.

The Board reviewed the four proposed goals addressing neighborhood and cultural-resource stabilization, economic vitality, organizational resilience, and youth development. Members recommended strengthening the goals by explaining their intended outcomes, including future generations, organizational capacity, partnerships, youth leadership, entrepreneurship, cultural stewardship, and measurable indicators of population retention and growth. The Board discussed whether resettlement and population growth should become a separate goal or be incorporated through strategies, tactics, and performance measures.

Additional discussion addressed the need to align the Community Development Corporation's work with the Town's strategic priorities while maintaining the Corporation's

distinct community-development role. The Board emphasized the importance of prioritizing achievable initiatives, grouping related strategies, clearly identifying whether the Corporation will lead, fund, partner, or advocate, and developing measurable performance indicators. Potential future uses of tax increment financing and other public-private tools to support infrastructure, rehabilitation, and economic development within historic neighborhoods were also discussed. Staff and legal counsel agreed that additional research would be appropriate as specific projects are identified.

The Board discussed transitioning toward a working-board structure supported by committees, community participation, subject-matter expertise, and clear fiduciary responsibilities. Mr. Boxley was asked to return after adoption of the plan with recommendations concerning committee structure, meeting cadence, implementation priorities, responsibilities, and a tactical work plan. Richardson LaBruce, legal counsel, provided general guidance regarding Freedom of Information Act requirements and advised that the eventual committee and work-session process should be structured to satisfy transparency and public-meeting obligations while allowing staff and committees to complete necessary preparatory work.

Mr. Boxley and staff were directed to continue revising the draft plan using Board and community feedback and will return the plan for future consideration.

No formal action was taken.

Chair Johnson opened the floor to public comment.

Omalola Campbell supported the Corporation's progress, emphasized sustainability and conservation, and encouraged collaboration on safe, engaging programs for Gullah Geechee youth. The Board affirmed that youth participation should be incorporated into the Community Development Corporation's future work.

6. New Business

- a.** Discussion and Consideration of the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Small Business Funding Opportunity — Thomas Boxley, Executive Director for the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation

Thomas Boxley, Executive Director, presented a proposed pitch-style small business funding opportunity intended to expand access to capital and build upon the Money Talks financial education series. The initial concept proposed \$25,000 in total funding distributed among three recipients following eligibility review and multiple rounds of evaluation and presentation.

The Board expressed general support for the concept and discussed whether the funding should be characterized as a grant, prize, or investment. Richardson LaBruce, legal

counsel, advised that a grant structure and familiar grant terminology may provide the clearest framework because the Corporation uses public funds and must demonstrate a valid public purpose. Legal counsel also advised that direct equity investment in private businesses would present additional constitutional and legal considerations for a publicly funded entity and should be evaluated separately.

The Board requested additional details regarding eligible and prohibited uses of funds, business-size and organizational eligibility, required licensing and good-standing documentation, funding sources, reporting and accountability requirements, post-award business support, and the distinction between for-profit and nonprofit applicants. The proposed funding would not operate as a reimbursement program; however, recipients would be required to document expenditures and comply with reporting requirements. Board members also encouraged development of a broader small-business portfolio that could eventually include education, grants, low or no interest loans, and other legally permissible forms of support.

Ms. Peterson made a motion to table consideration of the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Small Business Funding Opportunity pending additional review, program development, and clarification of the proposed framework. Mr. Brown seconded.

Chair Johnson opened the floor for public comment.

Omalola Campbell cautioned that describing the program as an equity investment could discourage participation if applicants believed they would be required to surrender an ownership interest in their businesses.

Motion carried 7-0.

7. Public Comment - Non Agenda Items

Chair Johnson asked for public comment on non-agenda items.
There was no public comment at this time.

8. Executive Session

- a. Receipt of Legal Advice Related to the Proposed Name Change [Pursuant to South Carolina Freedom of Information Act 30-4-70 (a)(2)]

At 11:42 a.m., Mr. Brown made a motion to enter into executive session. Ms. Tunner seconded. Motion carried 7-0.

At 12:27 p.m., Mr. Brown made a motion to end executive session. Mr. White seconded. Motion carried 7-0.

9. Action from Executive Session

There was no action as a result of executive session.

10. Adjournment

At 12:28 p.m., Ms. Peterson made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. White seconded. Motion carried 7-0.

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

TO: The Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Board of Directors
FROM: Thomas Boxley, Executive Director
CC: Marc Orlando, Town Manager
DATE: September 16, 2026
SUBJECT: Report of the Executive Director

BACKGROUND:

This report provides an update on the activities in which Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation (CDC) staff has been engaged since our August meeting. Highlights include:

- **Money Talks Financial Education Series:** The Money Talks Financial Education Series provides local businesses with financial education, practical resources, and connections to professionals who can support their growth and long-term sustainability. As the GGHNCDC nears completion of the series' third year, two final sessions will be held in partnership with Town departments at the USCB Hilton Head Island Campus. Both sessions will be held from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. and are intended to better position local businesses for future opportunities.
 - September 22, 2026 – This informational drop-in will connect businesses with Town staff and local and state resources related to procurement, business licensing, contracting opportunities, and business growth.
 - September 29, 2026 – This construction focused networking event will provide contractors, subcontractors, and trade professionals with information about upcoming Town projects and opportunities to connect with Town project managers and industry professionals.
- **Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Community of Practice Quarterly Meeting:** Staff attended the quarterly meeting of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Community of Practice at Claflin University in Orangeburg, S C. The Community of Practice brings together professionals, community leaders, educators, and other stakeholders to share knowledge, identify resources, and

discuss strategies for preserving and strengthening communities throughout the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. The meeting included six planning professionals and approximately 120 college students. Panel discussions focused on the importance of planning professionals' work in underserved communities and the long-term impacts of unmanaged development on coastal communities.

The next quarterly meeting is scheduled for December at the Penn Center on St. Helena Island.

- **Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD):** COAD is a network of community organizations and local partners that coordinates resources and services to support residents before, during, and after an emergency or disaster. The group met on September 8, 2026 to review the after-action report from its recent tabletop exercise, which simulated an emergency scenario to assess preparedness, coordination, and response capabilities.

Key next steps include:

- Developing a one-page community resource guide
 - Identifying potential temporary shelter locations on Hilton Head Island
 - Evaluating transportation options for moving residents to larger shelters during emergencies
 - Continuing to recruit local organizations and other strategic partners to strengthen the community's emergency-response network
- **Historic Neighborhood Permitting and Design Studio:** Established in 2021, the Historic Neighborhood Permitting and Design Studio provides individualized guidance to property owners within Hilton Head Island's historic neighborhoods as they navigate land development, permitting, and related property matters. The program is intended to improve access to the development-review process, help address potential barriers, and connect residents with appropriate Town departments and community resources.

Approximately 150 requests have been submitted through the program to date, representing an average of 25 requests annually. As of September 1, more than 30 requests had been received this year involving property-development guidance, heirs' property matters, demolition permits, and development permits.

- **Land Management Ordinance (LMO) Task Force:** The LMO Task Force presented its recommendations for proposed ordinance amendments to the Gullah Geechee Land and Cultural Preservation Task Force during a special meeting held on August 24, 2026. The recommendations will be presented to the Planning Commission on September 16, 2026 for consideration.

RECOMMENDATION:

No action necessary.

NEXT STEPS:

N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

1. N/A



TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND

TO: The Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Board of Directors
FROM: Thomas Boxley, Executive Director
CC: Marc Orlando, Town Manager
DATE: September 16, 2026
SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2027-2030 Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Strategic Action Plan

BACKGROUND:

This item was first presented to the Board in the month of July 2026, during our strategic planning workshop. Since our workshop, staff has taken time to incorporate the feedback from the Board into the plan. To engage the community in the process, staff hosted a public drop-in session at Town Hall and developed an online survey, which closed in August. As a result of these efforts, we received feedback from approximately fifty people.

Today we present the final draft version for your review and consideration.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of this item

NEXT STEPS:

Should the board approve, we will work with our communications team to develop a final version of the plan that will be presented to Town Council and posted publicly.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Fiscal Year 2027-2030 Strategic Action Plan Draft



The Town of Hilton Head Island Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation (CDC)

Strategic Goals 2027-2030

Introduction

Founded in 2022 by an act of the Town of Hilton Head Island Town Council, the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation (GGHNCD) was established. The defined purpose of the organization: to stabilize, protect, and promote the historic, culturally sensitive communities of Hilton Head Island. The Corporation emerged from a shared commitment to ensure that the Gullah Geechee residents and communities are positioned to benefit from the Island's continued economic growth and not forced out by the pressures of development.

The establishment of the Corporation reflects the recognition that Hilton Head Island's Gullah Geechee communities are among its most valuable cultural and historical assets. For generations, these neighborhoods have served as centers of family life, faith, entrepreneurship, land ownership, and cultural traditions that define the Island's unique identity. However, increasing development pressures, escalating property values, heirs' property challenges, housing affordability issues, environmental threats, and the risk of cultural displacement have created an urgent need for a community-based organization dedicated to advancing sustainable solutions.

The purpose of the Corporation is to serve as a community development leader that advances economic opportunity while preserving the history, culture, and character of Gullah Geechee neighborhoods. The Corporation works to increase access to capital, promote affordable housing, support entrepreneurship and workforce development, preserve historic and cultural resources, protect community land, and attract public and private investment that directly benefits Gullah Geechee communities and families.

Mission

To preserve, protect, and strengthen the historic, culturally sensitive Gullah Geechee neighborhoods of Hilton Head Island through community-driven economic development, strategic investment, and cultural preservation.

Vision

Thriving Gullah Geechee communities where residents access economic opportunities, affordable housing, expand land ownership, expand, support and create generational wealth opportunities, while keeping the unique heritage and identity of Hilton Head Island.

Key Definitions

Preservation

The protection, maintenance, and stewardship of historic Gullah Geechee neighborhoods, cultural landscapes, buildings, traditions, homesteads, and community assets in a manner that retains their historical, cultural, and social significance for present and future generations. Preservation seeks to sustain the authenticity and integrity of places, practices, and stories while supporting the continued presence of Gullah Geechee families.

Conservation

The responsible management, restoration, and sustainable use of natural, cultural, and historic resources to ensure their long-term health, resilience, and value. Conservation includes protecting environmentally and culturally sensitive people, lands, waterways, open spaces, and cultural resources using tools such as conservation easements, strategic greenspace investments, while balancing community needs and responsible economic development.

Mitigation

Actions taken to avoid, minimize, reduce, or offset the adverse impacts of development, climate change, infrastructure projects, or other activities that may threaten Gullah Geechee communities, families, historic neighborhoods, cultural resources, or natural environments. Mitigation strategies may include land acquisition, conservation easements, affordable housing development, infrastructure improvements, relocation assistance where proper, cultural resource documentation, environmental restoration, and investments that preserve community character and reduce displacement.

Guiding Principle

The Hilton Head Island Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation recognizes that preservation, conservation, and mitigation are complementary

strategies that work together to sustain the cultural heritage, economic vitality, environmental resilience, and long-term well-being of our culturally sensitive Gullah Geechee communities. For our work as a Community Development Corporation, we support, recommend, advocate, and implement these principles in support of our organizational decisions, partnerships, and development initiatives in partnership with, and on behalf of the Gullah Geechee people.

Goals

Goal One: Ensure the stabilization of, and investment in Gullah Geechee neighborhoods and cultural sites and history.

Goal Two: Strengthen the economic vitality of Gullah Geechee communities and families by creating pathways to wealth and financial stability and supporting the creation, growth, and long-term success of Gullah Geechee-owned businesses.

Goal Three: Build a resilient and financially sustainable organization that serves as the catalyst for transformative community development.

Goal Four: Empower Gullah Geechee youth through leadership development opportunities.

Strategic Goal One:

Ensure the stabilization of, and investment in Gullah Geechee neighborhoods, cultural sites, and history.

***Alignment with Town Council Goal 7, Action Item 5**

Strategic Approach: Neighborhood and land investment, cultural, and historic preservation are the drivers of goal one.

Neighborhood and Land Investment

- Continue and enhance the services provided through the Historic Neighborhoods Permitting and Design Studio. Ongoing
- Support and advocate land uses that honor traditional Gullah Geechee economic utilizations. – FY27, 28
- Build upon the resiliency work of the Community Organization Active in Disaster (COAD). – Ongoing
- Acquire strategic properties. – Ongoing
- Support workforce and affordable housing production. – Ongoing
- Partner with Town CIP department to prioritize projects and align with budget. – FY 27 – Ongoing

Cultural and Historic Preservation

- Document history, location, access and ownership structure of the Gullah Geechee cemeteries. – FY 27-28
- Support heirs' property resolution. – Ongoing
- Identify, inventory and honor significant cultural sites. – Ongoing
- Support expanded cultural tourism efforts. Ongoing
- Strengthen marketing opportunities with the Hilton Head Island Airport. – FY 27
- Support artists, artisans and the expansion of festivals and events. – Ongoing
- Support the designation of specific areas of the HHI trail system as heritage trails. – FY 29
- Support the development of cultural marketplaces, food enterprises and food entrepreneurs. – FY 30
- Support storytelling and digital archival of records. – Ongoing

Key Performance Indicators

By 2030:

- 20 acres of Gullah Geechee land preserved.
- 20 affordable housing units developed or preserved.
- 10 heirs' property cases supported or resolved.

- 2 historic structures rehabilitated or preserved.
- 5 investment partnerships established.
- \$15 million annual cultural tourism impact.
- 10 cultural preservation projects completed.

Strategic Goal Two:

Strengthen the economic vitality of Gullah Geechee communities and families by creating pathways to wealth and financial stability for residents and businesses.

***Alignment with Town Council Goal 7, Action Item 5**

***Aligned with Town Council Goal 7, Action Item 6**

Strategic Approach: Goal two is centered in the economic and financial health and stabilization of Gullah Geechee neighborhoods, residents and business community.

Economic and Financial Education and Development

- Establish a Gullah Geechee Community Investment Fund focused on Gullah Geechee Resettlement. – FY 27-28
- Develop a revolving loan fund to finance small businesses, housing rehabilitation, and community facilities. – FY 27-28
- Financial literacy education. – Ongoing
- In partnership with the Town Procurement department, develop and support procurement opportunities. Ongoing
- Create microloan and grant opportunities for startup entrepreneurs. – FY 27-28
- Partner with Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs). – FY 27-28

Business Support

- Develop impact investment opportunities for mission-aligned investors. – FY 27-28
- Support business technical assistance opportunities. – FY 27
- Support tourism-related business enterprises. – FY 28
- In partnership with the DMO, support business marketing opportunities. – FY 28
- Expand seafood, agriculture, and cultural industries. – FY 30
- Create business incubator space. – FY 29-30
- Develop cooperative business models that involve land ownership as a business model. – FY 28-29

Key Performance Indicators

By 2030:

- \$1 million in capital deployed by 2030.
- 20 businesses financially supported.
- 50 businesses access technical assistance.

- 15 new businesses created.
- 15 new licensed businesses.
- 50 jobs created or retained.
- \$1 million in new business revenue generated.

Strategic Goal Three:

Build a resilient and financially sustainable organization that serves as the catalyst for transformative community development.

***Alignment with Town Council Goal 7, Action Item 7**

Strategic Approach: The themes of goal three revolve around financial sustainability and community development. The Board will play a significant role in the accomplishment of this goal.

Financial Sustainability

- Diversify revenue streams. – FY 27-28
- Build regional partnerships. – FY 27
- Create a Community Development Finance Program to identify, secure, and manage public and private funding opportunities. – FY 28
- Establish a Gullah Geechee Community Investment Fund to provide flexible financing for neighborhood revitalization and economic development projects. – FY 29
- Pursue Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) partnerships to increase access to affordable capital. Ongoing
- Create a program-related investment (PRI) strategy to attract investments from philanthropic foundations locally, regionally and nationally. – FY 28
- Develop mission-related investment (MRI) partnerships with financial institutions and impact investors. – FY 28
- Create a donor-advised fund and legacy giving program to encourage long-term philanthropic investment. – FY 27-28
- Establish an endowment fund to support long-term organizational sustainability. FY 29-30
- Engage financial institutions through Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) investments. – FY 27-28
- Develop corporate sponsorship opportunities. – FY 28
- Establish impact investment opportunities for mission-driven investors. – FY 28

Community Development

- Build out the CDC Community HUB. FY 28-29

- Maintain the strategic partnership with various departments of the Town of Hilton Head Island. Ongoing
- Partner with universities and research institutions to pursue collaborative opportunities. – FY 28
- Expand professional staff with expertise in real estate development, grant management, finance, and housing. – FY 28

Board of Directors

- Strengthen board governance, fiduciary responsibility, and oversight. – FY 27
- Develop board committees to support the work of the organization. – FY 27
- Develop a sustainable board and committee meeting schedule – FY 27
- Strengthen data management systems. – FY 29-30
- Develop succession planning and leadership development programs. – FY 27

Key Performance Indicators

By 2030:

- Complete CDC Community Hub renovations.
- 5 Board committees established.
- Create and execute 3 fundraising events.
- Create and execute annual funding opportunity (Pitch Competition).
- 4 new banking partnerships established.
- 2 successful grant awards cycles completed.
- Establish diversified planned giving accounts with CF-Low Country.

Strategic Goal Four:

Empower Gullah Geechee youth through leadership development opportunities.

Strategic Approach: Goal four is future focused on youth engagement and involvement.

- Support the development of internship opportunities for youth with various departments at the Town of Hilton Head Island. – FY 28
- Offer business incubator experiences and summer entrepreneurship opportunities. – FY 30
- Support expanded financial literacy education for youth covering budgeting, banking, investing, credit, taxes, and wealth building. – FY 29
- Partner with local employers and educational institutions to support youth learning opportunities. – FY 29
- Secure funding for youth internships. – FY 28
- Develop mentorship networks connecting youth with professionals. – FY 28

Key Performance Indicators

By 2030:

- 2 youth leadership workshops conducted annually.
- 15 youth participate in internships or job shadowing.
- 6 employer partnerships established.
- \$50,000 raised specifically to support youth internship programming.

Additional Priorities: The following priorities were identified in our data collection process as areas of need.

Community Leadership

- Community led planning and decision making.

Environmental Resilience

- Promote climate resilience, disaster mitigation planning, and sustainable development.

Regional Collaboration

- Strengthen partnerships with government agencies, educational institutions, philanthropic organizations, tourism entities, and private-sector partners.

Community Feedback

Community feedback gathered through the public drop-in session and online survey helped inform the priorities and actions included in the 2027–2030 Strategic Action Plan.

What We Heard

Goal One: Ensure the stabilization and investment in Gullah Geechee neighborhoods, cultural sites, and history.

Neighborhood Preservation and Cultural Resources

- Protect existing Gullah Geechee historic neighborhoods.
- Identify and maintain historic sites through appropriate signage.
- Ensure cemeteries are appropriately identified with signage, including Jenkins Cemetery.
- Educate the community about local historic and cultural sites.
- Ensure planners understand the potential negative impacts of development on Native Islander historic and cultural sites, such as Talbird Cemetery.
- Establish a cultural center.

Land Use, Housing, and Property Development

- Identify predevelopment funding opportunities.
- Allow tiny homes within historic neighborhoods where appropriate.
- Permit accessory dwelling units on feasible lots.
- Provide information about long-term property leasing.
- Allow recreational vehicles on properties within historic neighborhoods where appropriate.
- Offer affordable home repair and improvement services.
- Maintain and improve neighborhood infrastructure.

Land Retention and Wealth Building

- Encourage families to hold meetings regarding the future use of family property.
- Provide property owners with new ideas for using their land and building generational wealth.
- Identify or provide funding for heirs' property land surveys.
- Identify appraisal companies that provide fair and reasonable valuations of African American-owned properties.

Community Education, Engagement, and Representation

- Educate residents about opportunities to serve on Town of Hilton Head Island boards, commissions, and committees, as well as the importance of community representation.
- Host an annual "State of the Community" event at a local church.

Goal Two: Strengthen the economic vitality of Gullah Geechee communities by creating pathways to wealth and financial stability for residents and supporting the creation, growth, and long-term success of Gullah Geechee-owned businesses.

Business Development and Technical Assistance

- Establish business incubators to support emerging and existing businesses.
- Offer one-on-one business assistance.
- Work confidentially with existing business owners to identify their needs and challenges.
- Form partnerships with local institutions and subject-matter experts to support business planning and development.

Financial Education and Access to Capital

- Offer financial literacy courses.
- Promote responsible borrowing and flexible repayment opportunities.
- Provide education about investing and financial markets.
- Provide education about insurance, including life, automobile, and homeowners' coverage.

Money Talks Small Business Series

- Continue offering the Money Talks Small Business Series.
- Strengthen marketing and outreach for the series.
- Conduct follow-up activities with participants after each session.

Youth Education and Career Development

- Identify or establish scholarship and college-access opportunities for youth.
- Provide education about employment opportunities, career pathways, and financial investing.

Goal Four: Invest in the future of Gullah Geechee communities by empowering youth through leadership development, entrepreneurship, and lifelong skill-building.

Youth Financial Literacy

- Offer financial education classes that teach youth how to save, manage money responsibly, and understand the long-term benefits of financial planning.

Career Readiness and Workforce Development

- Create internship and experiential learning opportunities that provide youth with practical skills and pathways to future employment.

Survey Data

Source: GGHNCDC Community Survey, 2026.

Chart 1. Historic Neighborhood Connections

Which historic neighborhood do you call home or have ties to?

48 responses

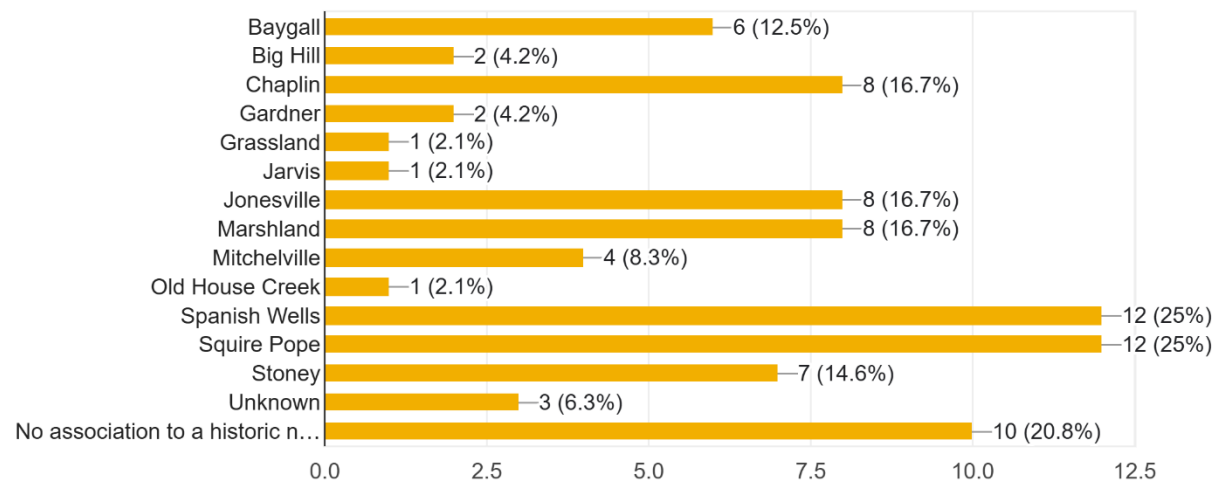


Chart 2. Primary Concerns About the Future of Historic Gullah Geechee Neighborhoods

What concerns you most about the future of our historic Gullah Geechee neighborhoods? (Select up to three.)

48 responses

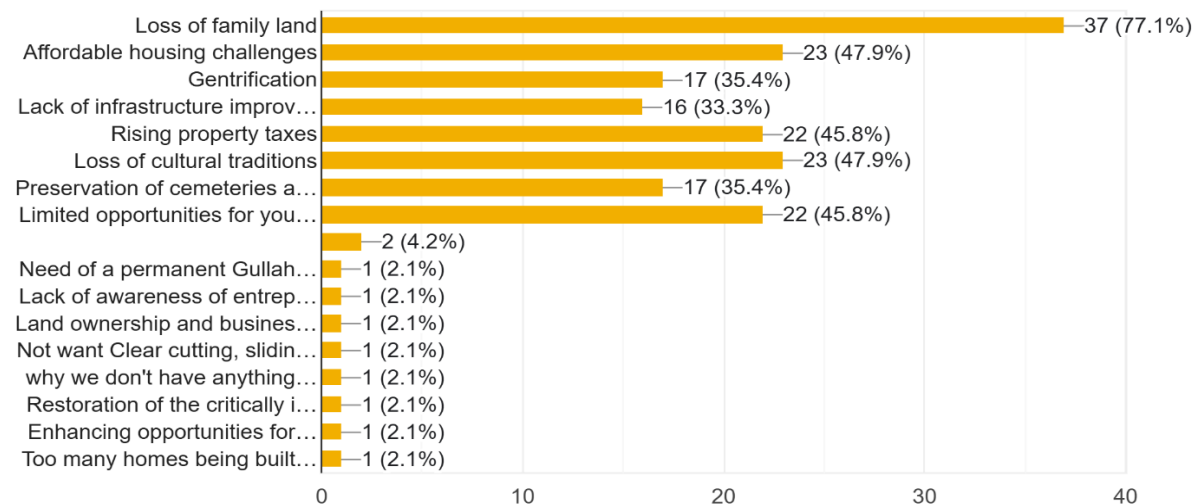


Chart 3. Community Interest in Information and Workshop Topics

What topics would you like the GGHNCDC to provide more information or workshops on?

48 responses

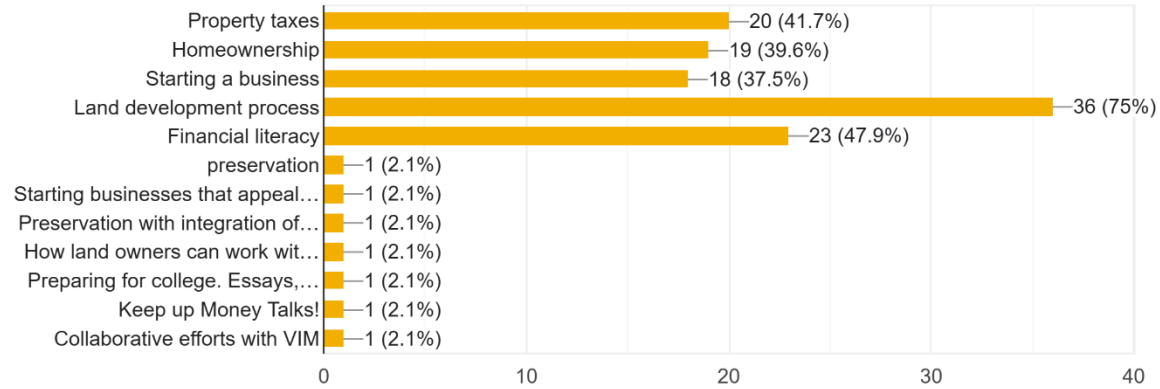


Chart 4. Economic Challenges Affecting Gullah Geechee Families

Which economic challenges impact you or your family the most?

48 responses

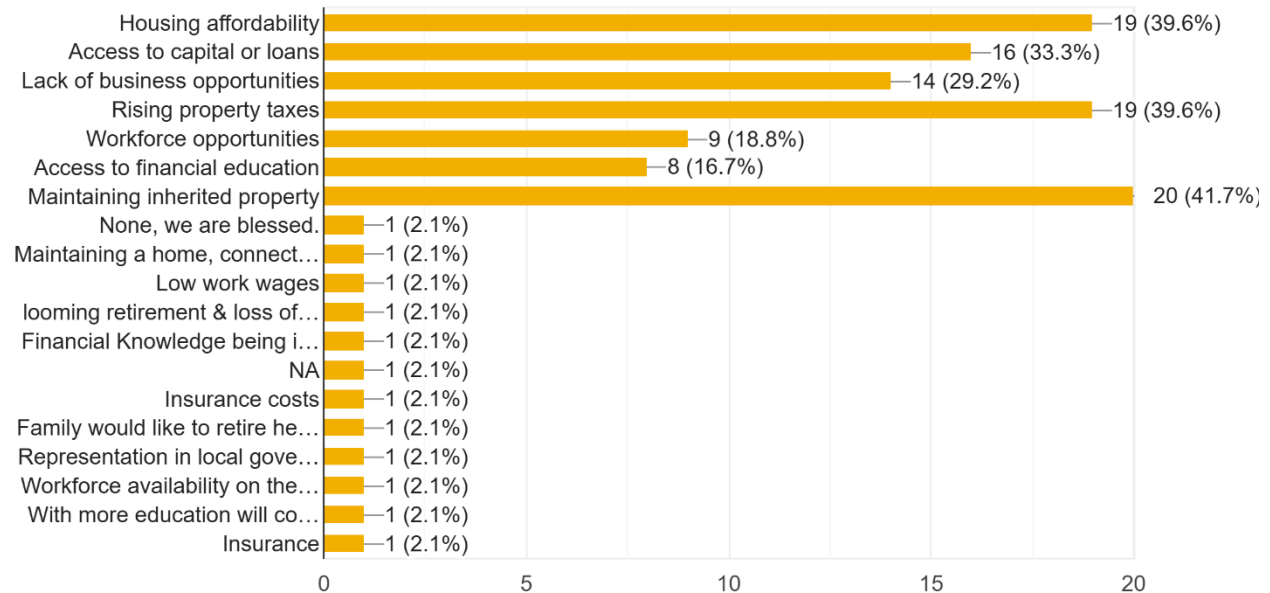


Chart 5. Community Interest in Financial Education Programs

What financial education programs would you participate in?

48 responses

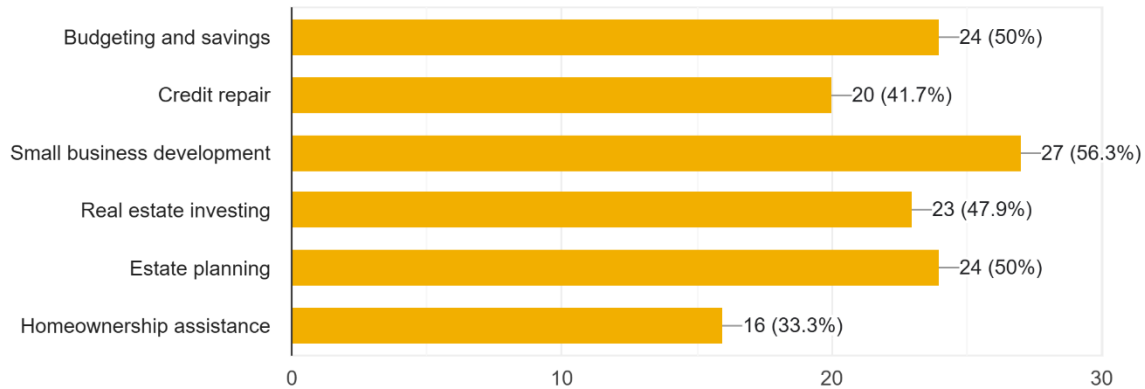
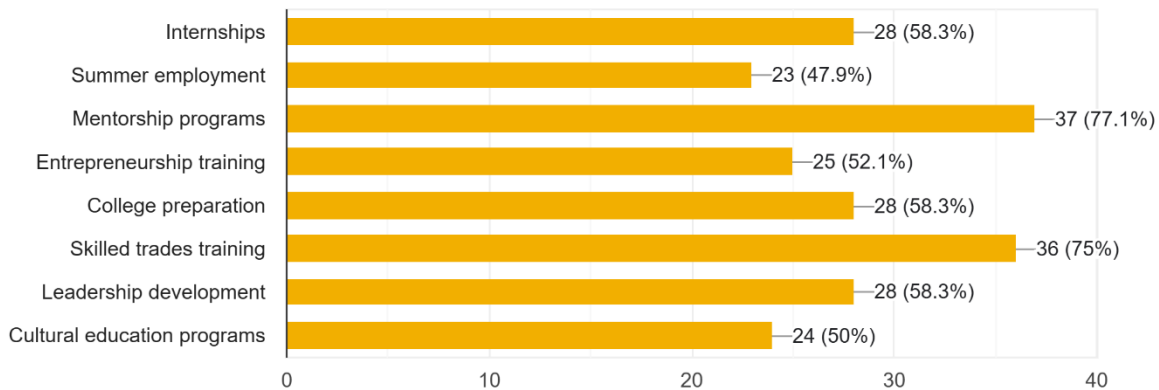


Chart 6. Opportunities Most Needed for Gullah Geechee Youth

What opportunities are most needed for our youth?

48 responses





TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND

TO: The Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Board of Directors
FROM: Thomas Boxley, Executive Director
CC: Marc Orlando, Town Manager
DATE: September 16, 2026
SUBJECT: Discussion and Consideration of the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Small Business Funding Opportunity

BACKGROUND:

This item was initially presented to the Board at its August 2026 meeting. Following discussion and questions regarding the technical aspects of the proposal, staff are returning the item to the Board for further review and consideration.

Our long-term goal is to develop the Full Count Pitch Competition event into an annual signature entrepreneurship initiative of the GGHNCDC. This is in alignment with our current strategic goal of increasing access to capital and financial education. Through this annual event, the CDC will provide \$25,000 in total investments to businesses demonstrating strong operational readiness, an understanding of their market, and potential for growth. Beyond the financial investment, the initiative is intended to increase business visibility, encourage entrepreneurial excellence, strengthen relationships between local businesses and the community at large, and further position the GGHNCDC as a catalyst for economic development within Hilton Head Island.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of this item.

NEXT STEPS:

Approval of this item will allow staff to move forward with the detailed planning of the event to include revised event schedule, identification of venues, recruitment of judges and call for participants.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. The Full Count: A Gullah Geechee Pitch Competition Overview



Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation

The Full Count: A Gullah Geechee Pitch Competition

Competition Overview -

In support of our stated objective, to support the advancement and sustainability of the historic and culturally sensitive Gullah Geechee communities of Hilton Head Island, and in alignment with our strategic goal number four, to increase access to capital and financial education, The Town of Hilton Head Island Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation presents The Full Count: A Gullah Geechee Pitch Competition.

In the game of baseball or softball, a batter has an opportunity to hit the ball into play. In a pitch count, the first number represents the number of balls, the second number represents the number of strikes. The defensive player in direct competition with the batter is the pitcher. The pitcher's objective is to strike out the batter in three legal attempts. The reference to full count is a time at which the batter has a last opportunity to hit the ball into play. In our analogy, the *Full Count*, the business owner represents the batter. Our competition, while it may not be the last "at-bat" for the business owner, we are encouraging our business owners to "swing" with intentionality: as if this opportunity was their last "at-bat."

Our goals for this event are to build and strengthen the business community and to provide direct access to capital for small business owners on Hilton Head Island.

Competition Process and Scoring Criteria -

First Round – Eligibility Screening

Business owners will make application with the CDC for participation. Each application will be reviewed in house by CDC staff and a panel of volunteer reviewers. Referrals will be made for participation in round two (not to exceed 15).

Scoring Criteria

Minimum Score to Advance: 70 Points

Criteria	Description	Maximum Points
Legal Business Entity	Registered with the South Carolina Secretary of State (proof required).	35



Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation

Criteria	Description	Maximum Points
Town Business License	Holds a current Town of Hilton Head Island business license.	35
Years in Business	Preference given to businesses operating five (5) years or less.	10
Historic Neighborhood Location	Business is owned or operated within a Historic Neighborhood as identified by the Town of Hilton Head Island.	10
Native Island Heritage	Business is owned or operated by a Hilton Head Island resident who can demonstrate ancestral or familial ties to the island prior to 1956.	10
Total Possible Score		100

Semi-final Round – Business Presentation

Semi-finalists will have the opportunity to publicly present their business to the semi-finalist panel of judges. Participants will have ten minutes to present their business concept to the judge's panel. The judges in this round will be responsible for scoring the applicant based on the criteria. Judges will recommend three finalists.

Scoring Criteria

Minimum Score to Advance: 80 Points

Top Three (3) scoring applicants advance to the Final Round.

Criteria	Description	Maximum Points
Problem & Opportunity	Defines a meaningful problem and demonstrates why it is important to solve.	20
Solution / Value Proposition	Presents a compelling, differentiated, and clearly articulated solution.	20
Market Opportunity	Demonstrates a clear understanding of the target market.	20
Traction & Validation	Demonstrates customer demand, revenue, partnerships, competition, or market validation.	20



Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation

Criteria	Description	Maximum Points
Team	Demonstrates the experience, skills, and commitment needed to execute the business model.	20
Total Possible Score		100

Final Round – Pitch Competition

Competitive round characterized by a seven-minute presentation with eight minutes of Q&A from the judges panel per participant. We will invite the community to attend and participate in this event. Judges will be responsible for scoring the finalists based on the established final round criteria and ranking the finalists first, second, and third.

Scoring Criteria

Finalists will be evaluated and ranked based on the following criteria.

Criteria	Description	Maximum Points
Business Model	Demonstrates a viable and sustainable business model.	30
Market Strategy	Clearly explains how funding will support growth and expansion.	30
Competitive Advantage	Demonstrates meaningful differentiation from competitors.	30
Presentation Quality	Delivers a clear, organized, and persuasive presentation.	5
Question & Answer	Responds confidently and effectively to judges' questions.	5
Total Possible Score		100

Award Structure -

The Full Count Gullah Geechee pitch competition will award \$25,000 in local business investment.

First Place: \$15,000.00



Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation

Second Place: \$6,000.00

Third Place: \$4,000.00

Initiative Impact -

The Full Count: A Gullah Geechee Pitch Competition represents more than a business competition—it is an investment in the future of Hilton Head Island's Gullah Geechee community. By combining access to capital, technical assistance, and opportunities for business exposure, the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation seeks to empower entrepreneurs to build sustainable businesses and strengthen the local economy. Through this annual initiative, the GGHNCDC reaffirms its commitment to preserving the cultural legacy of the Gullah Geechee people while fostering innovation, economic opportunity, and long-term community prosperity.



TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND

TO: The Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation Board of Directors
FROM: Thomas Boxley, Executive Director
CC: Marc Orlando, Town Manager
DATE: September 16, 2026
SUBJECT: Discussions and Considerations of a Proposed Event Partnership and Memorandum of Understanding Between the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation and Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park

BACKGROUND:

Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park (HMFP) has hosted its annual Juneteenth Celebration for the past 12 years. Through educational, cultural, and community-centered programming, the event commemorates Juneteenth, honors the history of Mitchelville, and celebrates the heritage and contributions of the Gullah Geechee community.

For the 2027 celebration, HMFP and the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation (GGHNCDC) propose collaborating to incorporate the Gullah Family Reunion concept into HMFP's established Juneteenth programming. This partnership would combine HMFP's experience in hosting the annual celebration, recognized historic setting, and cultural programming capacity with the GGHNCDC's commitment to preserving Gullah Geechee historic neighborhoods and cultural assets, strengthening economic vitality, supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs, engaging youth, and advancing the long-term sustainability of the Gullah Geechee community.

By coordinating their organizational resources, community relationships, cultural expertise, and outreach efforts, the organizations would broaden the celebration's reach and strengthen its educational, cultural, community, and economic impact. The collaboration would also reduce duplication of efforts and provide a unified platform for engaging residents, families, businesses, artists, cultural practitioners, and visitors.

The proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishes the roles and responsibilities of each organization. HMFP would serve as the host venue and lead site coordination, cultural programming, and operational planning. The GGHNCDC would provide project-management support, coordinate workshop development and community

partners, maintain planning documentation, and assist with volunteer recruitment. Both organizations would jointly develop the event schedule, review marketing materials, coordinate public communications, and pursue appropriate funding and sponsorship opportunities.

The MOU does not authorize either organization to financially obligate the other. Joint expenses must be discussed and approved in advance, and any jointly secured grant funding would be administered in accordance with applicable grant requirements. Significant decisions related to the budget, branding, programming, sponsorship commitments, venue use, or contractual obligations would require mutual agreement before implementation.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Board of Directors approve the Memorandum of Understanding between GGHNCDC and the HMFP for the planning and implementation of the 2027 Juneteenth Celebration and authorize the Executive Director to execute the agreement, pending legal review.

NEXT STEPS:

Approval of this item will allow staff members from both organizations to move forward with event preparation and planning.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation and Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park Memorandum of Understanding

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

Between

Town of Hilton Head Island Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation (GGHNCDC)

and

Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park (HMFP)

Regarding the Planning and Implementation of the 2027 Juneteenth Celebration / Gullah Family Reunion

Effective Date: _____

Term: Through completion of all post-event closeout activities, unless otherwise terminated in accordance with this Memorandum of Understanding.

1. Purpose

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishes the collaborative partnership between the Town of Hilton Head Island Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation (GGHNCDC) and Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park (HMFP) for the planning, coordination, promotion, and implementation of the 2027 Juneteenth Celebration / Gullah Family Reunion.

The purpose of this partnership is to leverage the strengths, expertise, and resources of both organizations to deliver a high-quality event that celebrates Juneteenth, honors Gullah Geechee history and culture, strengthens community engagement, supports education and economic opportunity, and promotes Hilton Head Island as a destination for cultural heritage tourism.

This MOU is intended to define the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of each organization while fostering a collaborative working relationship.

2. Goals and Objectives

The partners agree to work collaboratively to:

- Celebrate the significance of Juneteenth and Gullah Geechee heritage.
- Deliver a successful, well-organized, and financially responsible event.
- Increase community participation and visitor engagement.
- Support local businesses, entrepreneurs, artists, and cultural practitioners.
- Promote educational programming and cultural preservation.
- Secure sponsorships and funding opportunities.
- Coordinate marketing and communications efforts.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park (HMFP)

HMFP agrees to:

- Serve as the host venue for applicable event activities.
- Provide access to agreed-upon facilities and event spaces.
- Participate in event planning meetings.
- Assist with historical and cultural programming.
- Coordinate museum/site-related logistics.
- Support volunteer coordination, as appropriate.
- Collaborate on sponsorship and fundraising efforts.
- Assist with marketing and promotional activities.
- Designate a primary organization representative.
- Communicate operational needs and site requirements.

Town of Hilton Head Island Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation (GGHNCD)

GGHNCD agrees to:

- Assist with event planning and project management specifically determining workshop sessions including –
 - Speakers
 - Locations
 - Resources
- Assist event timelines and work plans.
- Assist with the coordination of community partners.
- Coordinate sponsorship outreach and grant opportunities.
- Participate in promotional materials in collaboration with HMFP.
- Maintain meeting notes and project documentation.
- Designate a primary organization representative.
- Assist with volunteer recruitment, with an emphasis on engaging local young adults to provide input and help shape the Saturday agenda.

4. Joint Responsibilities

Both organizations agree to:

- Participate in regular planning meetings.
- Collaboratively develop the event schedule and programming.
- Work together on fundraising and sponsorship opportunities.
- Jointly review marketing materials prior to public release.
- Coordinate public communications regarding the event.

- Share relevant information in a timely manner.
- Support volunteer recruitment.
- Collaboratively identify risks and mitigation strategies.
- Promote the event through each organization's communication platforms.
- Maintain open, respectful, and professional communication.

5. Governance and Decision-Making

The parties agree to make significant planning decisions collaboratively.

Each organization shall designate representatives authorized to participate in planning discussions and make recommendations on behalf of their organization.

Any significant changes involving budget, branding, venue use, programming, sponsorship commitments, or contractual obligations shall be discussed and mutually agreed upon by both organizations before implementation.

6. Financial Responsibilities

Unless otherwise agreed upon in writing:

- Joint expenses shall be discussed and approved in advance.
- Sponsorship revenue shall be managed in accordance with mutually agreed-upon financial procedures.
- Any grant funding secured jointly shall be administered according to grant requirements and separate written agreements, if necessary.
- Neither organization may obligate the other financially.

7. Marketing, Branding, and Public Communications

The organizations agree to:

- Recognize both organizations as official event partners.
- Include both organizational logos on approved promotional materials.
- Coordinate public announcements whenever practical.
- Ensure branding is used in accordance with each organization's branding guidelines.
- Obtain mutual approval before issuing major press releases regarding the partnership.

8. Intellectual Property

Each organization retains ownership of its existing intellectual property, including logos, trademarks, publications, and proprietary materials.

Any jointly created materials shall be used only for purposes related to the event unless otherwise agreed upon in writing.

9. Insurance and Liability

Each organization shall maintain any insurance coverage required for its respective operations.

Each organization shall remain responsible for the actions of its employees, volunteers, contractors, and agents.

Nothing contained within this MOU shall be construed as creating a joint venture or legal partnership for purposes of liability.

10. Independent Organizations

Nothing contained in this MOU shall be interpreted as creating:

- a legal partnership;
- a joint venture;
- an employer-employee relationship; or
- an agency relationship between the parties.

Each organization remains an independent entity.

11. Confidentiality

Both organizations agree to maintain the confidentiality of any non-public information shared during the course of this partnership unless disclosure is required by law or mutually agreed upon.

12. Amendments

This MOU may be amended at any time through written agreement signed by authorized representatives of both organizations.

13. Termination

Either organization may terminate this MOU by providing thirty (30) days' written notice to the other party. The parties agree to work collaboratively to minimize disruption to any ongoing event planning activities should termination occur.

14. Dispute Resolution

The organizations agree to make every reasonable effort to resolve disagreements through informal discussion and good-faith negotiation before pursuing other remedies.

15. Primary Contacts

Town of Hilton Head Island Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation

Representative: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park

Representative: _____

Title: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

16. Entire Understanding

This Memorandum of Understanding represents the current understanding between the parties regarding their collaboration for the 2027 Juneteenth Celebration / Gullah Family Reunion. It is intended to guide the working relationship between the organizations and does not create legally binding financial or contractual obligations unless otherwise specified in separate written agreements.

Signatures

Town of Hilton Head Island Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____