



Town of Hilton Head Island
GULLAH GEECHEE HISTORIC
NEIGHBORHOODS COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
COMMITTEE MEETING
Wednesday, May 15, 2024 – 10:00 AM
Minutes

Call to Order

Chair Peterson called the meeting to order at 10:05 am.

Board Members Present: Chair Shirley “Peaches” Peterson; David Ames; Alex Brown; Pastor Louis Johnson, and Andre White (via Microsoft Teams)

Board Members Absent: Terry Brubaker

Adoption of the Agenda

Mr. Brown moved to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Johnson seconded. Motion carried 4-0 (Mr. Ames was absent during the vote).

Approval of the Minutes

Mr. Brown moved to approve the meeting minutes of February 21, 2024 and March 18, 2024 as presented. Mr. Johnson seconded. Motion carried 4-0 (Mr. Ames was absent during the vote).

Appearance by Citizens

There were no comments made at this time.

Unfinished Business

Discussion of the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation’s Position on the William Hilton Parkway Gateway Corridor Project – Thomas Boxley, Executive Director for the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation

Thomas Boxley, Executive Director for the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation, discussed with the board the proposed expansion of the William Hilton Parkway Gateway Corridor Project and presented information gathered from impacted

property owners in the Stoney Community and to recommend mitigation strategies. Over the past several months, the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation has been actively engaged in collaborative discussions with property owners in the Stoney Community along the William Hilton Parkway/Highway 278 corridor. The primary objective has been to develop a comprehensive strategy and action plan aimed at mitigating potential adverse impacts. It is important to highlight that these discussions with each property owner are treated with the utmost confidentiality and are ongoing. Mitigation approaches are tailored to each property owner's specific circumstances, reflecting the situation's nuanced nature. Mitigation refers to measures to minimize or alleviate the impact of any adverse events. Mr. Boxley discussed the following proposed mitigation strategies because of these discussions. Right of way acquisition, property owners' mitigation and improvements, property owner's safe access, property acquisition and economic stability.

The Board had a discussion on the topic and the consensus was that they felt that Mr. Boxley is working with the families positively in terms of mitigation and attempting to lessen any further property impacts in the future. He is also developing alternatives within the Stoney Community along with Town Staff and having discussions with the South Carolina Department of Transportation to how best accomplish that. Of those mitigation strategies discussed, the board was encouraged by the attention to detail that they show. There has been a lot of discussion with Town Staff and the property owners from the Stoney Community to best incorporate their needs into this project that will be contentious as long as it is going on. Safety is and will be at the forefront of this project. There has been consideration of a land bridge that would provide safe access and connectivity for both sides of the road proposed on Town owned land. As a proposed solution, this would require further development of design and approval to move forward. The board was encouraged by this consideration and indicated that they would like to see this portion of the project through. Mr. Brown spoke to the board about how economically vibrant the Stoney Community was previously and how important it is to provide Stoney residents with the tools needed to get back to that. He thought that the conveyance of Town owned land should be an option should those opportunities arise for the property owners of Stoney. He also was concerned about the safety of the corridor and residents being able to access both sides of the road should they desire safely. Mr. Johnson encouraged Mr. Boxley to explore the possibility of a land bridge within the Stoney community. He provided the example of safe underground crossing in the Pine Ridge area of Bluffton. Retrofitting after the fact he feels is difficult, however, during the project makes more sense.

Mr. Ames made a motion to accept and forward to Town Council the William Hilton Parkway Gateway Corridor proposed mitigation strategies to include the addition of the proposed safe crossing access across highway 278 and the utilization of Town owned property for the use of economic development purposes within the Stoney Community. Mr. Johnson seconded. Motion carried 4-0 (Mr. White was absent at the time of the vote).

Chair Peterson asked for public comment.

Dr. Jamal Toure: Mr. Toure spoke with the Board regarding how current landowners are impacted by highway systems. He also spoke about the many environmental issues that are presented when highways and roadways are built.

Yolwanda Cohen McKinney: Mrs. Cohen McKinney thanked the board for their time and efforts. She stated that she has concerns with the decision to move forward on the William Hilton Parkway Gateway Corridor project. She also emphasized the importance of preserving the culture on Hilton Head.

Louise Cohen: Ms. Cohen spoke to the board about how the Gullah people of Hilton Head have gone through a lot. She feels that our ancestors chose the land and God chose the Stoney Community. She also feels that there should be a monument in the Stoney area and that improvements can and should be done to what is currently there.

William Stewart: Mr. Stewart shared with the board that he does not want the expansion and no longer feels comfortable in his own home. He stated that he thinks that the Town should reconfigure Ward 1.

Heather Rath: Mrs. Rath spoke to the board about her involvement with the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and their Island by Island guide. This guide could help the Town look to the future as to what the community is doing.

New Business

Discussion of the William Hilton Parkway Gateway Corridor Project Timeline – Thomas Boxley, Executive Director for the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation

Thomas Boxley, Executive Director for the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation, spoke with the board regarding the William Hilton Parkway Gateway Corridor Project. Mr. Boxley provided a detailed project timeline outlining the remaining milestones and key deliverables. This timeline incorporates input from relevant stakeholders, including the Town, County, State, and property owners. It was previously recommended that the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation (GGHNCD) provide regular progress updates throughout the remainder of the project. This approach will ensure the successful delivery of a mitigation strategy that will help Town Council decide on Municipal Consent.

The following dates represent the critical path forward to the municipal consent vote by Town Council. These dates are considered tentative and are subject to change.

May 1, 2024 – Meeting with Beaufort County, State Department of Transportation, Town of Hilton Head Island, GGHNCD – design alternatives presented

May 8, 2024 – William Hilton Parkway Gateway Corridor Independent Review Advisory Committee Meeting – Presentation of findings by consultant

Week of May 13-17, 2024 – Town of Hilton Head, Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation, South Carolina Department of Transportation, Beaufort County – Ongoing communication and discussions

Week of May 20-24, 2024 – Town Council Workshops

June 12, 2024 – William Hilton Parkway Gateway Corridor Independent Review Advisory Committee Meeting

June 2024 (Date/Time yet to be determined) – Town Council Meeting – Possible Municipal Consent and Memorandum of Understanding agenda items

In closing, Mr. Boxley encouraged all citizens present to remain engaged, as Municipal Consent is the final step of this timeline. He emphasized the importance of continued community involvement and urged everyone to stay informed and participate actively in the upcoming stages of the process.

Chair Peterson asked for public comment.

Yolwanda Cohen McKinney: Mrs. Cohen McKinney stated that the South Carolina Department of Transportation is communicating with the public that there is no impact and from what she has seen that is not the case.

William Stewart: Mr. Stewart stated that he believes that adding lanes on highway 278 feels similar to I-77 and it is not necessary. The Stoney community is not Miami or Atlanta and should not be expanded like that. Mr. Stewart also feels that Ward 1 should have three representatives on Town Council.

Dr. Jamal Toure: Mr. Toure asked the board what they want the community to do. He feels that the Gullah Geechee people will not stand up and speak out about how they feel about the project as they have sat silent too long and something needs to be said about that.

Blinda Stewart Young: Mrs. Stewart Young stated that she is looking forward to suggestions for moving forward. Generational wealth is what the property owners of the Stoney community want to use their land for. She made mention to the 17.6 mile Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel that connects Hampton Roads and the Delaware Valley. She thought that a bridge of that type or similar could fit the area and amenities such as an aquarium could be added for children to make it more appealing to all.

Sharon Sherman: Mrs. Sherman spoke with the board that living here and visiting here are different. As the President of the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) she wanted the board to know that her organization is here to help the Gullah Geechee Historic neighborhoods Community Development Corporation in any way possible.

Louise Cohen: Ms. Cohen spoke to the board about the need to have community involvement at their meetings. Starting at 10:00 am is hard for those that are working. She wanted the board to know that those that do attend the meetings take information back to their respective communities from the CDC. She thanked them for what they are doing and how hard they are working.

Pastor Louis Johnson shared with the board and those present that they truly need the community's support. The Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhoods Community Development Corporation, formed in 2022, is a new entity that has never existed before. Pastor Johnson expressed that he could feel the pain and suffering in the community's voice and emphasized their vested interest in their property and culture. He believes that trust, communication, and cooperation are a two-way street and asked the community to not only be patient with the board but to also help the Board and Mr. Boxley. Pastor Johnson reaffirmed that the GGHNCDC exists

for the community and is dedicated to serving and supporting their needs. He encouraged everyone to stay engaged and work together to preserve their heritage and improve their shared future.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:49 am.

Approved: July 24, 2024

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