



Town of Hilton Head Island GULLAH GEECHEE LAND AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION TASK FORCE MEETING Monday, May 6, 2024, 1:00 PM Minutes

1. Call to Order

Chairman Stevens called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Present were: Lavon Stevens, Palmer Simmons, Tom Henz, John Campbell, Joyce Wright. Absent were Shani Green and Ibrahim Abdul-Malik. Chairman Stevens recognized the presence of Town Council members, Ms. Becker and Mr. Brown and thanked them for taking time to attend this meeting.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

A motion to adopt the Agenda as presented was made by Mr. Henz and seconded by Ms. Wright. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Approval of the Minutes

a. Regular Meeting Minutes of March 4, 2024

A motion to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes as presented from March 4, 2024 was made by Vice-Chair Simmons and seconded by Ms. Wright. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Appearance by Citizens

Public comments concerning Agenda items were to be submitted electronically via the Open Town Hall Portal. No comments were received, and no citizens appeared to speak.

5. Staff Report

a. Introduction of Principal Planner for Historic Neighborhoods – Sharonica Gavin, Principal Planner

Sharonica Gavin was introduced as the new Principal Planner for Historic Neighborhoods, and she expressed her deep passion for preserving our community's rich culture and heritage, having been born, raised and educated in the local area. She defined her role as collaborating with residents, stakeholders, and any other local authorities and organizations to insure this preservation. She expressed her thanks for allowing her to serve in this capacity, and the Committee members welcomed her and offered their support to help accomplish her goals.

b. General Staff Updates – LMO/ Districts – Aaron Rucker, Community Planning Manager

Aaron Rucker, Community Planning Manager, presented his report on two big initiatives moving towards the upcoming Public Planning Committee meeting. The first is the movement forward of the Land Management Ordinance (LMO) that will be addressed for input and direction in a full LMO update meeting being presented on Thursday, May 9 at 10:00 AM, with Staff and the Town's consultant present. The second initiative also being presented on Thursday at the Public Planning Committee meeting is a discussion of the Skull Creek District Plan, where Staff will be seeking input on the approach and organizational template that is being used to develop all 8 Districts going forward, with the Skull Creek District being the first to be discussed.

c. Historic Neighborhood Permitting & Design Studio Report – Alexis Cook, Principal Planner

Alexis Cook, Principal Planner, reported several new cases being worked on for presentation at the next meeting. Since the previous meeting, two design studios have been closed, with 1 new case. That brings the total of cases completed so far to 38, comprised of 29 active projects, with 3 withdrawn projects and 2 duplicates from 2022. Her summary of issues addressed and collaborations with Town Staff and outside agencies and nonprofits are detailed on the Memo included in the Agenda Packet, and she expressed her appreciation for the assistance provided. She provided a brief overview of the types of cases and services provided by the design studio. She described the studio design process as beginning with identification of a possible case, phone call or email introductory contact, offer of a fact finding meeting, details discussed and internal staff review done, and a concept review with citizen providing options, with no obligations to proceed. She noted that with the LMO rewrite in progress, her team will be revisiting Family Compound and Family Subdivision with the consultant, and she will explore the possibility of a virtual attendance by the code consultant at a future meeting of this Committee.

Missy Luick, Director of Planning, noted that the code consultant would be meeting with the Public Planning Committee on Thursday seeking direction on the priority set, then work will begin on modules for the full code overhaul with more interaction occurring with the Task Force at that point.

d. Home Safety and Repair Program Update – Nichte Barrientos, Planner – Economic Development

Nichte Barrientos, Planner - Economic Development, presented the Home Safety and Repair Program update, with a summary of activity outlined in her Memo, which is included in the Agenda Packet. She noted that the role held previously by Chris Yates, Building Official, has been broken down into 2 programs, which are now led by Lydia Lewis, Community Development Administrative Manager, with Sharonica Gavin, Principal Planner for Historic Neighborhoods as the Citizen Liaison, who will be presenting future updates. Communication to update all applicants of the program changes and their status in the program is being developed. Various resources are being explored to assist with contractor quoting and to insure a smoother process for all parties involved. She reported that the motion from the last meeting to recommend to Town Council that

additional funding be provided for the programs will be up for Second Reading at tomorrow's Town Council meeting. Staff is also researching additional funding opportunities, as well. Mr. Henz requested future summaries should indicate the start dates. Ms. Barrientos indicated that Town Staff is still working internally on how the process will move forward following the departure of Mr. Yates, and Ms. Luick explained that the Building Department will remain involved in the bidding process, but a new administration team will be utilized for the progression of the applications, with Ms. Gavin managing quality control of the entire program and fielding phone calls. With the possibility of additional funding, the Town wants to ensure that it is ready for the contracting step that all applications are awaiting. The qualification of contractors was outlined by Ms. Luick.

e. Sewer Connection Program Update – Nicté Barrientos, Planner – Economic Development

Ms. Barrientos presented the Sewer Connection Program Update, which is included in her Memo, which is a part of the Agenda Packet. She advised that the program would be administered by Lydia Lewis, Community Development Administration Manager, with Sharonica Garvin providing future monthly updates. Communication is being developed to notify all applicants of the changes and the status of each applicant. Clarification was requested on the applications withdrawn and not qualified, which will be researched and presented at a future meeting.

f. Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhood CDC Update – Thomas Boxley, Executive Director Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhood CDC

Thomas Boxley, Executive Director for the Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhood Community Development Corporation, provided an update on activities in which he had been involved since his last report. He noted they had completed strategic planning and budget adoption by the Board of Directors.

g. Bridge Project Status; Stoney Neighborhood – Thomas Boxley, Executive Director Gullah Geechee Historic Neighborhood CDC

Mr. Boxley reported that extensive time has been spent with property owners and residents in the William Hilton Parkway Corridor related to mitigation strategies. Based on conceptual design work, the highway is scheduled to expand from 4 to 6 lanes, which would create access and safety issues for property owners along the Corridor. This has been a high priority for the CDC, and the implementation of a strategic plan. He noted there will be overlap with the team from the Community Development Department, and Ms. Gavin will be involved in identifying the priorities by the Task Force that have yet been implemented. He invited the members to a meeting being held Wednesday of the Gateway Corridor Independent Review Advisory Committee, where the consultants will present its recommended alternative plan, with final presentation to Town Council scheduled for June, as yet to be determined. Pending municipal consent, the SC Department of Transportation will be heavily engaged in further design phases. Mr. Boxley indicated he has been in constant communication with many property owners

within the Stoney Community, and considered it a priority to maintain an open line of communication with the Stoney residents and property owners directly impacted. He noted the next meeting of the CDC is May 15, and all members were invited to attend. Chairman Stevens encouraged the members of the Task Force to attend as many meetings as possible so that they can spread accurate information throughout the community.

6. Discussion Items

a. Land Preservation Update – Luana Graves Sellars, Lowcountry Gullah Foundation

While awaiting Ms. Sellars arrival, Tai Scott, asked the Task Force to keep density and the transfer of density rights in the forefront as a high priority when dealing with the LMO rewrite. This would affect families who want to be compensated, remain on their property, but still be able to use the land. Concerning the impact of the Highway 278 changes and impact on the Gullah community, Mr. Scott encouraged open communication with those affected, with just compensation and mitigation to avoid litigation. He also thanked Culture HHI for participating in an event last Saturday at Beautiful Island Square, and invited the public to view the colored bins painted by local young artists.

Ms. Luana Graves Sellars, Founder of Lowcountry Gullah Foundation, presented an update on what has been happening with the Foundation. She identified upcoming workshops scheduled for the remainder of the year on various topics. These can be found in her Memo, along with a flyer being distributed concerning heirs property, which is a part of the Agenda Packet. She noted that they are working with 2 families, who were on the redemption list for delinquent taxes. They are currently monitoring the list that will be coming out in October for delinquent taxes, and contacting those owners to provide assistance. Ms. Sellers reported she is working with Beaufort County to identify property owners and/or heirs property within the Gullah community, with a current number being approximately 1,100, but she explained that identification is not a perfect science and is ongoing. She indicated the list each year tends to be the same people, but the workshops are attracting new people who are in need of help. Discrepancies in ownership and tax records and problems in identifying Gullah owned properties were discussed.

Ms. Wright noted that the Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park will be celebrating its upcoming 10th Anniversary Juneteenth, which includes a 5K race, and daily activities. She invited the public to attend one or more of the activities planned, and to explore the changes made at Mitchelville.

Mr. Henz noted a function coming up sponsored by the Lowcountry Gullah Foundation, and Ms. Sellars provided information about the annual fundraising event for the non-profit organization that raises funds to continue to provide workshops and assist in payment of delinquent taxes.

Chairman Stevens noted it was always good to acknowledge and recognize the positive happenings in our community, and he noted that SoundWaves at the Hilton Head

Orchestra offices would be presenting another program, which is part of the Gullah series, with the Ella C. White Memorial Banquet being held May 17 and emceed by Town Council Member Brown. He encouraged attendance and support for these local events happening in our community.

An unidentified citizen reminded everyone that education is an important element in understanding tax bills and clearing heirs property, and he encouraged educational sessions be held on the topic of tax bills.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was declared adjourned at 2:04 p.m.

Approved: August 5, 2024

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