



**TOWN OF SULLIVAN'S ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA
LAND USE & NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL**

Friday, August 29, 2014

The Land Use & Natural Resources Committee of Council met at 9:00 a.m. on August 29, 2014 at Town Hall, 2050-B Middle Street, all requirements of the Freedom of Information Act having been met. Present were Committee members Pat O'Neil, Chair, Mayor Mike Perkis and Council member Jerry Kaynard; Staff, Administrator Benke, Zoning Administrator Henderson, Building Official Robinson and Fire Chief Stith

There were approximately ten (10) members of the public present, including Council members Chauncey Clark and Susan Middaugh; no media representatives present. Jeff Jackson, Town naturalist consultant, was present too.

1. Call to Order. Chair O'Neil called the meeting to order, stated the press and public were duly notified pursuant to state law and noted all members were present.

**2. Charleston County Urban Greenbelt Grant Program:
a. Review of Phase I (Jeff Jackson)**

Administrator Benke provided brief history of the Urban Greenbelt Grant Program:

- 2004: County-wide referendum passed for transportation sales tax (aka "1/2 cent sales tax") to fund various transportation projects, one being the Urban Greenbelt Program.
- Greenbelt Program objective: purchase vacant land for green space to be held open for public use:
 - Twenty-five year program projected to earn \$1.3 billion
 - Approximately 20,000 acres of land has been purchased and protected under this program, to date, at cost of \$90 million.
 - Grant apportioned to Charleston County municipalities based upon formula tied directly to population size.
 - Sullivan's Island portion is under \$198,000 which is insufficient to purchase land on Sullivan's Island (Isle of Palms and Folly Beach are in a similar situation).
- 2005: Sullivan's Island Administrator Benke, Isle of Palms Administrator Tucker and former Folly Beach Administrator Connor-Rooks began working with the Greenbelt board and Charleston County board to successfully amend the sales tax ordinance to accommodate beach community's special needs.
- Charleston County's program amendment (summer 2010) allowed for beach communities, like Sullivan's Island, to use the Greenbelt Program Grant funds for projects to allow public access to the beach.
- Town reviewed its walk-over needs: add new, expand existing or repair/update boardwalks as needed.

- 2007: Town engaged Coastal Science and Engineering (CSE) to study and review the Accreted Land. One of the CSE study items related to the Accreted Land maritime forest. Town received a number of comments from a variety of organizations: Audubon Society, Department of Natural Resources (DNR), US Fish & Wildlife, Land Trust, etc.
- 2006-2008: Confluence of activity attributed to evolution of Station 16 nature trail concept:
 - Jeff Jackson, for many years, had worked toward a nature trail concept in the accreted land;
 - Various organizations commented to CSE about natural habitats, etc.;
 - Town was developing its application for the urban greenbelt funds
- In July/August 2011, Administrator Benke presented urban greenbelt grant application to a variety of county-wide committees proposing to use funds to:
 - Build boardwalks from edge of pavement to the beach, to avoid people walking across the dunes.
 - Component of funds to be used to build a nature trail around Station 16 and, if the Town desired, extended along the Island through the accreted land.
- For past two years Jeff Jackson has worked on Nature Trail Phase I (Station 16 west) and Phase II (Station 16 east to lighthouse).
- 2013: Town developed a Request for Proposal (RFP) to build the boardwalk in Phase I, to include a boardwalk to take people to the beach and walk through the nature trail. A portion of the proposed boardwalk would terminate beachfront near Station 16 where recent erosion impacted the viability of the boardwalk. The Town did not want to construct a boardwalk to this erosion area that might be lost during the erosion cycle.
- Town accepted bids for this RFP in 2014 (spring) but did not award a contract. Town Staff feels the path required several modifications, which has been accomplished. Town is ready to re-bid the work.

Chair O'Neil asked Administrator Benke to review the paths (street to beach) that have been repaired or enhanced with Greenbelt Grant funds, to date.

Administrator Benke noted the following paths were enhanced with a combination of Greenbelt Grant funds and General Fund monies:

- Station 21 – handicap beach path (approximately 800') with 3 handicap parking spaces along street (Pettigrew Street);
- Station 18 ½ beach path (boardwalk)
- Station 22 ½ beach path (boardwalk)

He noted additional, small levels of funding came from a DHEC grant for beach path access and PARD grant funds.

Administrator Benke clarified for Chair O'Neil that the Station 16 project would include limited boardwalk installation for areas along the existing nature trail (cut 2012) wherein there is standing water. The Station 16 street-beach path work will be omitted from Phase I nature trail project due to acute erosion seaward of and into the primary dune. He clarified that the trail has been “cut” at present.

Mayor Perkis commented that at the Committee's April meeting, residents sought clarification that the Urban Greenbelt Grant application made provisions for the nature trail and street-beach boardwalk for Station 16. Mayor Perkis noted he read through the Town's Urban Greenbelt Grant application and it clearly states the Town was seeking funds for both the street-beach paths and linked nature trail running parallel to the beach.

Councilman Kaynard: Questioned the funding structure for the twenty-five year sales tax program, questioning if the Town had the opportunity to receive additional funds in the future.

Administrator Benke clarified that the Greenbelt Program has projected the revenues it would receive over the lifetime of the 25-year program and awarded the municipalities their one-time lump apportionment accordingly. The Town will not receive additional funds other than the approximately \$198,000 allocation. Administrator Benke noted the Town would be reimbursed from Grant funds as work is accomplished and invoices remitted to the Grant administrator.

Phase I Nature Trail: Overview with Current Modifications (Jeff Jackson):

Mr. Jackson reviewed the original Phase I nature trail proposal, highlighting the changes from original trail (RFP) and proposed revised trail, those changes being:

- Construction:
 - Originally three boardwalks over wetlands with small observation deck coming from wetland, approximately 115' of boardwalk in another section along trail and another boardwalk near the dune line.
 - Dr. Porcher recommended installing boardwalk all along the sensitive habitat at Station 16 to dune line. Town proposed installing a reduced boardwalk (300') from Station 16 beach path over a small swale area (85'), installing a small observation deck. Jeff Jackson recommended a free form shape to allow for small outdoor classes and to highlight this very active area for song bird migration.

Mr. Jackson noted the proposed changes:

- Reduce the number of segments (not total length) to allow for ATV safety vehicle access to the area with benches cantilevered off the boardwalk.
- Eliminate boardwalk section from Station 16 to ocean front where there is current erosion.

Mayor Perkis: How many feet of boardwalk is the Town proposing to remove from the nature trail plan?

Mr. Jackson: Town removed the beach boardwalk (approximately 300').

Councilman Kaynard: Requested sketch of boardwalk sections proposed for elimination with Phase I. (Mr. Jackson indicated he could provide this sketch).

Mayor Perkis: How many observation decks are proposed?

Mr. Jackson: Two observation decks, off path, one at the ocean and one in the wetlands, plus a few isolated benches in the trail.

Councilman Kaynard: Why did Staff remove the boardwalk area recommended by Dr. Porcher, for cost reasons?

Mr. Jackson: Yes, for cost reasons. Dr. Porcher's original recommendations would have required 900' of boardwalk.

Fire Chief Stith clarified for Councilman Kaynard that the Town has budgeted the project using \$60/foot for the boardwalk cost estimate.

Mr. Jackson: The Town requested 385' of boardwalk, in segments, in the original bid.

Summation of changes (for second bid of trail):

- Staff has modified the path plan to make it less complex (fewer twist/turns, reducing construction costs)
- Side boardwalk to beach has been removed
- Fewer boardwalk segments to construct

Staff clarified that fewer winding boardwalk areas, following the contours of the land, reduces the number of rails required and conserves amount of wood required to construct boardwalk. All Town boardwalks use stainless screws, not nails, in construction.

Public Comments:

Julia Khoury (resident):

- Appreciates Mr. Jackson's expertise and your past involvement with Dr. Porcher in developing paths.
- Stated she has been down the path many times and noted it is impressive, gentle on the environment and protecting all the important trees.
- Recommends as little building as possible with the fewest benches as possible to facilitate taking fewer tree roots out
- Suggests the trail could decrease floor room litter, wanted to say, job well done and that she looks forward to seeing this.

Jeff Jackson:

- Expounded on the litter issue. Noted that off of the path there used to be a lot of littering
- He has noticed much less litter in that area because even without the boardwalks people are using the trail and walking dogs. Suggests the people doing the littering are going elsewhere.
- Submitted that once the trail is finished with many residents using it, the area will police itself a lot.

Chauncey Clark (Council member):

- Stated there are about 10 dog walkers every morning that bring trash off the beach. The Town enjoys a clean beach that remains so, in part, to the example resident beach-goers set for visitors. People follow the example of others; if people see less litter, they are less likely to litter and vice-versa. Therefore, in his opinion, 10-20 people walking dogs on the beach daily are doing a service to the Island that goes unrecognized.

Mayor Perkis:

- Noted an observation made during the early phase of trail construction: if you give people a designated path, by nature they are going to walk the designated paths often.
- One of the values of putting nature trails is that people tend to walk the designated path and are less likely to meander around where they should not be.

Councilman Kaynard:

- Questioned, if cost was not a barrier, would Mr. Jackson recommend reincorporating the additional boardwalk Dr. Porcher originally recommended?

Mr. Jackson:

- Stated he would retain the larger area through the swale as it would be ideal for a class of 20 students to go to this area, under the shade of the trees, and learn about the forest and activity in the forest.

Councilman Kaynard:

- Questioned whether the Town should consider a public fundraising campaign to subsidize the trail cost to improve it and incorporate the boardwalk Dr. Porcher recommended.
- Noted the Town plans to do this trail only once. If the additional cost is \$10,000-\$30,000 dollars, perhaps there is a way to raise those funds and build the ideal trail at the front-end.

Chair O'Neil: Suggested this additional boardwalk section over the swale could be bid as a separate item: Town release a new request for bids with the swale boardwalk addition costs solicited separately from the main project. That way the Town could decide whether to incorporate it into the total award.

Councilman Kaynard: Clarified that this swale boardwalk section would be similar to a break-out item.

Public Comments (continued):

Chair O'Neil: Introduced Mr. Garrett Budds of the Lowcountry Open Land Trust (LOLT) present to hearing about the projects in the Accreted Land. He noted that LOLT does the Town's annual inspections in the protected land.

Garrett Budds (Lowcountry Open Land Trust):

- Applauded the Town's work on the trail, the work on the accreted beach and work on the paths to the beach.
- Supported everything he has heard to date. Agreed with Richard Porcher's suggestions on the habitat area and boardwalk as an excellent way to honor the ecology on the beach.
- Expanded on Administrator's synopsis of the Urban Greenbelt funding:
- Noted he cannot speak for the County, but expressed certainty the County would see this project as a worthwhile use of those town or municipal or city funds in the beach community.
- Noted the rural/urban breakdown for Greenbelt funds: believes all the money really left in the greenbelt account is for urban area projects. Suggested the County will have to take a finer look at what is being done and being spent.
- Believes the Town's project is a remarkable project from the County's perspective and applauds the Town for creating public access and highlighting one of the more remarkable migration systems available
- Noted the accreted land nature trail would be available as a natural asset and submitted the Town and its residents should feel lucky, frankly, to have this maritime forest as a natural asset here.
- Supported nature trail development accomplished with a "light touch."
- Agreed with Mayor Perkis' comments about people staying on the paths: at social times when a path is available, people will stay on it. The path provides places for people to walk and enjoy the natural habitat, but with alcoves or pockets for rest and reflection.

Councilmember Clark (as resident):

- Questioned Mr. Budds about the Urban Greenbelt Grant and population size calculations.
- Noted the formula for fund allocation is based upon the population of residents on site. In the case of Sullivan's Island, the Town services the 70,000 residents of Mt Pleasant. Noted Mt. Pleasant residents transport themselves to/from the island throughout the year, particularly in the summer. Suggested initiating dialogue with Mt. Pleasant or the County about this allocation.

Administrator Benke:

- Recalled Mayor Swails was adamantly opposed to sharing greenbelt monies.
- Submitted the County's initial amendment to the Grant program was an accommodation to the island communities.
- Purchase of land is the major thrust of the Urban Greenbelt Grant program, but the County and/or Grant board understands the dynamics of a beach community, moving people from the edge of asphalt to the beach, and the need to keep visitors on paths.

Councilman Kaynard:

- Suggested another approach, noting his thoughts and Councilman Clark's are similar. Charleston County obtained a large portion of the Grant funds and since Sullivan's Island is a part of the County and a large percentage of County residents use the Island to access the beach, perhaps the Town could obtain a portion of the County's allocation.

Administrator Benke:

- Noted the Town could make this request of the County and the Town should expect to look at the County's overall budget for the Town.
- Noted the County has shared a good percentage of their accommodations money with the Town over the past four years.
- The Town has received close to \$160,000 from the County in accommodations funds over the last four year (\$40,000/year) and that has been helpful.

Mayor Perkis noted the Ben Sawyer Causeway multi-use/bike path wherein the Town contributed only \$25,000 to this \$780,000 project.

Cross discussion about the use of the causeway path by more walkers than bikers.

Chair O'Neil directed Mr. Jackson to discuss the Phase II project proposal.

b. Review of Phase II Nature Trail (Jeff Jackson)

Mr. Jackson reviewed handouts of proposed Phase II nature trail, highlights being:

- Phase I conceptualized as an interpretive trail
- Phase II from Station 16 to Station 18 would be a more passive walking trail
- Incorporate existing paths and beach access paths (in front of Sand Dunes Club) in Phase II to include new boardwalks and old dune lines. Trail would follow natural terrain of land.
- Approximately 3880' trail with 20' of boardwalk requested. Proposal incorporates a boardwalk to pass over a gully and limited benches.
- Noted the trail proposal includes alternate options for portions of the trail, bringing the path closer or farther away from the ocean as the Town desired.
- If Town desired, another 180' of boardwalk could be built over a depression area near the Sand Dunes Club/Station 18.

Chair O'Neil:

- Phase II proposal appears to be placed far away from the resident houses.

Mr. Jackson:

- The trail was designed to be as far away from the resident houses as possible without encroaching on the active dune line and to follow the contour of the natural terrain.
- Stated he is sensitive to the space that is, in his opinion, residents' "front yards." Noted directional signs and markers are proposed to help keep people on the public trails when crossing private access points.
- Markers would be simple, in-ground concrete markers with small directional signs on this linear path.

Chair O'Neil:

- Asked Mr. Jackson to review diagram to the GIS map (overhead), noting vegetation.

Mr. Jackson:

- Diagram 1 – noted cacti. Existing path “A” runs through this area
- Diagram 2 – goes through an old dunes line (dune press) toward a new dune line, incorporates a boardwalk and existing Station 17 path.
- Diagram 3 – traverse Station 17 path to existing path, proceed inland through 50’ brush to an old dunes line. Proceed through an existing old dune line, jogging back to another old dune line to another existing path (cacti available as landmark).
- Diagram 4 – proceed down an existing path to cross an old dune field (open vegetation area) across to the Sand Dunes Club path (Station 17 ½). Trail jogs 200’ inland to another dune line with a clump of trees at end of Diagram 4 with a central bench to be placed in this area.

Chair O’Neil asked for Mr. Jackson’s opinion on the merits and drawbacks for the different alternate paths.

- Alternate A: Less expensive; places walker closer to the beach
- Alternate B: Requires a section of boardwalk; more natural and enclosed option with shade.

Councilman Kaynard: Noted Alternate A path appeared to incorporate more twists and turns, moving between paths whereas Alternate B path appeared to be intuitive for the walker.

Committee discussed merging portions of Alternate A & B paths in final path design.

Committee discussed the variety of trees in the Phase II area, boardwalk considerations, etc.

Public Questions/Comments:

Councilman Clark: Asked if Town could bid project in phases to initiate trail near Sand Dunes Club, observe activity and trail impact to the community, and potentially modify the trail, if needed, in later phases.

Committee discussed Councilman Clark’s suggestion that the trail be partially developed near Station 18/Sand Dunes Club and monitored for a period of time.

Mr. Jackson continued to walk the Committee through the trail referencing GIS mapping. Committee critically reviewed the proposed path with consideration to distance from resident yards, particularly in the Station 18 area.

Councilwoman Middaugh: Asked about vegetative clearing for the trail.

Committee briefly discussed vegetative cleaning to prepare for trail, noting the bid package is for hardscape construction not vegetative clearing. Staff noted vegetation cleaning would be accomplished outside this bid, partially in-house or using a contractor under Town supervision. The bid timetable has not been established for Phase II.

Committee moved to discussion of its recommendation to Council on this Phase II project. Committee reached general consensus to endorse this Phase II Nature Trail project and bring it to Council for discussion and further consideration.

Committee clarified that this trail is not being developed as a marketing tool to promote tourism on the Island. The Town will not seek to advertise the trail to draw people onto the Island.

c. Station 23 Street Dune Walkover

Administrator Benke:

- Noted he has fielded a number of calls from residents in this area seeking a dune walkover between Stations 22-24
- After heavy rain events, there is occasionally standing water near the area the Town refers to as the unopened portion of Bayonne Avenue (seaward side)
- The walkover would require approximately 600' of boardwalk

Chief Stith noted the path would be similar to Station 22 path and the path would need to be closer to 900' of boardwalk to avoid standing water areas.

Committee discussed details of the path, approximate cost of the path, and standing water areas in the Bayonne Avenue extension area.

MOTION: Mayor Perkis moved to recommend to Council approval of the Station 23 Dune Walkover path; Seconded by Councilman Kaynard.

Discussion:

Committee discussed project approval contingent upon funding. Councilman Kaynard noted that every project the Town approves is contingent upon funding. He suggested the Town could seek use of grant funding, or, consider utilizing budget monies set aside for beach path improvements.

CALL FOR THE QUESTION: MOTION UNANIMOUSLY PASSED.

d. Possible Station 26 Path Boardwalk Extension for Handicapped Access

Mayor Perkis noted this request came from residents. Town has an existing boardwalk at Station 26 but additional sand at the end of it makes it difficult to pass over.

Chief Stith noted he would check the path specifics but recalled the boardwalk was due for some maintenance and board replacement. Administrator Benke stated, according to his notes, that the boardwalk is currently 140' long. Staff noted that approximately 50' of boardwalk would be required on either end as an extension.

Public Comments:

Chair O'Neil expressed concerns with navigating the dune area.

Councilman Clark:

- Questioned if the Town was required to offer this path as a handicap accessible path. He noted the path at Station 22 attracts handicap visitors because it is wide; however, this path is not ideal for handicap people because of traffic and road patterns.
- Suggested handicap paths should be clearly marked to move special needs visitors to the appropriate places: Station 18, 19 and 21.
- Suggested the Committee might want to reconsider making Station 26 a true handicap path and focus handicap visitors to better, easier to navigate straight paths.

Chief Stith noted the Town could enhance the Station 26 path to be more accessible to residents and easier for visitors to access without creating a true handicap path.

Chair O'Neil asked Staff to provide additional information to Council at the September meeting. Committee will include this item Council September agenda for possible action.

Chair O'Neil summarized the LUNR Committee action items for September meeting:

- **Phase I Nature Trail**
- **Phase II Nature Trail**
- **Station 23 Street Dune Boardwalk**
- **Station 26 Street Boardwalk Extension**

Councilman Kaynard asked Committee include on the September Council Workshop agenda the following: implementation schedule for Protected Land Project List (Phase I & II) adopted October 2013, not to be confused with the nature trail discussed this evening. Some of the adopted items on the Project List include:

- Active management of myrtle trees
- Transition zones
- Limbing trees

He noted that these projects have been discussed in the past but not put on a schedule for implementation. He noted the ideal window of time for some of these projects to be accomplished this year is fast approaching (late fall/early winter).

Chair O'Neil noted he has spoken with Mayor Perkis and Staff regarding implementation of these projects. **This item will be added to September meeting agenda:**

- **Implementation Plans for Phase I & II Projects in Protected Land- Discussion**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:40 a.m. (Councilman Kaynard motioned; Mayor Perkis seconded; unanimously passed).

Respectfully submitted,
Pat O'Neil, Chairman
Land Use & Natural Resources Committee

Approved at the September 16, 2014 Regular Council Meeting