

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING

Council Chambers Meeting Room

February 15, 2023; 2:00 pm

Minutes

I. Call to Order: *Mr. Jordan called the meeting to order at 2:00 pm.*

Present: Jim Jordan, Chairman
Jane Ellis
KINHC: Lee Bundrick
TOKI: Aaron Given

Present via Zoom: Jim Chitwood
Jack Kotz
KICA: Matt Hill
ARB: Tommy Manuel

Absent: Lynne Sager
Pam Wilson
KIGR: Liz King

Also Attending: Russell Berner, *Council Liaison*

Also Attending via Zoom: Abby Sterling, *Shorebird Reserve Network*

II. Approval of Minutes:

A. Minutes of the September 14, 2022 Environmental Committee Meeting

Ms. Ellis made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 14, 2022 Environmental Committee meeting. Mr. Given seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

B. Minutes of the November 9, 2022 Environmental Committee Meeting

Approval of the November 9, 2022 minutes was deferred to the next meeting.

III. Citizens' Comments:

None

IV. Presentation:

A. Abby Sterling, Manomet, Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) Designation Process

Ms. Sterling presented on considering Kiawah Island as a potential member of a new Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) site for South Carolina.

Ms. Sterling stated that she worked for Manomet, a non-profit focusing on Coastal conservation issues and shorebird conservation, as the director of Manomet's Georgia Bight Shorebird Conservation Initiative. She provided background on the program launched in 2018 to recognize the importance of the coastal area to Shorebirds and to coordinate the work being done by the Federal and State Partners and the communities working on shorebird conservation.

Ms. Sterling stated that Shorebirds are one of the most critically declining groups of birds, showing as much as a 70 percent decline, particularly the long-distance migrants. She provided an overview

of the challenges of migrating Shorebirds and the efforts being considered to protect the habitats that are often at high risk of being lost because of things like development, climate change, contamination, and disturbance.

Ms. Sterling stated that the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network was under the conservation programs at Manomet and was an important conservation tool. It is a network of sites across the hemisphere, which are designated based on the number of birds they host and linked together. There are currently 112 sites that are part of WHSRN, with a total of 38.6 million acres of shorebird habitat protected through a non-regulatory designation process that helps highlight the important sites that Shorebirds need.

Ms. Sterling stated the Georgia Bight included three sites, the Altamaha River Delta, the Georgia Barrier Islands, and the Cape Romaine Santi Delta Region, briefly describing each. The idea of creating a WHSRN site around the Kiawah Island, Seabrook Island Davao Bank complex has been proposed. She highlighted the importance of Kiawah, the data that justifies the inclusion of Kiawah in WHSRN, and the opportunities available to Kiawah as part of the network.

Ms. Sterling stated that two main things must happen to become part of the Western Hemisphere shorebird Reserve Network. The first is that the site has to have biological significance, which has been established. The next thing is to designate responsible entity/entities who agree in writing through a letter of support to include shorebird conservation as a top priority, engage in management practices that protect, maintain, and enhance shorebird habitat and keep in communication with the WHSRN executive office, and then submitting the application. The process takes about six months, from submitting an application to reviewing and accepting.

Mr. Jordan asked Ms. Sterling to share the application and continue working with Mr. Given on the progress made during the process.

Ms. Ellis made a motion to recommend to Town Council that they participate in the designation process. Mr. Bundrick seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

V. Old Business:

A. Shorebird Stewardship Program

Mr. Given stated that the only stewarding going on at the moment was possibly for the Piping Plovers at the end of the island. Work was continuing on a Shorebird Festival scheduled for May 11th and 12th. The Town, the Kiawah Conservancy, South Carolina Audubon, DNR Fish and Wildlife Services, and Manomet are partnering to create the Sea Islands Shorebird Festival. The festival will include Kiawah and Seabrook Islands events, including field trips and evening presentations on both nights. On Friday, the 12th, a five-hour event will include conservation organizations, local artists, and activities for kids.

B. Grow Native

Mr. Jordan reviewed items from the annual Town Council Retreat, a two-day discussion of pertinent topics for the Town in the coming year. Environmental discussions included:

- Rain Garden at Town Hall
- Revitalization of the nature trail at Town Hall
- How to encourage the use of native plants
- The ARB not requiring to 80% of understory plants to be native
- The Town establishing a Tree protection ordinance
 - could contain requirements for native plantings superseding the ARB

C. Rodenticides/Wildlife

Mr. Jordan stated that 25 to 20 samples from a number of different species, raccoons, possums, and alligators, were sent in last week. The data that comes back on anticoagulants and heavy metals will be shared at the next meeting.

D. Deer Management

Mr. Jordan stated the second set of deer surveys was completed in January. The overall density for 2022 was 80 deer per square mile. Compared to the prior five years:

- In 2021 the density was 127
- 2020 the density was 123
- 2019 the density was 111
- 2018 the density was 96
- 2017 the density was 71

The lowest density seen in five years is clearly due to deer culling work and bobcats' recovery. The original goal for deer density of 60 to 80 deer per square mile is nearly reached. An ideal range is 60 to 70 deer per square mile, so the plan is to remove 80 deer this year and continue with the annual surveys next year.

E. Kiawah Conservancy Projects

Mr. Bundrick provided an update on the current two projects:

- Rain Garden installations –

Mr. Bundrick stated that since the last meeting, he had met the contractors to discuss and look at the six different project sites. After discussion and analysis with some of the Environmental Committee Members, the decision was made on the Town Hall site and Rhett's Bluff boat landing site. Reasons for selecting the sites included visibility, the areas that could easily be accessed, and the specific need for a Rain Garden. Mr. Bundrick also reviewed the discussions on the use of public funding behind the gate, work being done on design and permitting, and using the Town Hall site as a volunteer event.

Mr. Bundrick stated that the project worked on over the past two to three years, which highlighted different nature-based solutions that would work on the island, had been completed, and a printed copy of the Nature-Based Solutions Manual was available. He noted that there had been some good feedback from the community and that he had presented the Manual at the NOAA Social Science Conference, the South Carolina Beach Advocates Meeting, and the Ace Basin Symposium. He has also had conversations with the USDA Forester Service and Department of Natural Resources for potential projects and could possibly present the Manual at the Land Trust Alliance Rally.

- Maritime Forrest Study –

Mr. Bundrick stated that a graduate student initially helped with the project by figuring out lidar data and developing maps. Unfortunately, the student decided to leave the program. Work continues with a saltwater intrusion vulnerability analysis being conducted with some preliminary maps that will be shared with South Carolina Sea Grant and the college to review and analyze lidar data to understand the Maritime Forest density and create maps for land cover.

F. Clemson Ph.D. Bobcat Anticoagulant Study

Mr. Jordan stated that the bobcat traps run for two weeks and were opened on January 30th, catching five bobcats:

- New adult female - Parkside
- recaptured female adult female - Ocean Park. Bobcat 900 last year, now Bobcat 175.
- February 5th – new sub-adult male - The Preserve
- February 6th - adult female - Captain Sam Spit.
 - Originally tagged as a kitten in May of 2021 on Flyway Drive, she was collared last year as bobcat 850 also in the Flyway area, and this year as an adult, she's hanging out mainly on the western
- February 6th - new adult female – Flyway

Mr. Jordan stated there was one more collar, so trapping was opened again, and if no bobcats were trapped in the next two weeks, trapping would be suspended until the first week in March.

G. Marsh Management Plan

Mr. Jordan stated that he sent the draft of the Marsh Management Plan to the Committee last year and received comments from Mr. Chitwood. The plan was formally presented to Town Council in January and adopted at the February 7th Council meeting. With the Marsh Management Plan now official, the next step is implementing it. The implementation phase will begin with a workgroup of representatives from the island entities and community members to develop a strategy to move the plan forward. The initial meeting of the workgroup is on March 3rd at Town Hall from 1:00 to 3:00 pm. There will be additional meetings with property owners and regimes.

VI. New Business:

A. 2023 Kiawah Conservancy Projects Discussion

Mr. Jordan began discussing the potential Conservancy project for Town funding in the next fiscal year, July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024. Normally project ideas come to the Environmental Committee for review and selection at a later time. The idea behind having the discussion earlier is to allow Committee Members to make comments or suggestions before the Conservancy begins working on their proposals.

Mr. Bundrick stated that with the Marsh Management Plan being put into practice and the importance of the salt marsh, he felt that making sure that there were frequent updates on the status of the marshes and being able to monitor and assess them quickly was important. He reviewed some marsh project ideas:

- aerial imagery,
- looking at different types of vulnerability analysis
- more geospatial analysis
- on- the ground projects
 - Look at the sediment, in particular in the marsh
 - Vegetative status in the marsh and vegetive transect
- Research monitoring projects
- Restoration projects

Mr. Jordan stated that restoration projects were discussed at the Retreat. Dr. Heidingsfelder, the Council Liaison to the Environmental Committee, was unable to attend the meeting but indicated that he has a number of ideas for potential future projects that he would like to discuss.

Mr. Farrah suggested enhancing lands that the Conservancy has protected for the use of wildlife or what can be implemented as best management practices in those properties to ensure the future health of our wildlife.

Mr. Bundrick stated a potential option was the Conservancy engaging with DNR on a project, working in tandem on potentially getting a living shorelines project, or potentially doing more research on the vulnerability analysis in the marshes. He also indicated that one of the things that would likely leave a huge impact on South Carolina as a state was initiating a wetland restoration project using a lot of drawings because he didn't think there had been a large landscape-wide project done yet.

Mr. Jordan stated that also brought up at the Retreat was something about fertilizer use (ponds, golf courses) and concerns about potential problems. Mr. Bundrick stated that it might be worth looking into the type of downstream impacts on water quality.

Further discussion included research projects vs. restoration projects, shifting focuses of the Conservancy, and the restoration of the kayak launching area.

Mr. Hill commented on Mr. Farrah's suggestion on the lands under conservation easements. He stated the few lands and parcels left on the island that can be natural are becoming more important. He stated that more development means less habitat and stressed the importance of looking at the Conservancy properties to ensure the best habitat possible. The question was raised if the ARB would have an issue with taking down a substantial number of trees on an undeveloped lot to promote understory habitat, more of a forestry management process on the properties. Mr. Manuel indicated that on the surface of the suggestion, he did not think the ARB would have a problem but would have to evaluate each on a case-by-case basis.

B. 2023 Kiawah Conservancy Land Acquisition Discussion

Mr. Jordan stated that the Conservancy had approached the Town about a potential project. There had been some initial discussion on creating a pool of money within the Town to support future land acquisition mainly off the Island but in the near proximity to the Town.

Mr. Farrah stated that one of the main goals of the Conservancy is to preserve land. There are several methods, primarily through conservation easements, land donations, and acquiring land through purchasing property.

This year the Conservancy submitted a Greenbelt application for a roughly six-acre property just off Betsy Kerrison Parkway. The property is very close to the Town, adjacent to a pending conservation easement, a high-priority site in the efforts to add to contiguous preservation and protect the historical and cultural significance of the property.

Along with protecting natural infrastructure on the property and the view shed coming onto Kiawah Island, this property was a great one for the Conservancy to pursue. He stated that as a bonus, a public nature trail had been incorporated on the property, coming off of the existing sidewalk leading through the property educating its visitors on the native vegetation and ultimately leading to a marsh viewing bench and or outdoor classroom setting.

The Conservancy has approached a Town about to see if there was any interest in helping fund this project and future projects seen as important for preservation.

Mr. Jordan stated that at the next Ways and Means Committee meeting, there would likely be a discussion of the request for the Town to contribute \$75,000.00 to the property purchase. During the

budget process, there will also be a discussion of setting aside the requested \$500,000.00 for future purchases of this type.

C. Kiawah Go Green 2.0

Mr. Jordan stated that the former Council Liaison headed up a Go-Green Workgroup looking at a number of Green ideas and strategies. The workgroup did not go through the end of the process; it is kicking off for a second time and being called 2.0. The effort will be similar but, for right now, will be run through the Public Works Department and not through the Environmental Committee. The committee should receive reports and updates and may get involved and designated in some aspect.

Mr. Jordan highlighted the project initiatives presented at the Retreat:

- to increase the number of EVS electric vehicles in the Town's Fleet
- to install public EV charging stations across the island
- to continue to decrease the use of plastics across the island
- continue to explore solar panel options
- explore the use of battery-powered landscape equipment

VII. Reports:

A. Town of Kiawah Island

Mr. Given provided a summary of the fall migration:

- 8,660 new birds were banded
- 2200 recaptures
- 99 different species of birds
- Captain Sam's – record year with most birds ever caught in a season
- little Bear - close to

Mr. Given reported on the interesting recaptures:

- a Tree Swallow was caught on the west end of the island that was originally banded in New York in 2015
- a Yellow Rump Warbler was caught that was banded in Ontario, Canada, at Long Point Bird Observatory
- an American Red Star was caught that was banded in Ontario, Canada, at the Pelee Island Bird Observatory in Ontario, Canada
- a Gray Cat Bird was caught that was banded last year on Sullivan's Island

Not part of the Fall Migration, Mr. Given reported there was a Cooper's Hawk that naturalists got called about. When they picked it up, it was found to have a band on its leg. The information received yesterday was that a bird was hatched in 2009 and was banded in 2010 on John's Island just north of River Road in what looked like somebody's backyard by Dr. Maria Whitehead. There is no other information on why or how they banded that bird or if it was a rehab bird.

Mr. Given stated that he was working on the marsh sparrows banding, which was delayed because of rain and windy conditions in January, along with the winter songbird banding on the island's west end.

Ms. Ellis commented on the fantastic front-page article about Mr. Given in the Post and Courier.

B. Kiawah Island Community Association Land & Lakes Management

Mr. Hill reported that the fish tissue samples sent to look for heavy metals and pesticides were returned from the lab. All the fish were checked out and were fine.

Mr. Hill reported that the large-scale pond pruning operation would begin for pond management at the end of this month. A contractor will remove the large wax myrtles that are helping with erosion. He also reviewed the new technologies being tried in the ponds to improve overall water quality hopefully. The first, instead of using an herbicide to fight algal blooms, use a safe product that permanently binds up the phosphorus making it unavailable to be used by algae to grow. The second is using Nanobubbles, a fairly new technology, in water management.

C. Kiawah Island Golf Resort

Ms. King relayed that the trailers for the move would be delivered on Saturday morning.

D. Kiawah Island Architectural Review Board

Mr. Manual reported that the ARB got a sneak peek at the plans for the new Nature Center. He stated they looked promising and were excited about it.

E. Kiawah Conservancy

Mr. Bundrick reported the completion of the Nature Based Solutions Manuals, and they were available. He is working on the Ecological Health Report that looks at five distinct habitats of Kiawah. A vegetation analysis was conducted to examine marshes and how they have changed. The report should be coming out in the next few months.

F. Turtle Patrol

No additional report

VIII. Citizen Comments:

None

IX. Chairman's Comments:

None

X. Committee Member Comments:

None

XI. Adjournment:

Mr. Jordan motioned to adjourn the meeting at 3:30 pm. Mr. Bundrick seconded the motion, and it unanimously passed.

Submitted by,

Petra S. Reynolds, Town Clerk

Approved by,

Jim Jordan, Chairman

Date