



Richland Soil and Water Conservation District

2020 Hampton Street, Room 3063A

Columbia, SC 29204

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April 13, 2020

Virtual Meeting • 6:00pm

Commissioners Present

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Jeff Laney, Vice Chair

Jim Rhodes, Secretary/Treasurer

Mary Burts

Others Present

Quinton Epps, Conservation Division Manager

Chanda Cooper, Education Program Coordinator

Nancy Stone-Collum, Conservation Coordinator

Charlie Fisher, Administrative Assistant

Mary Hannah Lindsay, Education Program Assistant

Emily Bonilla-Gonzalez, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service District Conservationist

Marc Cribb, SC Association of Conservation Districts Liaison

Tyler Brown, SC Department of Natural Resources Conservation Districts Program Manager

Yancey McLeod, Attorney

Russ St. Marie, Crickentree Homeowner

Welcome and Call to Order

Ms. Cooper provided a Zoom meeting orientation and introduced participants. Chairman Mullis called the meeting to order and gave the invocation.

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Laney and approved unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 9 board meeting. Commissioner Laney seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Financial Report

On March 1, the Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (RSWCD) had a checking balance of \$47,405.62. Seven checks totaling \$3,975.95 were paid from the account, and five deposits

totaling 11,434.25 were made, during the month of March. The ending balance on March 31 was \$54,863.92.

Affiliate Membership

One honorary affiliate membership was awarded to attorney Mitch Williams in appreciation of his reviewing the Pollinator Garden Manager contract at no charge to the RSWCD.

Conservation Division Report

Mr. Epps reported the RSWCD's Urban Agriculture Conservation Grant and Seed Sanctuary program were both approved after many conversations between RSWCD Commissioners, County Council members, Richland County Conservation Commissioners, and County staff and administration. The Community Planning and Development Department's administrative assistant pool has been created, but the Conservation Division Administrative Assistant position was not included in the pool. No new information is available about the Land Program Planner vacancy and hiring process. An agenda briefing for the Walden Pond Amendment has been submitted for County Council's review. The Columbia Rowing Club contract renewal was approved by County Council last week. No new information is available about the Fairfield wastewater treatment plant, or about the Richland County Conservation Commission's contract for legal services. Richland County Conservation Commission Historic Preservation grants totaling \$207,561 and Community Conservation grants totaling \$42,439 are awaiting Council approval. The Timberlane Drive tree planting proposal is still under review and consideration by County administration.

Education Report

Ms. Cooper reported RSWCD is 6 months into a 12-month contribution agreement with the SC Association of Conservation Districts to assist with USDA-NRCS farm bill program marketing and education. To date, staff have provided \$3,105 in services towards our \$10,000 agreement.

Following approval to proceed with Urban Agriculture Grant work, RSWCD signed and returned the grant acceptance paperwork to the National Association of Conservation Districts. Attorney Mitch Williams reviewed the RSWCD's Pollinator Garden Manager contract; the contract was then signed by Anne Marie Johnson. Ms. Johnson has developed plant lists and garden designs; ordered plant materials; designed irrigation systems and ordered irrigation supplies; top-dressed, mulched, and reseeded existing garden beds; repaired leaks in existing irrigation systems; and rejuvenated several "new" beds by removing old mulch and landscape fabric, weeding, sifting blackberry roots, adding mushroom compost, mulching with coastal Bermuda hay, and installing irrigation. Her husband, Jim, logged 35 volunteer hours during the first month of project work. Ms. Cooper is tracking all volunteer, staff, and Commissioners' time spent on this project for in-kind match.

Ms. Lindsay reported that, following County approval to site the Seed Sanctuary in the Conservation Division office, she purchased the cabinet, seed, envelopes, and stamps to launch the program. The original plan was to host a volunteer seed packing party, but due to COVID-19 response measures and social distancing requirements, Ms. Lindsay has spent many hours packing seeds on her own. Commissioner Burts volunteered to assist with seed packing.

Options for distributing seeds during COVID-19 including mailing seeds and making them available in Little Free Libraries around town were discussed.

Since the last meeting, RSWCD education staff presented pollinator conservation programs for 86 students at Conder Elementary School. All remaining classroom programs have been canceled due to COVID-19, but ~2,800 students have already participated in RSWCD programs this school year—more than last year, even without programs for the final three months of the school year.

Several modifications have been made to the RSWCD poster contest in order to increase participation during school closures. The deadline was pushed back until May 8; online submissions are being accepted in lieu of hard copies; and any size poster between 8.5"x11" and 14"x22" is now acceptable.

RSWCD's social media reach continues to grow, with 228 Instagram followers, 419 Twitter followers, 678 Facebook likes, and 850 people reached.

NRCS Report

Ms. Bonilla-Gonzalez announced USDA offices remain open and staff are working, but interaction with the public is restricted. She has completed three Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program field visits. Approximately 90 applications are in the system, and 35 of those applications are from Richland County, with a good mix of livestock, cropland, and forestland.

Chairman Mullis recommended Commissioners consider New Business before Old Business since Old Business would require a move into Executive Session. Hearing no dissent, New Business was taken up.

P/N SAC-2018-01612 District Comment Letter

A proposal for development at the Saxe Gotha site in the service area of the Mill Creek Mitigation Bank has been submitted to the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE). The applicant, Lexington County, proposed completing Permittee-Responsible Mitigation instead of purchasing credits from the existing Mill Creek Mitigation Bank. Staff recommends the District submit a comment letter to the ACOE encouraging them to require the applicant to use the mitigation bank instead of completing Permittee-Responsible Mitigation. A draft letter was provided to Commissioners for review. Following discussion, Commissioner Rhodes moved to submit the comment letter as drafted. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Burts and unanimously approved.

Advocacy Request – Clean Energy Campaign

Audubon SC and Conservation Voters of SC requested that RSWCD share a clean energy campaign message on the RSWCD Facebook page. The campaign message reads "Do you want SC to be 100% clean? Santee Cooper must retire existing coal plants and invest in cleaner energy. It's cheaper and cleaner for our community. Sign the petition: bit.ly/cleanenergypetition." Following discussion, Commissioner Rhodes made a motion not to

share the message. Commissioner Laney seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

COVID-19 Response

Ms. Cooper asked if there were any COVID-19-related community needs the RSWCD could address in addition to measures already being taken to support teachers and students with at-home learning content and poster contest adjustments. Commissioners recommended using RSWCD social media to promote at-home conservation projects such as recycling and gardening and brainstormed several possible ways to distribute seeds from the Seed Sanctuary. Mr. Brown commended the RSWCD for maintaining operations during COVID-19.

Strategic Plan Review/Update

Ms. Cooper recommended the RSWCD revisit the now two-year-old strategic plan to tackle issues that have not yet been addressed and assess progress. She polled Commissioners as to their interest and willingness in participating in a session or sessions; Commissioners agreed to participate in a series of short (1-2 hour) planning sessions over lunchtime or in the late afternoon to accommodate Commissioners whose working hours would conflict with a half-day or day-long session. Ms. Cooper will develop a plan for consideration.

Crickentree Easement Request

Mr. McLeod and Mr. St. Marie expressed appreciation for RSWCD's consideration of accepting the proposed conservation easement on a 250-foot buffer between the existing Crickentree subdivision and the proposed new subdivision on the site of the former Crickentree Golf Course. Commissioner Laney made a motion to enter Executive Session. Commissioner Rhodes seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Commissioner Laney moved to exit Executive Session. Commissioner Rhodes seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously. No actions were taken during executive session.

Commissioner Rhodes made a motion to turn down the Crickentree easement request. Commissioner Burts seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously. Chairman Mullis explained the RSWCD does not currently have the capacity to hold an easement of this complexity and needs to develop criteria for evaluating and accepting future easements.

Education Program Assistant Contract

Commissioners will await additional information before making a decision on whether and how to adjust the Education Program Assistant's contract.

Announcements/Public Input

Commissioner Burts expressed concern about obtaining signatures for the upcoming petition for election, given stay-at-home orders and social distancing requirements. Mr. Brown assured her it was a concern for many and he expects more guidance on the issue to be forthcoming.

Next Meeting

Commissioners agreed to meet at 6pm on May 11.

The meeting adjourned at 7:54 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kenny Mullis, Chair

Charlie Fisher, Admin. Asst.