

TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND
Planning Commission
LMO REWRITE COMMITTEE MEETING

August 9, 2012 Minutes

1:00p.m. – Benjamin M. Racusin Council Chambers

APPROVED

Committee Members Present: Chairman Tom Crews, Vice Chairman Gail Quick, David Ames, David Bachelder, Irvin Campbell, Chris Darnell, Jim Gant, Walter Nester, and Councilwoman Kim Likins, *Ex-Officio*

Committee Members Absent: Charles Cousins, *Ex-Officio*

Planning Commissioners Present: None

Town Council Members Present: Bill Ferguson

Town Staff Present: Teri Lewis, LMO Official
Jill Foster, Deputy Director of Community Development
Kathleen Carlin, Administrative Assistant

1) CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Crews called the meeting to order at 1:00p.m.

2) FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

Public notification of this meeting has been published, posted and mailed in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and Town of Hilton Head Island requirements.

3) APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was approved as presented by general consent.

4) APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The committee approved the minutes of the July 19, 2012 meeting as presented by general consent.

Chairman Crews presented opening statements regarding the purpose of the meeting and welcomed today's guest speaker, Dr. Chris Marsh.

5) NEW BUSINESS

- A. Wetland buffers and other measures available to protect and improve water quality
Presented by: Dr. Chris Marsh, Executive Director, LowCountry Institute (LCI).

Dr. Chris Marsh is the Executive Director of the LowCountry and works extensively with municipal governments in the area to help improve water quality and land conservation practices. Prior to moving to the Lowcountry, Dr. Marsh was a biology professor at Coastal Carolina University where he taught ornithology, ecology, and animal behavior. Dr. Marsh has over 10 years of experience as an environmental

consultant and has worked with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources on coastal shorebird populations.

Dr. Marsh and the committee discussed the following key issues:

- (1) Wetlands functionally include both the “wet” part and the adjacent uplands. They serve both as wildlife habitat and as stormwater treatment. It is important to define the primary purpose of a specific wetland in order to make management decisions.
- (2) Pesticides are broken down by being exposed to sunlight and/or oxygen. Some pesticides and heavy metals are insoluble in water so they are transported into the salt marsh by attaching to clay or organic particles (sediment). Ideally, these compounds remain on upland areas until they are degraded which includes preventing large volumes of flowing water to occur since this is what transports sediments into the marsh.
- (3) Buffers help with water quality by slowing down sheet flow thereby trapping sediment. Buffers also help with water quality by absorbing water and transporting it back into the atmosphere by evapotranspiration. Grassy filters do a better job at filtering surface flow whereas woody plants with deeper roots take up subsurface water and transport it into the atmosphere. The best buffers include both.
- (4) If curb and gutter is present, the benefits of buffers are minimized if the end of the stormwater drain empties directly into the adjacent water body.
- (5) Using swales and berms that temporarily retain water in open sunny areas are preferable to curb and gutter if soils are sandy and water table is not near the surface. An important water quality BMP for golf course design is to have all drain fields from tees and greens pass through vegetated swales before entering a pond.
- (6) The addition of several feet of porous sand prior to building parking lots improves the function of bio-retention gardens created in “curb-less” parking lots.
- (7) The overall goal is to have stormwater be retained onsite. Defining “onsite” depends on scale. In most cases this should include within the property boundaries, but also could include downstream property (uplands and wetlands) that may be owned by and managed by the Town of Hilton Head Island or by the County.
- (8) Detention ponds should be constructed so that they can be maintained with small tractors or riding mowers rather than hand labor. This requires appropriate sloping of sides of pond and the bottom of the pond.
- (9) Detention ponds should include both woody plants and sunny areas with herbaceous plants that can be mowed annually or semi-annually prior to the growing season. The highest priority is to protect the salt marsh and tidal creeks as well as ponds where fish are caught and eaten.
- (10) Retention/detention ponds that are designed to function as a visual amenity can harbor toxic algae blooms that release neurotoxins into the atmosphere. Therefore, their use in stormwater management is being discouraged by EPA and NOAA.

Dr. Marsh and the committee discussed the following recommendations:

- (1) Use GIS database to define which wetland systems are part of a forest preserve and, therefore, provide important wildlife habitat.
- (2) Maintain current buffer requirements for tidal waters. A variance could be given if new construction is designed to direct stormwater away from the marsh and through a series of bioretention ponds and grassy swales that effectively direct all stormwater flow through at least 150 feet of vegetation.
- (3) The importance of buffers along the edges of man-made lagoons depends on the extent of the lawn “uphill”. The more lawn, the more important it is to have a buffer. Creating a gentle berm on the adjacent wetland that retains sheet flow is a satisfactory mitigation in residential developments.
- (4) Promote a combination of bio-retention ponds and use of additional sand in the construction of new parking lots. Discourage use of curb-and-gutter.
- (5) Minimize landscaping with large areas of turf grass. Have mowed grass near the pavement but maintain wildlife meadows in other areas. These areas should be mowed annually or semi-annually before the growing season and have signage that educates the public about what they are seeing.
- (6) Work with the newly-formed Port Royal Sound Foundation to initiate a public education program “Keep our Dolphins Healthy” to educate residents about the dangers of pesticides and other chemicals in stormwater runoff from their homes and neighborhoods.

Dr. Marsh and the committee discussed separating the definition of a specimen tree vs. a mature tree. Dr. Marsh discussed the importance of Urban Forestry. Dr. Marsh recommended that the Town be careful with strict adherence to the Code because strict adherence can result in a monotonous appearance. One of the concepts of landscape architecture is ‘mystery and discovery’. Consider creating places with meadows and shrubbery to help avoid a manicured appearance.

What is the real definition and the real purpose of Hilton Head Island? The real definition of Hilton Head Island is a sea island – and not a forest preserve. A rural sense of place can be achieved without having 100% trees.

Dr. Marsh and the committee discussed best practices in stormwater management. Dr. Marsh stated that the island’s lagoon system helps a great deal in filtering water and helping water quality.

The committee discussed redevelopment as it relates to site-specific zoning and the use of a buffer system. An obvious concern is the use of pesticides on both water and soil quality. Dr. Marsh and the committee discussed the size and the uses of buffers. They also discussed the number and the location of lagoons. Dr. Marsh recommended that certain lagoons be prioritized. It is important to identify a value within the lagoon system. Dr. Marsh discussed concerns with the pollutants that affect the health of the island’s dolphin population.

The committee discussed the challenge of setting up an ordinance that does not have a ‘one size fits all’ approach. At the conclusion of the presentation and discussion, the committee thanked Dr. Marsh for his very interesting and informative presentation.

B. Discussion on appropriate hotel density

Ms. Teri Lewis made the presentation on behalf of staff. Ms. Lewis and the committee discussed the staff's handout that included the names of the hotels located on the island (number of floors, number of rooms, and rooms/acre). The committee and staff discussed what the density should be. The staff and the committee discussed the difficulty of dealing with hotels that are located within PUDs because the PUD master plan will need to be changed in order to increase the density. This type of rezoning will need to be approved by the PUD first. This process can be time consuming.

Ms. Lewis asked about next steps regarding forwarding the Natural Resources information to the consultant. Ms. Lewis will work with Mr. Gant on a summary of the committee's discussion. This information will be provided to the committee for their review.

Following this discussion, the staff and the committee discussed next steps for the committee. Mr. Gant asked the members to forward to him the top items that are staying the same in the LMO and the top changes that are being made to improve the ability to redevelop. Mr. Gant will synthesize these into a list which the committee can discuss in preparation for public education on the LMO. The committee stated the importance of launching a public education campaign perhaps in early October.

6) ADJOURNMENT

Following final comments, the meeting was adjourned at 3:10pm.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

August 30, 2012

Kathleen Carlin
Administrative Assistant

Tom Crews
Chairman