



Town of Hilton Head Island  
**Community Services & Public Safety Committee**

Monday, January 25, 2021 at 9:00 am

## **MEETING MINUTES**

**Present from the Committee:** William Harkins, David Ames, Tom Lennox, Tamara Becker

**Present from Town Council:** Alex Brown

**Present from Town Staff:** Josh Gruber, Scott Liggett, Jayme Lopko, Lindsey Rambow, Krista Wiedmeyer, Karen Knox

**Others Present:** Ahmad Ward, *Executive Director, Mitchelville Freedom Park*, Stefanie Nagid, *Passive Parks Manager – Beaufort County*

**Present from Media:** None

---

### **1. Call to Order**

**2. FOIA Compliance** - Public notification of this meeting has been published, posted, and distributed in compliance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act and the requirements of the Town of Hilton Head Island

**3. Roll Call** – All members were present.

### **4. Approval of Minutes November 23, 2020**

Council Member Becker moved to approve the Minutes of November 23, 2020. Chairman Harkins seconded. The Minutes of November 23, 2020 were unanimously approved.

### **5. Citizen Comments**

Public comments concerning today's Agenda items were to be submitted electronically via the Town's Open Town Hall Portal. The public comment period closed Friday, January 22, 2021 at 4:30 pm. At the conclusion of the Open Town Hall, there was one citizen comment. Citizens who wished to speak at the Meeting had to call in no later than noon on Friday, January 22, 2021 at noon. No citizens signed up to speak at the meeting.

### **6. Unfinished Business**

### **7. New Business**

#### **a. Mitchelville MOA/Lease Update**

Jayme Lopko stated you have before you the renewal of our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as well as the Lease for the Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park. Right now the MOU that we have with Mitchelville will be expiring on March 19, 2021 and it requires it to be reviewed prior to moving forward. The approval of the MOU is two-fold. 1) is to extend it for an additional two years; and 2) add in a management fee. We have a similar structure with the Coastal Discovery Museum and as you will recall the past four years we have paid Mitchelville \$100,000 to go towards the salary of the Executive Director as well as the Town has been paying for the utilities. The intent of this was to put the lump sum of \$105,000 as

a management fee to continue paying those costs and Mitchelville would then put the utilities into their name.

The Lease has been updated for two reasons as well: 1) we are eliminating the requirements of the submittal of the Master Plan and Business Plan because they were accepted and approved by Town Council on August 18, 2020; and 2) we have changed the requirements of the property to continue as a public park. As you will recall in the Master Plan there is the intent for Mitchelville when they get fully up and running to have the entrance to the Park gated where an admission fee would be paid thereby not really meeting the definition of what a public park should be. We have added that should the Town have the ability to relocate the public park, its amenities and water access to a different location then the public park use of that particular property could cease.

Those are the changes to the Lease and the MOU. Ahmad Ward, Executive Director of Mitchelville is available for questions as well.

Ahmad Ward said he had no extensive comments and just wanted to thank Town Council for its continued support of our project as we move closer to the goals of getting this very important project off the ground. For your benefit, we are beginning campaign management and so we are looking forward to be able to get into funding to start construction on the site as soon as humanly possible. We will keep you posted on that. No comments on the Lease, we agree to the Terms and it makes sense for us to move forward and they hopefully take control of the site to management it fully.

Council Member Ames said he has reviewed it and has been working with Mitchelville so I am in favor of this MOU.

Council Member Lennox stated this is a two-year extension of the existing MOU and I think that makes sense. That was our intent a couple of years ago. On paragraph 3 of the MOU as it pertains to maintenance, the Town is assuming that its cost and expense responsibility for janitorial, landscaping and general maintenance of the Park. That was our intent from the beginning as well. Paragraph 3c is talking about the Town will continue the 10-year capital improvement plan for the park. I think there is benefit in some sort of annual review of the status of that Plan less it gets away from us. I think that one of the things we may consider Mr. Chairman is either having that 10-year Plan come back to this Committee or to the Finance & Administrative Committee for an annual review at or about budget time each year. On paragraph 5 Operations, I am not sure I caught your comment Jayme about the rent of \$105,000 going to Coastal Discovery. Is that in addition to the \$100,000 for the Executive Director or does that include the \$100,000. Ms. Lopko said this is an agreement we mirrored from Coastal Discovery Museum. They receive a management fee for managing the Honey Horn property and so that is where this came from and the \$105,000 is going to Mitchelville for their management and payment of the utilities for the Historic Mitchelville Freedom Park. Council Member Lennox said he is unclear as to what the second sentence in paragraph 5a means. It starts.....Mitchelville shall raise the balance of its operating budget as shown on its operating account profit and loss statement from sources other than the Town for the annual operating budget of Mitchelville. Ms. Lopko said it means that if there is funding needed above and beyond the \$105,000 that Mitchelville will be responsible for raising those funds.

Council Member Lennox asked what is the date of our last annual financial statement and do we get interims. Ms. Lopko said we do not get interims. Their budget year ends on December 31<sup>st</sup> and as of January 31<sup>st</sup>, they will send their statements to us. I have received those from Mr. Ward and I have those for the past three years. Councilman Lennox asked if we have a statement from December 31, 2020. Ms. Lopko said she didn't believe she

had received it yet and asked Mr. Ward if he had sent it. Mr. Ward said they are finalizing their end of year right now and you will get it as soon as we finish.

Chairman Harkins asked Council Member Lennox in his role as Chairman of the Finance Committee is it your recommendation that your Committee and Mr. Ward think of the value of an annual capital review. Council Member Lennox said he has seen Mr. Ward and his Boards work and I like it and would like to keep it at the fore in front of Council and if through the F&A Committee that absolutely is fine with me if Mr. Ward is fine with it as well. Mr. Ward said he would do whatever you need us to do.

Chairman Harkins said he sees the value of an interim statement as well.

Council Member Alex Brown said he is pleased with the dialogue so far and is just here in a supporting role today.

Council Member Ames moved to approve the MOU as submitted and forward it to Town Council for its full review. Council Member Becker seconded. The motion unanimously passed.

b. **Ford Shell Ring Partnership**

Jayme Lopko stated staff recommends the Committee forward a recommendation to Town Council authorizing the execution of a Joint Ownership and Operating Agreement that will allow the County to move forward with developing and permitting of the Ford Shell Ring property.

Stefanie Nagid, Passive Parks Manager for Beaufort County thanked the Committee for putting this on today's Agenda. To give you a little background, this property was co-purchased 50/50 between the Town of Hilton Head Island and Beaufort County in 2003. It does protect a significant archeological structure. The Hilton Head Island Archeological Society is very interested in this property. I have been in communication with them for the last 3+ years and they are very supportive of this project. When the property was purchased there was actually an agreement made between the Town and the County that it would be opened up for passive recreation use and so when I was hired back in 2018 I went through several different agreements that the County had with multiple Towns, Cities and other organizations trying to get those agreements fulfilled. Obviously this one is 17 years in the making. We have just now started a conceptual plan to allow very basic earthen trail, an access area for minimal number of vehicles – probably up to five parking spaces, a trail kiosk, trail head entrance for pedestrian only and then a maintenance fencing and access gate on the back side for emergency vehicles, but also for any kind of maintenance that might be needed from the Town, from the County or from the Hilton Head Archeological Society who we would also enter into an agreement for interpretative tours. It is very basic and minimal. The original Agreement called for a future boat ramp but I am not in favor of that given the sensitivity of the site. However, if the Town of Hilton Head Island would still like to pursue that then we could definitely have more discussion about that. It is just such a small area and there is not a lot of room there for boats and trailers. So, unless it is in need on the Island then I think we could probably forego that part of the original agreement.

I do have funding through the Rural and Critical Lands Preservation Funds that was allocated to do these improvements so the County would be paying for the cost of the capital improvements and then part of the Intergovernmental Agreement or the Joint Operating Agreement would be if the Town could provide maintenance services with mowing the trail and trash pick-up. The County would be also long term responsible if something was damaged like if a fence got damaged, etc.

Chairman Harkins asked if we had some sense what the call would be in terms of our budgeting activity. Ms. Lopko said in speaking with Facilities Management for basically what we call mowing and blowing and clearing of the trail as well as the opening and closing of the gates would run about \$750/month.

Ms. Nagid stated it could be possible that we do an automatic timed gate so there wouldn't necessarily be a need for someone to go there every day and open and close at dawn or dusk.

Chairman Harkins said for the public who is tuned into this meeting, some may not understand the historical importance of this site. Chairman Harkins asked Ms. Nagid to give a brief comment on that. Ms. Nagid said they had someone come just before the pandemic and in the Fall of 2019 to do a survey of the Shell Ring. It is a Native American site and does look like it was more of a living quarters situation and not just something that where oysters were deposited. It was more like they were very specifically placed in order to be more of a permanent structure. We are still getting information from that researcher who was from New York. They are doing their thesis on the property and are supposed to be coming back after the pandemic in order to finish up their research and once we have that information there will be a report that we can share with everyone.

Council Member Ames thanked Ms. Nagid and said he is very excited about this. Council Member Ames asked when this dates back to. David Stott Gordon, President of the Hilton Head Chapter of the Archeological Society of South Carolina commented that the Ford Shell Rings are about 4,000 years old. Council Member Ames said he is glad they are putting a focus on it, but thinks that the capital investment is only half of the story. The uniqueness of Hilton Head's history is the other half and unless we have a plan where we are marketing this as a part of the collection of that history and the rest of the history, I think we are missing the boat. The point I am making is that it is good that we are adding this particular pearl to the necklace, but we ought to market the entire necklace so that when people are thinking about relocating to the Island or visiting the Island they are captivated by this very unique history. I think it is important for us as Council to be promoting this on the Town's web site encouraging the Chamber to speak to the history of the Island and in particular this very unique and when I say unique I am not sure that 1% of the people who come to the Island are aware of this connection to Indian history and the fact that we do have remnants of shell rings on the Island that could very well encourage people to come to the Island and see what is unique about this place. My point Mr. Chairman and to the rest of the Committee is that we have to make sure we tell the story in order to make our investment in the place worthwhile.

Council Member Lennox said he has not seen this site which confirms what Council Member Ames is saying. I will, however, take a look at it as quickly as possible. I think the \$750 a month in additional or existing maintenance expense is a small price to pay for a site as historical as this appears to be. I am definitely in favor of this joint effort with Beaufort County.

Council Member Becker said she wanted to say that this is an important project. Hilton Head is so rich in our history and every opportunity that we have to celebrate the depth of the roots here are certainly important. One of the things that comes to mind is a realization and I think we need to stay cognizant with the front of our mind as we begin to move forward and make decisions on each area of the Island that we impact that we too will be part of that history generations and hundreds of years to come. When folks look back and see what we have done that there is something that they also want to celebrate. I just wanted to take a moment to say that and that we are part of history building as well in terms of what we plant on this Island and we need to be very careful and specific about it. I think we generally are

but I think there are some places where we need to take our time and take a breadth and look at the development and the impact that we make for that historical tale.

Council Member Brown ties this project back to the core values of our Comprehensive Plan and working with the County would be inclusive. I am excited about that. Eventually it will also touch on our economy as all of our colleagues have said this is a very significant piece of history right here on Hilton Head which sets us aside from a lot of our resort competitors. Improving this area is definitely in our best interest. The other core value that I want to just touch on briefly is – I am not too sure of the process here but I feel obligated to speak on it is the infrastructure. I can appreciate the improvements that we are making and I understand that there is going to be some roadway improvements in that area. I have gotten several concerns from citizens in that area about the current drainage situation. The way that Squire Pope Road is configured there is a lot of run off from that road and of course the development in that area onto individuals' properties. I can appreciate that once we start the improvements that our Engineers here at the Town and at the County will be taking a look at the particular site and making sure that it meets all of our current standards. However, I would ask that we take it a step further and consider a comprehensive study of the area and see how we can improve it. As Council Member Ames mentioned earlier, this is just the first step of this project. We need to be thinking more long term and if there are additional funds that are going to be needed and they may not be from the Town or from the County – it may be State infrastructure funds that could help us alleviate some of the current conditions. I would appreciate that we move in that direction.

Ms. Nagid said she wanted to note that as a Biologist am very aware of how impermeable surfaces effect drainage and water flow, especially in the Low Country and so just to assure all on this call it will be a permeable parking area as well as just an earthen trail. There will be no impermeable surfaces that would create any additional storm water runoff. We are also going to improve the entrance area where the culvert is. Right now there is kind of this swale between the road and the property that has a small culvert and that swale has kind of filled in a little bit. It is going to get improved right there at the entrance so it will have better drainage at least in front of our property.

Council Member Ames suggested including as part of the Motion a marketing plan or a plan that elevates this and other historic sites in the Community so that we are moving forward with that. Again, capital investment is about half and the other half is having people take advantage of what we have invested.

Council Member Ames moved that we move forward with the plans for the Ford Shell Ring and included in that a Marketing Plan of the site as well as other archeological sites on the Island. Council Member Becker seconded. Council Member Lennox said the idea of a Marketing Plan is a good one, but I think it should be consistent and parallel with the Parks & Recreation Master Plan. We have a very detailed Master Plan that we are going to be talking about later this week and I don't think we need a stand-alone Marketing Plan for archeological sites that are significant. If we can integrate that and include in the Motion something that says consistent with the recently completed Parks & Recreation Master Plan I think that then brings it under that umbrella. Council Member Ames revised his Motion to incorporate what Council Member Lennox said. Council Member Becker seconded the Revised Motion. Council Member Ames said I am trying to highlight the importance of the Town and the Chamber working together to tell the story of what this Island has to offer from a historical standpoint – not only a recreational one.

**c. Sandalwood Apartments and Beaufort County Housing Authority Discussion**

Chairman Harkins said Angela Childers, Beaufort County Housing Authority indicated her interest in serving as a resource as we enter this discussion. I do not see her on the screen

yet, so let me share with you my conversation with her. In our last discussion on this subject, I think it was Mr. Ames that made the comment about Sandalwood that maybe it was not realistic to bit by bit try and repair the structure. It was probably in the best interests of sound planning to come up with a new structure. With that in mind, I asked Angela if she would map out in detail the process that she, working with HUD and others would have to follow to make that a reality. She agreed to come before us today with that outline and highlighting from her perspective how we join in the effort from a lobbying standpoint or otherwise to be helpful to bring that to a reality. If she does not come on board with that work product that she was going to share today, I will make sure it is distributed to all of Town Council as soon as I receive it.

That said, we did have an inspection report on the facility generated by Angela's operation and that has been shared with the Committee Members. I would like to begin with that.

Council Member Brown stated that if this was going to be a topic of concern moving forward he wanted someone from staff that is assigned to doing this type of work. The report that was sent over was very comprehensive and it included all of Beaufort County Housing Authority sites, not just Sandalwood. It took a bit of time to try and scrub through it. As an overview there are a couple things that need to be pointed out. There were several areas of deficiency and according to their scoring system, the structures in at least two cases were scored in a negative fashion with zero being baseline as the worst there were areas well below zero. The report that we received was a 2019 assessment. I am assuming that the 2020 is still being developed. Nevertheless, when you take the overall score of a 63 what HUD deems to be a danger score is 59. We are four points off at the moment. I will make a very educated assumption here that within a year's time we may be even closer to that 59 that HUD would deem a danger zone. The report does support what Mr. Ames said at the last meeting that we may be too far gone as far as repair of this structure. I think it is something that we need to be more expeditious in trying to resolve because every day that goes by is just another day of us not bringing any relief to our residents in that area. I understand at this point it will a good bit of time and process that the Housing Authority has to go through with HUD. You pile on top of that construction, we are talking perhaps 5-6 years in getting relief. The people that live in that area need a voice and being that it does reside in our Township, I think it needs to be a priority of ours to assist the Housing Authority in whatever way possible to get this done as soon as possible. HUD typically does just a sampling of apartments from what I understand so that not every apartment is reviewed. If you use the ratio of how many apartments were deemed in very bad shape vs. the potential, the report will come back in a more negative fashion than is all ready presented.

Chairman Harkins said he had two points of thought – one is I think we all can agree that the ultimate solution is a new product in the Town. If that is the case then following the rules of HUD which on a practical level we are probably not going to change. For the HUD professionals to lay before us and this is what I am asking Angela to do – lay before us a chart that will from start to finish outline in detail who has to do what to make this happen and then to insert what role we might play ourselves and what role we might play encouraging others to join the bandwagon. The other train of thought is and Alex your point is well taken that if we are dealing with the federal government we are harnessed with a very laborious effort that will consume a lot of time. What can we do in the meantime to help encourage an improvement to the extend that is realistic on a short-term basis. I do not have any answers for that right now.

Council Member Ames said you have outlined the sequence – 1) we have interim maintenance challenges that we need to deal with; 2) we have an opportunity to completely refresh the housing opportunities for the people who live there and benefit the broader

community. I am aware of money that Provident Presbyterian Church has been raising and has already contributed to the upgrading of the maintenance challenges at Sandalwood. I think there are other people in the community who might want to participate in that. I think a natural conversation to have is with the Community Foundation of the Low Country, but I know they are somewhat ham strung and have to give money to 501C3's and not government agencies. I do think there is an opportunity there because of the new Chairman and President and I think we should be encouraging that to happen. The Town of Hilton Head has a vested interest in doing something about this project for a variety of reasons that we are all aware of. I think there is a partnership opportunity and responsibility there for the Town. Certainly the Beaufort County Housing Authority is the mechanism through HUD for things to happen. I am under the impression if not conclusion that we should be advocating very strongly for that project to be demolished and rebuilt in keeping with our community standards as well as for the benefit of the people who live there and perhaps other people who might be able to live there in the future. The model that I am wondering about is whether or not the Town or State can take the lead role of redeveloping the property and then turning it over to the Housing Authority. I do not know if that would expedite the renewal of the property or not, but I know that the models in the nature conversancy for instance where certain kinds of funds are used to secure land and then turned over permanently to another organization. My position here is that the Town has an active role to play to push forward a solution to upgrade the housing and eventually replace the housing on the Sandalwood property. This obviously fits into the broader challenges of Workforce Housing and housing for the community generally on Hilton Head Island. I think it is a part of the solution.

Council Member Lennox started by saying he is looking at the three-page Sandalwood Inspection Data Report and I am not sure what I am looking at. It doesn't look good, but nothing seems to reconcile on it. If there is a more complete report I sure would like to see it because I cannot make any sense out of the report I am looking at. Secondly, we are in a really awkward situation as the living conditions at Sandalwood do not represent what we would expect in terms of quality of life on Hilton Head Island. We have no status in this issue. This clearly is a state authority and federal government program that is responsible for maintaining and operating this program. That said, this cannot be the only one like this region wide, state wide or certainly nationwide. Josh, I wonder if there are other local governments or municipalities that have had situations similar to this where there has been a federal project that has maintained and operated by the federal government that has fallen into serious disrepair to the extent that there are life threatening deficiencies. And if so, what did they do. I really believe that this is not the first time that this has happened and that a lot of other municipalities have had to deal with something similar. Lastly, I do agree that this is part of Affordable Housing on the Island and I tend to agree that probably the most efficient way to deal with it would be to raise the project and rebuild it but I recognize that in so doing that, we are putting the people that are currently tenants out of the house. We are taking their lifestyle and living quarters away. What is going to happen to them while whoever rebuilds Sandalwood.

Council Member Becker said that the project over at Sandalwood is in the Town of Hilton Head it is private property that has been purchased by Beaufort County Housing Authority and run by a federal organization to provide housing. I have gone out and witnessed the housing personally and it is substandard in many respects. I also agree that what we see is dated and I believe Alex when we met we were to receive a current report that was just being completed. I look forward to seeing that. I also look forward to hearing what Ms. Childers has to say with regard to all of this. When we spoke to her as I recall, the idea of tearing down a portion and rebuilding of that property was feasible. There were accommodations that have to be made as they go through the process and did their work to bring it up to living standards that are acceptable and certainly represent a quality of life

and Hilton Head Island's values. Having said all of that, the other question that came to mind as I read the report that we were provided, there are some conditions there that look as though they are dangerous to life e.g., fire issues and people being able to get out safely. I think those are things that the Town can have an immediate impact on and I would ask that if we haven't that we revisit that and see if we can make a change and see that everyone is safe while details of the rest is worked out.

Chairman Harkins said at the pleasure of the Committee and Mr. Brown, I would like each of you to take on a homework assignment and create an outline that we could present to Ms. Childers and that, combined outline would in fact be the agenda for a singular focus meeting on the subject with her. I would like to ask Josh from a facilities standpoint and Code Enforcement standpoint to reach out to whomever at the Town to give an as is assessment of the physical condition, if possible. Then I think we can have a very organized presentation. My goal would be to start to get a short-term plan together and a long-term plan recognizing that we are a local government working with state and federal organizations and also recognizing as Mr. Lennox said what is going on here does not reflect what we want in the community, does not reflect well on our image and it needs whatever help we can generate to correct this situation.

Council Member Ames said in addition to what you asked Josh to research, I would be very interested in knowing whether or not another jurisdiction put in such a place as we find ourselves found a way for another developer or another agency or another source or money to expedite the construction of a project and then turn it over to the Housing Authority. I think there is an opportunity there on that site for us to encourage that to happen but it would obviously depend on Beaufort County Housing Authority's willingness to discuss it.

Council Member Brown stated he appreciates the steps forward that you are describing, I am just wondering if the meeting that we have with Beaufort County Housing Authority would not only include the Executive Director, but potentially some Board members. Chairman Harkins thought that was an excellent idea.

Council Member Lennox said we have to be sensitive to where we are stepping. It is my understanding that the Housing Authority is an organization that reports up through County Council. To the extent that the Authority has direct reporting or accountability to an entity it makes good sense for us to have that entity part of any and all discussions that we have with the Authority.

Chairman Harkins said the start point is a clear definition of the statement of the problem, the clear understanding of what the issues are and then with that understanding look at the myriad of individuals of agencies that we have to go through to get change. A clear assessment of the issue – what is behind the 69 that Alex mentioned. I think that creates the burning platform and it also says these are now places that any of us would want to live in. These are places that we don't want others to have to live in.

I think at our next Town Council we should share that this is work in progress and to keep this on track we should also create a calendar of activities so we stay on track here. Council Member Lennox said he has not been part of any discussions or meetings that we have had with Angela as head of the Authority. If we went to Angela and simply asked her the question does Sandalwood meet your safety and facilities standards, what would she say. Chairman Harkins said the immediate next step would be to invite Angela to a session with all of us and the work product coming from that would be an outline of activities that we could jointly participate in. Council Member Brown said this situation is huge in terms of the magnitude of what it would take to get it right and a lot of times when you are in that type of environment,

and you are the Agency that may not necessarily be able to do anything about it right at the moment, you may find pointing outward instead of inward more often. That is just the attitude that I have got thus far and I am hoping that it will change. That is the whole intent here is to hit the reset button and let's change the dialogue and change the discussion. I am not interested in pointing fingers at anyone, I am interested in us collectively as a Town, the residents that live there, the Housing Authority and HUD point together at the solution. That is important that we go in that direction. Council Member Ames said he goes along with what you are proposing, but with a suggestion that you add the Chairman of the Board of the Housing Authority and Ron Ianoale who is the Hilton Head Representative on the Housing Authority in that meeting. Chairman Harkins said it is really important and clearly our discussion right now as we plan for a process going forward will be enhanced dramatically by having Angela at a meeting like this.

#### **8. Executive Session**

At 10:10 a.m. Chairman Ames moved to adjourn to Executive Session to discuss the re-appointment of the Town's representative to the County Airports Board. Council Member Lennox seconded.

#### **9. Adjournment**

At 10:20 am, the Committee returned to Open Session. Chairman Harkins said no action was taken in Executive Session. Council Member Ames moved to adjourn. Council Member Lennox seconded.

**Submitted by:**

**Karen D. Knox**

**Approved: 2/22/2021**