



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

Friday, March 17, 2023

Committee met at 9:00 a.m., Friday, March 17, 2023, at Town Hall (2056 Middle St.), all requirements of the Freedom of Information Act having been met. Present were:

Committee members: Gary Visser (Chair) and Pat O'Neil

Staff: Andy Benke, Town Administrator; Charles Drayton, Director of Planning and Zoning; Joe Henderson, Deputy Administrator and Pam Otto

1. **Call to Order.** Chair Visser called the meeting to order, stating the press and public were duly notified pursuant to state law.

Media: None present

Public: Seven (7) present

2. **Approval of Minutes** – November 3, 2022

**Motion:** A motion was made by Mr. O'Neil to approve the November 3, 2022 meeting minutes, seconded by Chair Visser; this motion passed unanimously, 2-0.

3. **Discussion of the potential employment for the Town of a naturalist to attend the needs of the maritime forest and other areas of the island.**

Chair Visser mentioned that the arrangement of the meeting, a round table layout, was to facilitate discussion and conversation. It is also the reason the meeting was only audio recorded, not video. The purpose of the meeting was because of Council forwarding a request made by a resident, to the Land Use and Natural Resources (LUNR) Committee. The request was to hire someone to manage, advise on, and work in the accreted land and other Town properties. Chair Visser stated that Town Council was bound by the notion to manage the accreted land by the 2018 Comprehensive Plan for the Town. The goals of the meeting was to determine the title of the job, the job description and what areas of the Town should be managed.

Mr. O'Neil said that someone had recommended the position be called Natural Resources Director. Chair Visser then asked to whom this position would report. Benke stated the position would be similar to a Department Head and would report to the Town Administrator.

Benke stated it would be an administrative position, monitoring wildlife and dealing with invasives but subcontracting out the big aspects of the job, like removing invasive trees. Jeff Jackson stated that he saw this job as additionally responsible for managing beach paths, managing the interface between lawns and natural areas and also overseeing the dump.

Chair Visser said this job offered the potential for communication with educational facilities to supply interns to help with the work. It had been suggested the Duke University program with Western Carolina University that they partner with to monitor shorelines and aid with resiliency. This position would supervise the interns. Benke stated that the position seems to have a broad view, hiring a biologist will not meet all the needs. Mr. Jackson stated the person might not need to know everything they are talking about but be willing to continue their education while in the position. They would need to have a strong base education in environmental science though.

There was some discussion about how a maritime forest habitat is very different, despite the perception that it can be similar to other coastal habitats. This is why it is important to hire someone with experience in maritime forests.

Mr. O'Neil asked if anyone had an idea of the cost to hire someone for this job. There was mention made of the lack of clarity on the scope of the job, that there was a need to first identify the goals and objectives of the position. Drayton stated that it should be included for the role to be responsible for education and outreach. Benke added that they should also be able to enforce when there was illegal activity in the accreted land. Henderson mentioned that enforcement was a challenge, so the position should be a sworn position. Benke mentioned if they were sworn in, then the position could write Town Ordinance tickets.

It was mentioned that the primary focus should be to manage and help grow the maritime forest. Mr. O'Neil stated that the marsh side of the island needs to be included as well. It was said that in order to manage the maritime forest, there would be a need to control invasive species. Susan Middaugh gave a list of problems the Naturalist would need to address. That list is as follows:

- a) Manage the two hundred (200) acres of protected habitats for health and sustainability of the marine ecosystem, with an immediate focus on control of invasive vegetation and repair of the extensively damaged area at Station 26.
- b) Plan and implement nature-based solutions to create resilient protections with a focus on both the accreted lands and the marsh lands.
- c) Enhance enjoyment and appreciation of the Town's natural resources by residents, visitors and students by education.
- d) Work with Town staff to develop grant opportunities and manage permitting with a focus on increasing resilience.

Chair Visser stated the importance of managing the beach paths and how to create access for everyone while still protecting the maritime forest. Mr. Jackson stated that when it came to

public access bisecting the protected natural area, the Naturalist would be key in managing the paths. He also said that each beach path should have its own management plan, as each is different and constantly changing. The goal should be to allow access to the beach while having a minimal impact on the land being travelled through.

It was discussed that the position would require someone to make calls on a daily basis, relying on their own knowledge and experience. It is not possible to define every task they might have, the day to day job description will be constantly changing. Mr. Jackson stated a professional would be needed, willing to commit to the long-term scope of the job. It was then discussed how the position could direct and organize volunteers, but Benke said that volunteers are not something seen favorably by the Town's Tort Liability Insurer, as they open the Town to liability. It was asked how to facilitate people who have knowledge of invasive species, and are willing to help with the control of them.

Mr. O'Neil stated that budget review was currently happening and there was a need to come to an agreement for a specific ask to Town Council as far as budgeting is concerned. He asked Mr. Jackson to describe the position. Mr. Jackson said the position requires management skills in addition to biology knowledge, as well as the ability to interact with staff and residents, someone with experience. Mr. O'Neil asked how much should be asked for in the budget. Ms. Middaugh said seventy to eighty thousand dollars (\$70,000-\$80,000). Mr. O'Neill stated there needed to be an expectation of continuous funding as well, he asked Benke if it would be enough to fill the position. Benke stated that \$80,000 would be the gross, fringe benefits of about twenty-eight percent (28%) would need to be considered also. There was also the costs of a vehicle and continuing education to consider. The budget ask would need to be about one hundred fifty thousand (\$150,000) to retain a conservationist specialist. Benke asked how it would be funded, as the budget for Fiscal Year 2024 is completed and balanced. There was some discussion on how to work it into the budget.

**Motion:** A motion was made by Mr. O'Neil to request budgetary support so the Town of Sullivan's Island can employ an environmental professional to act as Natural Resources Director to manage the Town properties including the maritime forest and the marsh side, seconded by Chair Visser; this motion passed unanimously, 2-0.

4. **Adjourn.** There being no further public discussion or new business, the meeting adjourned.

**Motion:** A motion was made to adjourn at 9:54 a.m. by Mr. O'Neil, seconded by Chair Visser, motion passed unanimously, 2-0.

Respectfully Submitted

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pamela A. Otto". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P".

Pamela Otto,

LUNR Committee Staff Member

Approved at the May 17, 2023 LUNR Meeting