

The Sewee Summit

Meeting Summary and Notes

Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center
5821 Highway 17 North
Awendaw, SC

February 16, 2010
1:00 – 4:00 pm

Objective

To explore the possibility for mutually beneficial collaboration in the region

Next Steps

- **NOEL:** Request the appointment names for municipality representatives
- **TAMMIE, JENNIE, MEGAN, DICKIE, RON, CHARLES, CHRISTIANE, RUTLEDGE, KEVIN:** Establish the planning team with representative from the various sectors
- **MICHELLE:** Convene the above group to create the planning team.
- **WHOLE GROUP:** Determine how this effort relates to the County Comprehensive Plan.
- **PLANNING TEAM:**
 - a. Return information to full group by mid-May before school closes
 - b. Work on an asset inventory
 - c. Determine the key elements of a collaborative and comprehensive plan. The Planning Team will identify possible key elements and share with the large group for feedback. Findings will be based on asset mapping.
 - d. Short-term products: verbalize human/natural assets, needs, values associated with them, such as what are values of Gullah-Geechee culture, natural areas, etc.?
 - e. The Planning Team should use any information the CDC has on wastewater management as well as the old strategic plan. There is also the 2004 report on the economic value of national wildlife refuge for the four county area.
 - f. Overlay a district as an example of collaboration.
- **CALVIN:** Minutes and email addresses will be shared with this group.
- **MICHELLE:** To be invited next time: 1) Forestry Interest; 2) Electric Cooperative
- **MICHELLE:** Send SC Electric and Gas and Berkley Electric the notes from this meeting.

Agenda

1:00	Welcome and Introduction	Dickie Schweers
1:15	Meeting Objectives, Guidelines, Roles	Calvin Allen
1:45	History of Collaboration in the Region . Natural Neighborhoods Context and How Everyone is Involved . Questions	Dickie Schweers Noel Thorn
2:00	Small Group Review of Stakeholder Goals for Region . Questions for clarification? . Observations from stakeholders? . Any trends, positive or negative? . What would happen without working together? . Report Outs	Calvin Allen
2:45	Small Groups: Explore Possibility for Collaboration . Value in thinking regionally? . What might be accomplished through collaboration?	Calvin Allen
3:15	Report Out to Large Group . Quick summaries from small groups . Is there value in exploring this further?	Calvin Allen
3:45	Next Steps	Calvin Allen
4:00	Adjourn	

Background and Context for This Meeting

- We are discussing the mostly rural area between Charleston County, Mount Pleasant, Awendaw, and McClellanville – the Sewee to Santee region.
- Noel Thorn and Michelle Sinkler are working with the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation on the intersection of natural lands and rural areas. They are working in different areas that they call “Natural Neighborhoods.” The three Natural Neighborhoods are the Yemassee region, the Pee Dee region, and the Sewee to Santee region.
- They paid attention to the voices of local people in these areas as they worked on conservation issues that said that there is a great need to think about the high concentration of poverty, the needs for septic systems, good drinking water, education, and jobs.
- This effort is an attempt to meet the conservation, community economic development, and social needs in the area through a coordinated strategy in partnership with the major municipalities, expertise partners, landowners, and relevant community partners.

Meeting Attendance

Participants:

- Mac Burdette, Town of Mount Pleasant, mburdette@townofmountpleasant.com
- John Burn, Town of Mount Pleasant, councilclk@townofmountpleasant.com
- Sam Campbell, District One, ???
- Daniel Davis, Berkeley County, dwdavis@berkeleycountysc.gov
- Megan Desrosiers, SC Coastal Conservation League, megand@scccl.org
- Clay Duffie, Mount Pleasant Water Works, clayduffie@mpwonline.com
- Christiane Farrell, cfarrell@townofmountpleasant.com
- Kevin Godsea, US Fish and Wildlife, Kevin_Godsea@fws.gov
- Eric Greenway, Berkeley County, egreenway@berkeleycountysc.gov
- Sarah Hartman, The Nature Conservancy, shartman@tnc.org
- Tammie Hoy, Lowcountry Housing Trust, tammie@lowcountryhousingtrust.org
- Mac Jenkinson, Mount Pleasant Water Works, mac@carolinaone.com
- Charlie Johnson, Sewee to Santee CDC, charliej36@tds.net
- Diane Lauritsen, Mount Pleasant Water Works, ddlauritsen@comcast.net.
- Rutledge Leland, Town of McClellanville, McClellanville@tds.net
- Harry Lesesne, City of Charleston, lesesneh@ci.charleston.sc.us
- Ron Mitchum, Council of Governments, ronm@bcdcog.com
- Christopher Morgan, City of Charleston, morganc@ci.charleston.sc.us
- Raye Nilius, SC Lowcountry Refuges Complex, Raye_Nilius@fws.gov
- Charlie Northcutt, ???
- Joseph Riley, City of Charleston, rileyj@ci.charleston.sc.us
- Sam Robinson, Town of Awendaw, samueln@tds.net
- John Sands, Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, jsands@gddf.org
- Dickie Schweers, Charleston County, dickieschweers@tds.net
- Michelle Sinkler, Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, michellesinkler@comcast.net
- Jennie Stephens, Center for Heirs Property Preservation, jstephens@heirsproperty.org
- Billy Swails, Town of Mount Pleasant, bswails@townofmountpleasant.com
- Noel Thorn, Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, noelthorn@aol.com
- Bill Wallace, Town of Awendaw, billwallace33@msn.com
- Steve Wells, Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests, swells@fs.fed.us

Conservation Fund Facilitators

- Calvin Allen, National Community Forestry Service Center Program Director, callen@conservationfund.org
- Cynthia Brown, Resourceful Communities Program Associate, cynthia@sojournergroup.org
- Mikki Sager, Conservation Fund Vice-President, mikkisager@aol.com

Top 5 Trends, Opportunities, or Challenges

The large group was broken into four diverse small groups and tasked to:

1. Share their sense of their area's top trends, opportunities, and challenges with their groups
2. Create a collective list of top trends, opportunities, and challenges for your group
3. Prioritize your top 3 to share with the group

Group 1

Expertise: political entities, community development corporation, non-governmental organizations

Themes: tension, protecting the environment, and community economic development, providing services to existing residents (water & sewer)

Prioritized Trends, Opportunities, and Challenges

1. protecting natural assets
2. providing economic opportunities
3. opportunities: communication between municipalities and relevant parties; rural transportation; economic development opportunities at a manageable scale; protecting rural values/land conservation ethic

Group 2

Expertise: CHPP, Mayor Riley, MP Water Works, Citizens of unincorporated

Prioritized Trends, Opportunities, and Challenges

1. The lack of regional vision, communication, and agreement
2. Public health – drainage, infrastructure
3. Citizen's needs – housing, etc.
4. Impacts of climate change

Group 3

Expertise: Mayors, elected officials

Prioritized Trends, Opportunities, and Challenges

1. FMNF/Cape Romaine – conservation of natural resources
2. Where and how to develop, especially Awendaw – surrounded by protected lands
3. Water/wastewater issues: the need for safe, affordable drinking water. There are issues of water and wastewater treatment in the Lowcountry

Group 4

Expertise: Government representative, non-governmental organizations, community economic development, conservation, infrastructure, economic development, development

Prioritized Trends, Opportunities, and Challenges

1. Balancing Growth – economic/community development with conservation/wildlife

2. Cost of Services
3. Difficulties in government cooperation

Group Reactions to Small Group Reports

- There were no surprises.
- We need to be proactive to address the challenges with everyone in this room.
- There is recognition of the common problems affecting the area.
- It helps to point out our needs.
- There are positive steps that can and will be taken.
- There is an inter-relationship and commonality of our problems and needs for community economic development.
- We're seeing the same things.
- There is an opportunity to move forward.
- We have problems, and many are difficult to solve. There was a 1999 booklet and strategic plan, but nothing was done with it. It was too ambitious.
- What will we walk out of here with, what will we work to accomplish?
- The EPA has 319 projects, and Charleston County is working to fix failing septic systems. Once they are fixed, how do we ensure their maintenance? They send out notices every five years as reminders to pump out.
- We have to set achievable goals.
- Are there new issues? Climate change is affecting national wildlife refuges.
- The groups' top 3 lists are similar in concept.
- It's all about balance.
- Our main commonality and the elephant in the room is concern about unplanned and/or insensitive development.
- There is value in bringing to prominence environmental and cultural values. We have to articulate them along with the dangers that unplanned growth and development pose to it.
- We have the chance to see a bigger historical frame. There are two national protected systems, so how will they be negatively changed?
- There are opportunities to look at a bigger picture: how do we want development and conservation to meet?
- It is important that there be an educational component to bring a message to the majority population. We all need to understand the need for preservation of national forests and national wildlife refuges. We could educate the majority population in Awendaw that certain developments will impact their lives and may displace them.
- What will we do around Gullah-Geechee culture in the region?
- We have to ensure good public education for those of Gullah-Geechee heritage and all citizens of Awendaw.
- We spend a lot of time on the protection of species, but what about the protection of people and culture?
- How do we develop so everyone gets to enjoy it?
- Cultural dynamics can change if we're not careful, particularly around the Gullah-Geechee corridor. The people it is named for may be gone if we're not careful.

Analysis: Small Group Discussions on the Value of Collaboration

The large group was divided into different small groups to address the following questions and then report their ideas to the large group.

1. What will happen without collaboration?
2. Is there value in regional collaboration?
3. What might be accomplished through collaboration?
4. What barriers need to be overcome?

What will happen without collaboration?

We will continue to act as individual interests, clash with our neighbors, and miss opportunities for long-term, intentional regional development that meets everyone's needs.

1. Someone will tell Charleston County that they have 800 acres and that they are going to develop it. That could be good or bad.
2. People will barter annexation for more density, etc.
3. The state of the region is not acceptable without collaboration. Why? It has impacts on people, natural resources, and gentrification.
4. We keep doing the same thing over and over.
5. Nobody wins. One example is that residents don't have economic opportunities and that champions for natural resources don't win.
6. Is collaboration happening already? It is happening to some degree but lines are drawn. We tend to revert back to what OUR rights are as counties, towns, or other third parties (such as developers). That trend doesn't bring good things to the area. One group exercises their right to do something, going back to the default position.

Collaboration is big picture, long-term, and everyone's voice has to be included.

7. What we mean by collaboration:
 - a. Planning at the landscape level, looking at the entire landscape, not just pieces of it.
 - b. Looking at the assets together, articulating them, and identifying the needs of the assets and values of the resources. Then, we can look at how to collaborate.
8. Can provide for water and sewer without new development?
9. What are we trying to accomplish? How do we get there? What is everyone's role in getting there, and what is everyone's contribution?
10. Everyone needs to be at the table and have a voice.
11. It's not just zoning which is a temporary line in the sand. We need to take this work and elevate it to the point that it's a matter of culture not zoning. For example, Charleston decided intentionally that this is what we want to be and what we want to look like.
12. What are the core values of this area? How do we achieve them?
13. Collaboration is about helping neighbors do what you'd like everyone to do.

We all have an interest in growth beyond our town/county boundaries, as we're all impacted.

14. We all have the right to have aspirations and concerns about change beyond where we live because we are all residents of this region.

15. Collaboration is about affirming the all the interests and a belief in the value of what happens. We'll all be impacted as municipalities and as citizens. I need to think about Awendaw's growth for my grandchildren.
16. What is our 30-50 year plan? Where are our growth boundaries?
17. Our town sought collaboration because of our assets and values, and because people have strong feelings. We're responsible to them even if they don't live in the city.
18. We all live in same region, so we all serve residents of the region. Many of us are a team of elected officials. It is all our responsibility to help make peoples' lives better and more liveable.
19. We have to come to agreement on our common goals.
20. Francis Marion National Forest and CRNWR are all owned by everyone. No jurisdiction should have the right to disturb them without input from everyone.

Is there value in collaborating together on regional development in this area?

We polled the entire group anonymously to see if there was a belief that there is value in regional collaboration. 0 = no value at all, while 5 = exceptional value. There were all 4's and 5's, mostly 5's.

What are the barriers to collaboration?

1. Trust is lacking, it's been stretched or it has been broken through past interactions.
2. It was raised that there have been prior efforts to collaborate four years ago, but not everyone signed onto the agreement for various reasons.
3. We have individual agendas and put citizens in our jurisdiction first while thinking regionally.
4. Stereotyping of what every municipality is like. County residents think Mt. Pleasant wants all big box development. Different areas have stereotypical opinions.
5. Top-down approaches where one entity thinks they have the right vision and that there is no other vision.
6. We are not meeting individual interests at times.
7. We seek short-term solutions, which often defeat our long-term purposes. We want everything now.

What will move us beyond these barriers?

1. We have to be upfront about our issues, put them on the table, and face them together.
2. We have to be transparent, and make sure everyone has a voice.
3. We have to determine how to address private property rights, as landownership will change.
4. We have to put things on the table but also respect and deal with what is said. We have different perceptions and we have to get to resolution, and not just pass over the conflicts.
5. We have to value people's opinions, respect others' ideas, and be willing to compromise.
6. We have to accept and acknowledge that this is a region, not just individual entities. We have to develop strategies to get beyond our defaults to true collaboration.
7. We need to have a mutually agreed upon end product and outcome.
8. We need leadership.

9. What was known as the “Blood Pact,” the earlier effort at collaboration, was so negative that it needs to go away. Down the road, we might work toward a better, more inclusive memorandum of understanding that we could all sign, but that is again down the road. We can’t know what the end product is today. It may be unfair to say it will be a document, etc. as it is to be determined.
10. We have to be organized as a group, with a place to go, people to facilitate, and a convening entity.

Convening Entity

1. Noel Thorn is the convener on behalf of the Donnelley Foundation in the Yemassee project. He is not a resident there as he is here. He won’t be seen as a neutral party. We need a neutral entity, someone that owns it without having a specific agenda. This has to be a neutral process where everyone has an equal voice. Professional, neutral facilitation a key ingredient. Noel coordinates meetings but doesn’t vote
2. We have to agree to work together. In Yemassee, the Council of Governments (COG) has helped bring everyone together but they haven’t facilitated. COG doesn’t mind helping. We shouldn’t have “ownership” but we’re willing to help with convening. We shouldn’t take the lead.
3. The Donnelley Foundation is glad to help for the short-term. We don’t want to be in local government long-term, but we have worked with Noel to convene, find meeting locations, send meeting notices, and buy meals.
4. Noel Thorn proposed a similar structure to the Yemassee group of forming a Planning Team made up of representatives of housing, conservation, economic development, education, major landowners, COG, technical college, and all the municipalities. It was a 12 person team. Their task was to develop an inventory of the region, the elements to be included of a collaborative plan, and report their findings to the large group.
5. COG director Chris Bickley pointed out in Yemassee that nothing would move forward without the will of the local governments around regional planning and cooperation. Therefore, Noel worked to prepare an MOU approved by the whole group that went to all the councils. All agreed at least to collaborate. We should do the same here.
6. We have a model that’s working somewhere so let’s give it a shot: the Donnelley Foundation will convene the group for now with Michelle Sinkler and Noel Thorn as leads.

Composition of the Sewee to Santee Region Planning Group

- Each government will appoint a person (Mayors will have ministerial authority to appoint someone)
- COG representative
- Affordable housing representative
- Economic development representative
- Education representative
- Community economic development representative
- Heirs property representative
- Large private landowners representative
- Small private landowners representative

- Conservation representative
- Unincorporated areas representative

Next Steps

- NOEL: Request the appointment names for municipality representatives
- TAMMIE, JENNIE, MEGAN, DICKIE, RON, CHARLES, CHRISTIANE, RUTLEDGE, KEVIN: Establish the planning team with representative from the various sectors
- MICHELLE SINKLER: Convene the above group to create the planning team.
- WHOLE GROUP: Determine how this effort relates to the County Comprehensive Plan.
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Evaluation

What we liked:

- It was well-organized
- It was well-facilitated
- There was good participation from everyone

What we didn't like about the meeting:

- Nothing listed

What could be improved or changed:

- We need a larger meeting space.

Would you come back to another meeting?

- Yes