



MINUTES CONSERVATION BANK BOARD

April 9, 2019

Oconee County Administrative Offices, Council Chambers
415 S. Pine Street, Walhalla, SC 29691

MEMBERS

Mr. Andrew Smith, Chairman, District II
Ms. Frances Rundlett, Vice Chairman, At Large
Ms. Emily Hitchcock, Secretary, At Large
Mr. Frank Ables, Treasurer, District V

Mr. Ryan Keese, District III
Mr. Marvin Prater, District IV
Ms. Laura Havran, District I
Ms. Katie D. Smith, Staff Liaison

The Oconee County Conservation Bank Board [OCCB] met at 9:00 a.m. in Council Chambers, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC with all members present [except Ms. Laura Havran; Ms. Frances Rundlett arrived late] and Katie D. Smith, Clerk to Council acting as staff liaison.

Press: Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting, date, time, place of meeting and agenda were posted on the bulletin board at the County Administrative Offices, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC, and the County Council website [www.oconeesc.com/council]. In addition it was made available [*upon request*] to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned citizens.

No members of the media were present.

Call to Order

Mr. Smith called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Ables made a motion, seconded by Mr. Keese, approved 5 – 0, to approve the minutes from March 5, 2019 meeting as presented.

Treasurer's Report

Mr. Ables noted the Treasurer's Reports as presented are accurate. He further noted the balance on the report is \$613,735.46. Ms. Hitchcock made a motion, seconded by Mr. Smith, approved 5 – 0, to accept as presented the Treasurer's Report for February 2019.

Discussion Items

Lengthy discussion followed regarding the topics indicated below, with various opinions expressed, to include but not limited to:

Continued Discussion regarding Alternate Funding Sources

- Notes from last meeting from Ms. Hitchcock [copy filed with these minutes]
- Approach groups or individuals in the County
- Have presentation & list to target prepared for the OCCB next meeting

Ms. Rundlett arrived during the discussion of regarding alternate funding sources.

A video recording of this meeting is available at www.oconeesc.com. Meetings have been live-streamed beginning January 17, 2017. Brought to you by Your Oconee.

Continued Discussion Regarding Types of Accounts Available to Generate Interest

- Spoke with Greg Nowell, Oconee County Treasurer & David Root, County Attorney
- No impediments for OCCB to put the funds in an account available to generate interest
- Type of accounts and rates; most favored was the rate through the State pool
- Set certain amount of funds aside for State pool and the remaining funds will be readily available in another account
- Budget

Continued Discussion and/or Action Regarding Moore property

Mr. Eddie Martin, Oconee Soil & Water Conservation District, addressed the Board with the following:

- Received full application on Moore property
- Prime and statewide soils but small parcel
- SC Conservation Bank priorities are set for bigger parcels; more acreage, more public access, etc.
- OCCB can fill a gap from a funding aspect for the smaller parcels
- Application in SC Conservation Bank for this property
- Requested a letter of commitment from OCCB to help fund; Mr. Martin could take with him to the next SC Conservation Bank meeting and may can close on property by June
- Potentially award lesser grant than what Oconee Soil & Water Conservation District is asking for

Discussion continued to include:

- Largest request
- Prior funding requests granted have been between \$8,000 to \$11,000 due to limited funds
- Ordinance requires an environmental assessment if the grant is over \$30,000
- Due diligence aspects must be completed prior to closing, including an environmental assessment
- Survey has already been completed by landowner
- Conservation easement
- Issue is the 50% funding request for the project
- Mr. Martin to correct the acquisition type under Section I to “Conservation Easement” instead of “Fee Simple”
- Some mortgage companies will not approve a conservation easement on a property where they hold a mortgage
- Request Mr. Martin to give an outline that reconciles all of the numbers

Ms. Rundett made a motion, seconded by Ms. Hitchcock, to approve a letter of commitment to fund the Moore property in the amount not to exceed \$29,000.

Continued discussion to include:

- Not comfortable with moving forward quickly without having some assurance from Wells Fargo of the amount
- OCCB has not funded for the purchase of a conservation easement
- Funding the purchase of a conservation easement vs. funding all or part of closing costs

A video recording of this meeting is available at www.oconeesc.com. Meetings have been live-streamed beginning January 17, 2017. Brought to you by Your Oconee.

- More active with the funds available
- Five year budget
- Endowment
- OCCB grants that have been completed [copy filed with these minutes]

Mr. Jason Davis, Natural Resources Conservation Service [NRCS], addressed the Board with the following:

- If funds are not put toward conservation, there will be nothing to conserve
- Funds were set aside for conservation; conservation easement would fall underneath this, as well as closing costs for conservation easements, attorney fees, surveys, etc.

Mr. Ables asked why was this the first project brought to the OCCB asking for funding on a conservation easement. Mr. Martin noted this was the first property that fit the parameters with the property being small and less likely to be funded at the higher level.

Continued discussion included:

- Scoring sheets that are used for all of the criteria
- Two members need to walk the property before they approve an application
- Schedule another OCCB meeting?
- Commitment letter to fund some portion of the asking price
- Closing date not set until the funds are secured
- Making recommendations to Council for approval
- Move forward with the OCCB process and see if the Oconee Soil & Water Conservation District will accept
- Keep application open with OCCB until decision is made regarding funding

Ms. Hitchcock made a motion, seconded by Mr. Ables, approved 5 – 0, [Mr. Keese recused; copy filed with these minutes] to table the previous motion until scoring sheets have been completed and two OCCB members have walked the property.

Continued Discussion and/or Action Regarding William Lyles Estate

Mr. Chris Straker, Land Conservation Manager with Upstate Forever, addressed the Board noting there are large projects that need assistance in a variety of ways and further noted that every project is not going to be a \$5,000 to \$10,000 project. He further noted some projects have big monetary requests and some will get big matching funds, such as NRCS, Agricultural Conservation Easement Program [ACEP] funding, State Conservation Bank, etc. as well as other grant opportunities.

Marvin Prater recused himself from discussion [copy of recusal form filed with these minutes].

Discussion continued to include:

- In the past, there was an application window
- OCCB makes decisions and recommendations later in the year
- Ordinance notes application deadlines are April 1st, August 1st, & November 1st and decision needs to be made within 60 days of those dates

A video recording of this meeting is available at www.oconeesc.com. Meetings have been live-streamed beginning January 17, 2017. Brought to you by Your Oconee.

- Action of the OCCB in 2017 was to set the funding cycle to accept applications from January through June 30th and decisions are made from July 1st through December 31st
- Whetstone Creek Preserve; on Statement of Interest it was submitted as the William Lyles Estate
- Whetstone Creek is a tributary to the Chattooga Natural Wild and Scenic River
- Classified as Trout Natural by DHEC; high quality stream & watershed
- Due to this property being in an estate and Mr. Lyles passed away not too long ago, this property is slated to be subdivided or sold at some point
- Family members are willing to put the property into a conservation easement and then sell to Naturaland Trust
- Property borders Sumter Natural Forest
- Eastern Band of the Cherokee
- Requesting \$85,000 from OCCB and is going to be matched with \$170,000 from ACEP
- Naturaland Trust has an application in with the State Conservation Bank as well
- Archeological study
- State Conservation Board is waiting on decision from OCCB
- Upstate Forever will hold easement and Naturaland Trust will purchase from the Lyles family

Discussion Regarding Presentations for 2019

- Would be appropriate for Eddie Martin, Jason Davis, & Chris Straker to give presentation on the district's approach on conservation easements
- Financial Advisor
- Oconee County Treasurer

Discussion Regarding OCCB Cash Flow for FY 2019-2020

- Create a budget before July 1st

Ms. Hitchcock made a motion, seconded by Mr. Keese, approved 6 – 0, to have the Treasurer and Chairman present a proposed budget for the next meeting.

Ms. Hitchcock made a motion, seconded by Mr. Smith, to immediately transfer the funds into an interest bearing account and come back as part of the budget process with a recommendation on an investment that is consistent with how much funds should go into the account.

Discussion continued to include:

- Take funds out of the account to fund the ongoing projects before funds are put into an interest bearing account
- Two accounts and how much funds would go into each
- Approach three of our local banks
- State pool is readily available

Ms. Hitchcock withdrew her previous motion.

A video recording of this meeting is available at www.oconeesc.com. Meetings have been live-streamed beginning January 17, 2017. Brought to you by Your Oconee.

Mr. Prater made a motion, seconded by Ms. Rundlett, approved 6 – 0, to direct the Treasurer to move all the OCCB funds to the State Pool as soon as possible and if a better rate can be located for a portion to be determined later, the funds can be transferred into a different account.

New Business:

Mr. Eddie Martin addressed the Board, noting the following:

- Thanked the members for their service
- Conservation community appreciates the opportunity to come before members who are diligent
- Speaking with you at the request of the County Administrator to note his past experience with grant receivership, funding, etc.
- Apply for grants several times a year
- Donors expect funds to be spent in an expedient timeframe
- Good projects available
- Board can help with smaller parcels that have exceptional benefit to the community
- Deed stamps
- Funding is getting tight for these projects
- Upstate Forever website has information regarding conservation easements

Ms. Rundlett made a motion, seconded by Ms. Hitchcock, approved 6 – 0, to appoint Mr. Ryan Keese and Mr. Andrew Smith to walk the Lyles property and Ms. Frances Rundlett and Mr. Frank Ables to walk the Moore property and bring a brief summary back to the next meeting.

Old Business

None at this meeting.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting will be held at 9:00 a.m., Tuesday, June 11, 2019 at the Oconee County Council Chambers, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC 29691.

Adjourn:

Mr. Ables made a motion, approved unanimously, to adjourn the meeting at 11:02 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Katie D. Smith
Clerk to Council & Staff Liaison

A video recording of this meeting is available at www.oconeesc.com. Meetings have been live-streamed beginning January 17, 2017. Brought to you by Your Oconee.