



MINUTES CONSERVATION BANK BOARD

May 14, 2024

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

MEMBERS

Ms. Emelyn Jones, Chair, At Large
Mr. Andrew Smith, Vice Chair, District II
Mr. Ryan Keese, Secretary, District, III
Mr. Gordon Becker, District I

Mr. Taylor Howard, Treasurer, District IV
Mr. Scuddy Walker, District V
VACANT, At Large
Mrs. Jennifer C. Adams, 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 and Jennifer C. Adams, 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

Ms. Jones called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Keese, approved 6 – 0, to approve the April 16, 2024 special meeting minutes as presented.

Treasurer's Report

Mr. Howard read the Treasurer's Report for the Community First Bank and the Local Government Investment Pool [State Pool] and noted they are accurate as presented [copies filed in backup]. He further noted the balances on the reports are as follows:

Community First Bank for April 2024 is \$480.00.

Local Government Investment Pool [State Pool] for April 2024 is \$383,116.69.

Mr. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Becker, approved 6 – 0, to accept as presented the Treasurer's Report for Community First Bank for April 2024 and the Local Government Investment Pool [State Pool] for April of 2024.

Fundraising and Public Relations Report

Mr. Smith provided details of the Oconee Food Council Farmer's Breakfast that he attended in March, noting this breakfast focused on the topic of conservation easements, to which he was able to provide those in attendance with details regarding the OCCB.

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.

Ms. Jones then noted to the Board that going forward she would like to add to the agenda a “Minute for Conservation”, where one topic is discussed regarding activities in the State related to land conservation, then went on to provide details of the recently passed Working Agriculture Land Preservation Act.

Mr. Smith informed the Board that the Oconee Food Council decided to hold the Farmer’s Breakfast in March at the Fair Oaks Community Center due to the current Sewer South project happening in that area and noted that there is a lot of concern over the possibility of agriculture shifting to more industrial/commercial/residential development in that area of the County.

The Board continued with a short discussion regarding the rate at which farm land is being lost in South Carolina and on a national scale due to development.

Grants Status

Mr. Walker informed the Board that there have been no changes in the OCCB Grants Disbursed and Expenses chart [copy filed in backup].

Discussion Items

Board member resignation/replacement

Ms. Jones informed the Board that no questionnaires have been received requesting appointment to the vacant At-Large seat.

Mr. Keese introduced a citizen in attendance, Ms. Jessica Fry, that is interested in possible appointment to the vacant At-Large seat on the OCCB.

Revisions to the OCCB Webpage

Ms. Jones reviewed the current OCCB description wording on the webpage with the Board, explaining that while the OCCB does support fee simple transactions, they are also required to have a conservation easement, noting this wording is also on the funding application and it will need to be changed as well.

Ms. Jones asked the Board for recommendations on the re-wording of this description.

Mr. Howard and Mr. Smith suggested that the following edit:

“The Oconee County Conservation Bank Board (OCCB) was established to protect Oconee County lands with significant natural, cultural, and/or historic resources in the County that meet specific criteria by providing a financial incentive to willing landowners to convey either a conservation easement or fee simple title, **where such transaction also includes a conservation easement**, to eligible recipients.

Mr. Howard made a motion, seconded by Mr. Smith, approved 6 – 0, to approve the above stated wording change to the OCCB webpage description and the funding application.

SC Land Trust Network

Ms. Jones provided details regarding the South Carolina Land Trust Network to the Board, explaining this is a network of non-profit land trusts across the state and the OCCB has been invited to join.

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Ms. Jones went on to inform the Board that a new membership category has been added with the SC Land Trust Network that invites local county lead organizations that fund conservation projects the opportunity to join, noting that County representatives are not voting members and this membership would be for educational and networking purposes only.

Mr. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Keese, to approve the OCCB joining the SC Land Trust Network.

Mr. Howard inquired as to where the money for membership to the network would be funded from.

Ms. Jones stated that membership dues would be paid out of the OCCB bank account after approval from the County Attorney, Mr. David Root.

Mr. Smith amended to motion to include prior approval from County Attorney, Mr. Root, be obtained before actually becoming a member of the network.

Motion for the OCCB to become a member of the SC Land Trust Network with prior approval from County Attorney, Mr. Root, approved 6 – 0.

Minute for Conservation – Working Agricultural Lands Preservation Act

This agenda item was discussed by the Board under the Fundraising and Public Relations Report.

Discussion regarding Fall Creek Headwaters Application for Funding

Mr. Chris Starker, Land Conservation Manager with Upstate Forever, joined the meeting via phone to answer any questions that the Board may have while reviewing the application to fund Fall Creek Headwaters.

Ms. Jones noted to the Board that page 13 of the Application for Funding has been updated with a signature and that a U.S. Forest Service Map has been added as page 175 in the application document sent over from Upstate Forever.

Mr. Howard provided details to the Board related to the site visit that he, Ms. Jones and Mr. Keese attended on May 10, 2024.

The Board then proceeded with a lengthy review of the Oconee County Conservation Bank Criteria Worksheet as it relates to the Fall Creek Headwaters application, during which Mr. Starker was able to answer all questions presented by the Board via phone.

At the end of the discussion by the Board, Ms. Jones stated that the final score was 44 [copy of criteria worksheet in backup], which meets the criteria to be presented to County Council for consideration of approval and it meets the criteria for funding from the OCCB.

Mr. Howard made a motion, seconded by Mr. Walker, approved 6 – 0, to approve sending a recommendation for funding the Fall Creek Headwaters conservation easement in the amount of \$35,000.00 to County Council for approval.

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Mr. Smith made a motion, seconded by Mr. Taylor, approved 6 – 0, to approve sending a copy of the final OCCB Evaluation Scoresheet and the OCCB Sec.2-404(b)(4) Findings to County Council with the recommendation for funding and to authorize Ms. Jones to offer a letter of support to the applicants, if requested, with prior approval by County Council.

Ms. Jones noted that she has a draft of the OCCB Sec.2-404(b)(4) and offered all members of the Board a chance to review the document before it is sent to County Council.

Adjourn:

Mr. Keese made a motion, approved unanimously, to adjourn the meeting at 10:45 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Jennifer C. Adams
Clerk to Council & Staff Liaison

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