

**Gullah Geechee Land and Cultural Preservation Task Force  
Meeting Minutes**

May 6, 2019 – 1:00 PM  
Council Chambers – Town Hall

Task Force Members present: Lavon Stevens, Shani Green, Palmer Simmons, Caroline McVitty, Ibrahim Abdul-Malik, Martha Davis

Town Staff present: Jayme Lopko, Jennifer Ray, Carolyn Grant

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- Chairman Stevens called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM.
- The agenda for today's meeting and the minutes from the April 22, 2019 meeting were approved by consent.
- Chairman Stevens discussed the schedule moving forward with the Gullah Geechee Culture Preservation Report and the Task Force recommendations.
- The Task Force discussed each strategy from the Gullah Geechee Culture Preservation Report and stated whether they agreed with the strategy and also recommended changes or additions to several of the strategies. The Task Force also discussed whether each of the strategies would be a short term, mid-term, or long term strategy.
- Attached is the "Gullah Geechee Land & Cultural Preservation Task Force: Response to the Gullah Geechee Culture Preservation Report" that details these discussions.
- Ibrahim Abdul-Malik made a motion to forward their recommendations, including funding requests and prioritization of the strategies, to Town Council for approval. Palmer Simmons seconded the motion and the motion passed 6-0-0.
- Chairman Stevens opened the floor to comments from the public on items unrelated to the agenda and none was received.
- Chairman Stevens adjourned the meeting at 3:04 PM.

Submitted by: Jayme Lopko  
Meeting date: May 6, 2019  
Approved: June 3, 2019

## **Gullah Geechee Land & Cultural Preservation Task Force Response to the Gullah Geechee Culture Preservation Project Report**

### **CULTURAL PRESERVATION**

The Historic Neighborhoods Preservation Administrator (HNPA) should play a role in each of these recommendations whether it be leading the effort, providing education or assistance, or in communication.

The Gullah Geechee Land & Cultural Preservation Task Force (Task Force) recommends that Town Council create an Advisory Committee to work with the HNPA to accomplish these recommendations.

### **Research, Education & Interpretation**

CP-1. Promote the use of the Heritage Library Foundation's resources with the Island's Gullah people to encourage them to research their history and genealogy.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Short Term)*

CP-2. Initiate a major fundraising effort to expand cultural programs that teach traditional Gullah ways and support the physical development of key interpretive sites.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. HNPA should assist the Senior Grants Administrator. (Long Term)*

CP-3. Adapt and expand the interpretive themes from the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (GGCHC) management plan as a framework for Gullah cultural interpretation on Hilton Head Island, and pursue accurate and consistent storytelling.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. This could start with the Town's Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA) but could evolve into something the neighborhoods or community organization can take over. (Long Term)*

CP-4. Develop a self-guided tour of the Island's Gullah sites utilizing multiple methods (hard copy maps, site markers, digital technology, etc.) to supplement existing guided tours so that a broader range of interpretive experiences can be available.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. The OCA should work with HNPA to create. Recommend Town Council provide funding for this (\$25k). (Long Term)*

CP-5. Develop a graphically consistent wayfinding and wayside exhibit system throughout the Island to highlight sites tied to Gullah history and culture and to better orient visitors.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. The OCA should work with HNPA to create. Recommend Town Council provide funding for design (\$5k). (Short Term)*

CP-6. Establish a program for local students to conduct oral history interviews of elderly Gullah citizens to document their way of life in earlier eras before this important information is lost.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. HNPA should lead this effort with assistance from the OCA. Paid training is needed to ensure the story is consistent. Recommend Town Council provide funding for training (\$10k). (Short Term)*

CP-7. Establish a program to educate Town officials, area school teachers, and others on Gullah culture so they can better understand the culture and more effectively interact with the Island's Gullah citizens.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. HNPA should lead this effort with assistance from the OCA and Gullah organizations on the island, not just the Gullah Museum. (Short Term)*

CP-8. Utilize interactive approaches to interpretation to better engage current and potential new audiences, particularly young people.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. HNPA should lead this effort with assistance from the OCA. (Short Term)*

### **Heritage Tourism**

CP-9. Coordinate the promotion of the Island's Gullah-related attractions with state and regional cultural heritage organizations to attract more visitors to the Island's Gullah sites.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. The Chamber's Visitor and Convention Bureau (VCB) should promote more than just the Gullah Celebration. (Short Term)*

CP-10. Promote the Gullah culture and cultural resources more prominently within the Island's overall tourism marketing to attract more visitors to the Island and, in particular, to the Island's Gullah sites.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. The VCB should conduct year-round promotion of the Gullah culture. Recommend Town Council provide funding to the Beaufort County Black Chamber to assist with promotion of Gullah heritage tourism. (Short Term)*

CP-11. Provide technical and financial support to businesses whose products and/or services are strongly tied to Gullah culture to increase their odds of sustained success.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Short Term)*

CP-12. Establish a Gullah authenticity certification program by which businesses with authentic Gullah services and products can utilize an adopted logo that conveys their status as being certified based upon adopted criteria.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Short Term)*

CP-13. Utilize information from the recently-drafted Economic and Fiscal Impact Study for Beaufort County and the Arts & Economic Prosperity 5 report to refine strategies to more effectively promote Gullah heritage tourism for Hilton Head Island.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Short Term)*

CP-14. Establish an open-air market as a pilot program to sell food, arts and crafts tied to Gullah culture as an economic development initiative for the Island's Gullah community.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. HNPA should lead with assistance from NIBCAA and assistance with promotion from the OCA. The HNPA should further discuss this with the Gullah community and Task Force before a location is determined. (Short Term)*

### **Preservation Planning**

CP-15. Conduct a comprehensive inventory of cultural resources related to Gullah history and culture on Hilton Head Island to better accommodate future preservation planning for Gullah history and culture.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. Recommend Town Council provide funding for the comprehensive inventory of cultural resources (\$15k). This may be just an enhancement of what we already have in place. (Long Term)*

CP-16. Prepare a comprehensive and detailed cultural preservation plan for the Island in general, but to include a focus on Gullah historic and cultural preservation, to expand upon the potential preservation benefits of this project.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. Recommend Town Council provide funding for a cultural preservation plan for the Island (\$50k). (Long Term)*

### **Other Issues**

CP-17. Recognize the Island's Gullah-associated churches as an important facet of Gullah culture, particularly regarding leadership and communications, to ensure that they are actively involved in all future Gullah-related initiatives.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Short Term)*

CP-18. Identify an entity to match land owners in the historic Gullah neighborhoods with applicable private developers to increase the land owners' odds of success with selling or developing their property.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation with new wording: Identify a process to match land owners in the historic Gullah neighborhoods with applicable private developers to increase the land owners' odds of success with leasing, developing or selling their property. (Short Term)*

### **Additional Task Force Recommendation**

CP-19. Recognize the Island's Gullah-associated cemeteries as an important facet of Gullah Culture to ensure that they are preserved. *(Short Term)*

## **PUBLIC POLICIES**

The Historic Neighborhoods Preservation Administrator (HNPA) should play a role in each of these recommendations whether it be leading the effort, working with other Town staff, working with other organizations, or in communication.

These recommendations do not apply to heirs' property; however, they can be used as an incentive to encourage families to start the process of clearing title to their property.

### **Development Approval Process**

PP-1. Allow waivers for development application fees and establish a grant program to assist property owners to pay for specific development impact fees for sites within the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. Recommend the LMO be changed to waive application fees for the Overlay District. Recommend Town Council establish a fund to assist primarily single-family applicants of low-income status with impact fees. (Mid Term)*

PP-2. "Fast-track" the review process for development applications within the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District to decrease the land owners' time and costs associated with development.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Mid Term)*

PP-3. Utilize the Town's newly-created Historic Neighborhoods Preservation Administrator position to work closely with property and business owners in the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District to help them navigate Town regulations related to land use, development, and businesses.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Mid Term)*

### **Land Use & Development Standards**

PP-4. Designate a Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District for all delineated historic Gullah neighborhoods that can serve as the vehicle for many of this report's recommendations.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. Staff needs to test design standards to see what could be achieved on Gullah properties. (Mid Term)*

A. Allow higher densities for the RM-4 and MF zoning districts in the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District so that land owners can better leverage their potential land value.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. Impervious coverage and height may need to be evaluated in order to maximize the permitted density. (Mid Term)*

B. Reduce some setback and buffer requirements within zoning districts applied to the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District so that land owners can maximize their development potential.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. Elimination of setbacks and buffers should be included as an option. Setbacks and buffers on access easements are also a problem and should be considered for reduction or elimination. (Mid Term)*

C. Reduce the LMO's open space requirements as applied to the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay Zoning District so that land owners can maximize their development potential.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. This may only be needed if buffers are reduced or eliminated. (Mid Term)*

PP-5. Add Family Compound provisions to the LMO to be applied to the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District to avoid triggering the full range of LMO requirements and fees for small-scaled family "paper subdivisions."

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation with additional opportunities:*

- *To add flexibility, create a waiver from design standards similar to what exists for nonconformities.*
- *Increase the number of lots permitted before a major subdivision required. This would take away infrastructure and open space requirements. Look at possibility of a sliding scale for this. (Mid Term)*

PP-6. Provide greater flexibility for required road ROWs and drainage easements within the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District to make the development of some properties more viable.

*TF Response: Agree with part of this recommendation. There is no negative impact from drainage easements so they should not be included in this recommendation. Right-of-way takes away land and density in already developed areas (ex. where dirt roads exist). Recommend Town Council support changing the LMO to not take away density when property for a right-of-way is donated to the Town. (Mid Term)*

PP-7. Adopt Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) to be applied to the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District to avoid too much development in Gullah neighborhoods, while allowing land owners to benefit financially from their development potential.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Long Term)*

PP-8. Utilize a program to purchase development rights from willing property owners within the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District to preserve ownership of land in historic Gullah neighborhoods, while allowing land owners to benefit financially from their development potential.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. Families will not lose their land and they will receive funding for density sold; however, they will lose that density for future development potential. (Mid Term)*

PP-9. Amend the Town's Design Guide, as applied to portions of the Corridor Overlay District that are within the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District, to better reflect the design tradition of the Gullah culture.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Mid Term)*

### **Property Taxes**

PP-10. Explore the potential to base property values for tax assessment purposes in historic Gullah neighborhoods on the land's current use rather than market value to reduce the tax burden and enhance the ability of owners to retain their property.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Long Term)*

PP-11. Establish a fund to help property owners avoid losing their property to delinquent tax sales as a way to protect Gullah land ownership on the Hilton Head Island.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation. NIBCAA is needed on the island and they can partner with CFL to create this fund. The HNPA should assist with providing information and communication. (Short Term)*

### **Other Issues**

PP-12. Establish a program to educate Gullah residents and others on a wide range of public policy issues that impact their lives, including property taxation, land use and development, and heirs' property so they can prosper more socially and financially.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. Continue the current program and expand as needed. (Short Term)*

PP-13. Ensure that local financial institutions are meeting the requirements of the federal Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) to make loans for economically challenged people and properties to provide greater financial opportunities within the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Long Term)*

PP-14. Establish a program providing temporary and seasonal signs that are compliant with Town regulations to be used within the proposed Historic Gullah Neighborhoods Conservation Overlay District to expand economic opportunities for Gullah residents and businesses.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Mid Term)*

## **HEIRS' PROPERTY**

The Historic Neighborhoods Preservation Administrator (HNPA) should play a role in each of these recommendations whether it be leading the effort, working with other Town staff, working with other organizations, or in communication.

HP-1. Utilize the Heritage Library Foundation as a potential first step for Gullah families toward clearing title to their property to overcome heirs' property issues.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation with a change to the wording: Utilize the Heritage Library Foundation as a potential resource for Gullah families toward clearing title to their property to overcome heirs' property issues. (Short Term)*

HP-2. Leverage a range of local, state and national organizations involved with addressing heirs' property issues to maximize the Island's potential to address the issue.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Mid Term)*

HP-3. Encourage the Center for Heirs Property Preservation (CHPP) to open a satellite office in Beaufort County to make their resources more readily available to Hilton Head Island's Gullah community.

*TF Response: Agree with this recommendation, no change. (Short Term)*

## **Additional Task Force Recommendation**

HP-4. The Task Force recommends that NIBCAA work with the CFL to set up a fund to help pay for the costs of clearing title to heirs' property. *(Short Term)*