

Charleston County
Resilience and Sustainability Advisory Committee (RSAC)
Meeting Minutes
February 27, 2024

ATTENDEES

RSAC: Stewart Weinberg, Scott Curtis, Kyle James, Sally Brooks, Joe Boykin, and Diamond Curry
Absent: Adrian Cain

County Staff: Arielle Gerstein, Karen Burney-Green, Walter Smalls, Sheetal Verma

Fernleaf: Aashka Patel

SSG: Erica Heath, Aisha Mohd Isa, and Yuill Herbert

CALL TO ORDER

Stewart Weinberg called the Charleston County RSAC meeting to order at 9:32 a.m.

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS' REMARKS

- Approved meeting minutes at 9:32 a.m. from February 06, 2024.
 - Motion to approve introduced by Stewart Weinberg. Motion was approved unanimously.

Topics Discussed

- Karen introduced Ashka Patel to provide an update on the Vulnerability Assessment.

Presentation:

Fernleaf: Vulnerability Assessment

Aashka Patel

- Previously, results from the flood assessment were reviewed.
- Since the last vulnerability update, Fernleaf has met with staff twice and conducted the first focus group with community members.
- In addition to the flooding assessment, we now have a property-based wildfire assessment.
 - This includes drivetime and property impact analyses.
- There is also the Extreme Heat Assessment Approach, which is not property based but a neighborhood scale assessment.
 - This combines the urban heat island effect and public health considerations.
 - The underlying assessment is taking into account income as an indicator of the ability to cope with heat.
 - In rural areas, they are not necessarily immune to the effects of heat, so the focus within these areas is the level of education and availability of resources to deal with heat.
- In one of the workshops, Fernleaf was able to collaborate with staff members to determine the topics they wanted to explore further.
- Since the last workshop, Fernleaf has been able to share access to Acceladapt with staff.

- This allows them to access geospatial information.
- Over the next two months, they will need to synthesize key vulnerabilities with the staff (early March) and identify preliminary strategies (late March).
- Community Engagement Update
 - They had great participation from community leaders and CBO staff over the course of the last four workshops, which were in person.
- The first Focus Group in January 2024 was a “meet and greet” session.
 - What does ‘Community’ mean to you?
 - What do you think when you hear ‘Resilience’?
 - What ‘Assets’ are important to your community?
- The second focus group is scheduled for Friday, March 01, 2024.
 - Evaluation of the vulnerability assessment(s)’ quantitative information and what it means for the communities.
 - Flooding information and concepts.
 - Identify information gaps: community lived experiences and complementary data.

Questions:

- Stewart asked if Charleston County has any firefighting possibilities or if they are all local.
- Councilman Boykin explained that there are regional government entities that are like public service districts. James Island and Johns Island have fire districts with brush trucks to fight wildfires. He wasn’t certain of St. Paul, but Awendaw most likely has one that happens to fall under the County rather than a public service district. He also shared that the county has adopted a resolution to support prescribed burning under specified conditions that should help the environment and wildlife.
- Karen will follow up with Aashka on the areas covered by St. John’s, St. Paul’s, and Awendaw in terms of fire districts.
- Aashka shared that this particular information is not captured by the Wildfire Assessment but can be included in the description and interpretation of the results as this is a form of mitigation.
- Councilman Boykin added that the forestry commission had firefighter teams develop fire lanes to deal with wildfires, and he is under the impression that the USR has their own means as well as they engage in prescribed burning in the Francis Marion National Park each year.
- Aashka shared that this information can be useful in managing any oddball cases as wildfires aren’t as common in the area, but the landscape of the County is more managed due to the presence of national forests.
- Karen will provide a copy of the Summary of Assets table from Aashka’s presentation.
- Stewart asked Aashka if he is correct in assuming that Fernleaf is working with other regional organizations or communities who are also looking at the same things that she is, such as the City of Charleston, Berkeley County.

- Karen explained that there is some coordination with the City of Charleston being that they have already completed a vulnerability assessment with Fernleaf.

Presentation:

SSG

Erica Brook & Yuill Herbert

Arielle introduced the premise of the SSG presentation as one focused on how the comments provided by RSAC and the internal working group (staff and representatives from other municipalities) were incorporated into the Climate Action Plan draft, which has been stylistically designed for presentation to County Council next week. There are 53 actions, and the public comments will be focused on these actions.

Yuill:

- A large number of comments were provided regarding the Climate Action draft.
 - They ranged from detailed corrections to thoughtful comments, insights on governance, and insights on initiatives underway.
 - SSG was very careful in incorporating and addressing each comment; only a few were excluded just based on relevance.
- The Climate Action plan for Charleston County has more emphasis on equity than any previous plan due to the growing concern of communities in this respect.
- 53 Actions is substantial, the normal range is less than 20-30, so it is expected that Arielle will require assistance in managing these measures for the County.
- The document was restructured to reflect some of the comments, and the order can be seen in the table contents. This has made it much clearer now.
- There was a correction made to the Financial Contribution section.
 - The IRA Financial Contribution has a window of 10 years, so it wouldn't extend to 2050 for now.
 - The contribution could amount to \$1.2 billion to Charleston County just for households and businesses; this doesn't include municipal grants or tax incentives to businesses; so there's even more money separately available in those categories.

Questions:

- Diamond asked if there were any distinct language changes to the draft to make the information more understandable for the general public.
- Yuill explained that the major barrier to the document is the length, which was addressed through the development of the Executive Summary. As far as the terminology, SSG is open to feedback once everyone has had a chance to read through this initial draft. The document is fundamentally a fairly technical analysis, so there is a bridge there.
- Arielle added that even in reading the Executive Summary, the information was still rather technical. However, she expressed that it will be part of her job to bridge the comprehension gap for the public and Council. She is planning to develop a Frequently Asked Questions page on the website that will make the low carbon pathway understandable and highlight its importance in the 2050 pathway. This should, ideally, address questions as to what the pathway is and what it will accomplish because the communication of scientific ideas is challenging in general. This page will be available some time after Council is briefed on the document.

- Diamond shared that this would be helpful to residents and their connection to the different actions rather than seeing it as a potential cause for tax increases.
- Arielle confirmed that costs and savings are an important part of the Frequently Asked Questions, and substantial emphasis will be placed on costs to the public. This document will be made available to County Council and on the website.
- DCA Smalls asserted the importance of incorporating this information into the larger Strategic Plan and Council's directorate.
- Arielle further explained that she has previously written in plainer, less technical language as to why a Climate Action Plan is being proposed before. The FAQs are a work in progress that will be made available. She is open to suggestions as to what questions everyone thinks Council would like to have answered.
- Councilman Boykin expressed that there should be a fair amount of feedback that can be given after the initial briefing.
- Arielle asked if the FAQs should be given to Council prior to the briefing.
- Councilman Boykin explained that the next step may be giving the Councilmembers an opportunity to read through the Climate Action Plan draft and make comments on the requirements. It is likely that they will have questions/concerns as with the energy element previously, but they may come to Arielle directly to have those questions addressed. He suggested that a bulleted one pager be developed that could distill the information and make it more understandable/manageable for Council and others so that they can delve into the minutia as it interests them. However, it has to be kept in mind that Council may shy away from mandating anything and that this process may take longer than anticipated to reach fuller implementation.
- Stewart suggested that in presenting the Climate Action plan that we address that regardless of what may be thought personally, we can't deny that there are more storms, more extreme heat, etc., and we have conducted a greenhouse gas emissions survey on the following pages. This has led to 53 action plan items that are neither mandated nor required.
- Diamond added to the point that the messaging would need to be adjusted so that, for example, a builder who sees the action item encouraging low carbon considerations in the planning for new municipal buildings doesn't view this as just a source of delay in their work.
- Councilman Boykin reiterated that the messaging is very important, which was made even more apparent in the reading of the Energy Element at the latest County Council meeting. Although the message has to remain consistent, the tone has to be softened to help everyone understand that none of this is mandated or required, but the actions should be comprised of ideals that we collaboratively and jointly work towards.
- Stewart stated that it should be mentioned that the State of South Carolina's Office of Resilience and DHEC are planning to submit a Climate Action Plan for the entire state to the EPA.
- Arielle confirmed that they will be discussing the moves being made in Columbia on behalf of the state and the climate action plan that they've developed.
- Councilman Boykin shared that it's important to stress the importance of Charleston County positioning itself ahead of everyone as much as possible to be first in line for any potential funding/benefits. The Council is always receptive to the possibility of grants.
- Arielle explained that the FAQs will address other areas that are developing climate action plans within the state and the southeast.
- Council Boykin stated that part of what he wants to do is prevent problems before they arise, such as not building in areas that are known to flood. He admires the work that the City of

Charleston has done in addressing flood areas, and if their approach is working, it's best to adopt and implement similar measures rather than trying to reinvent the wheel.

- Kyle asked for a review of the figure that represents the investment in Charleston County [to support the climate action initiatives].
- Yuill displayed figure 3, which show the incremental investment that's required to decarbonize Charleston County. The 'orange' represents the contributions from the IRA, which is about \$200 million a year, and the green shows the payback over the lifetime of the investment, which is the most compelling part. The only way to get the investment from the IRA is to make sure people are aware of the investment and using it.
- Aisha added that they included a narrative in the Climate Action draft that details all the different programs that are already active in the community and at the County level.
- Arielle pointed out that the specific costs that are not directly related to the action items are not listed, which is for the best because it's hard to predict. The City of Charleston used this approach as well.
- Councilman Boykin asked if anyone from the committee has been in communication with the state's Office of Resilience to determine if any federal funds they receive will be distributed to the counties for assistance in implementation or if they will be spending the funds on their own at the state level.
- Stewart explained that there is a possibility that the state may not have the means to do everything in the preliminary climate action plan, and there are additional possibilities for local municipalities to apply for funding.
- Councilman Boykin asked if there was a timeline for the State to put out the statewide plan.
- Kyle explained that there is a priority climate action plan that is due April 1st, and there will be a comprehensive climate action plan that comes after.
- Councilman Boykin asked if it's a possibility to wait until the state releases their plan so that we can compare and build the County's off of it.
- Stewart and Arielle explained that we must have a plan in place and supporting evidence in order to apply for any of the grants that become available, which means that we can't wait for the state plan.
- Walt inquired of our contacts with the State.
- Karen shared that the committee does have a contact with the state, and she plans to make a trip to Columbia to follow up.
- Arielle revisited the discussion of a one-page document being developed with plainer language. She wanted to know if this was something that needed to be given to Council prior to the briefing on March 7th, 2024.
- Councilman Boykin clarified that it's not a document that needs to be developed and disbursed before the March 7th briefing but should be a document that complements the draft. It should give councilmembers a high-level view of what's being discussed and serve as means to capture their attention to read further if they wish. He doesn't want them to get lost in scientific terms or discouraged by the comprehensiveness/length of the draft.
- Walt agreed that this is something that could be worked on for inclusion with the draft.
- Karen asked if it would be better if they completed a blue sheet.
- Councilman Boykin said that wouldn't be needed.
- Arielle confirmed that a one pager could ultimately be used for multiple purposes.
- Yuill shared that there is one more month for public comment, so this will likely lead to a limited set of revisions as well.

- Arielle reminded everyone that there is a Committee Meeting on March 7th, 2024; this meeting doesn't allow public comment, but everyone is still invited to attend so that they can provide any feedback afterwards.
- Yuill explained that there are some responsibilities that won't be assigned to the County.
- Arielle and SSG confirmed that implementation will require a great deal of work so additional staff is likely necessary.
- Councilman Boykin suggested that an additional tab be added to the Climate Action Plan draft so that readers could flip straight to the contents because the Executive Summary is included twice.
- Arielle clarified that this was intentional because the Executive Summary is a part of the complete Climate Action Plan, but an additional copy was included as a standalone document.
- Stewart asked if any work is being done with the other municipalities in discontinuing the use of the thicker plastic bags.
- DCA Smalls shared that the measures are being reviewed by Environment Management, and there should be a meeting in the near future.
- Scott asked if there will be an education push once the Climate Action Plan is approved to raise awareness in the community.
- Arielle shared that climate ambassadors may not be used, but there will be an educational push.
- DCA Smalls added that is it a part of Council's original directive to have community engagement to educate residents on the initiatives.
- Arielle noted for everyone that 90% of the actions are community driven. The county government has a few, but most of the actions are community based; so, their support will be greatly needed.
- Councilman Boykin introduced the question of what percentage of vehicles are currently electric and whether that number/percentage is increasing.
- Arielle and Kyle were able to confirm that the percentage isn't a lot, but it is trending upwards especially in Charleston.
- Yuill presented a website that was able to depict the density of EV usage based on zones of the tri-county. It has been increasing rapidly, which was determined by the sales jumping from 5% to 9% in the past two months. Yuill also took this time to convey his appreciation for this opportunity to work with the RSAC, and he urged everyone to make their voices heard in presenting this information to County Council as it could have an important impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE

This was SSG's last RSAC meeting as their contract ends with the development of the Climate Action Plan. In the upcoming meetings for 2024, Arielle will be seeking everyone's input on prioritizing the implementation of the 53 actions; these will have a duration of 5 years and will not be spread out to 2050.

Next Meeting

TBD

Next Meeting

TBD

CHAIR'S REMARKS

No remarks were offered as this time.

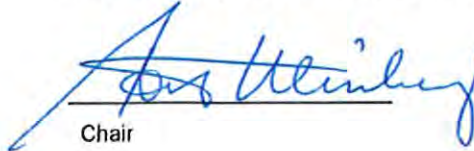
ADJOURNMENT

The Chair, Stewart Weinberg, adjourned the meeting at 11:51 a.m.

Sheetal Verma

County Ratified by the Charleston

Resilience and Sustainability
Advisory Committee
this 4th day of March 2025.


Chair

Attest:

Administrative Officer - Resilience


Signer ID: TCGS7XMQ14...

Administrative Officer - Sustainability

