

## CHARLESTON COUNTY NEWS RELEASE

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### **Greenbelt Advisory Board Reviews Results of Public Workshops** ***Working definition of "greenbelts" receives initial approval***

Charleston County's Greenbelt Advisory Board for the Transportation ("Half-Cent") Sales Tax recently reviewed the summary report on the public workshops held in September.

Workshop attendance totaled 323, with 98 people attending the workshop at the Charleston County Public Service Building in North Charleston, 102 attending at the Mount Pleasant Library, and 123 attending at the John's Island Library.

"The workshops provided opportunities for the public to help shape the future of their communities by voicing their opinions about greenspace for Charleston County," said Louise Maybank, Chairperson of the Greenbelt Advisory Board.

The workshop report summary was presented to the Greenbelt Advisory Board at their Oct. 25 meeting. The report included 348 public comment forms, and included submittals from individuals who were unable to attend the workshops. The majority of individuals who submitted forms, either in person at the workshops or by mail, lived in West Ashley, Mount Pleasant and James Island.

Passive greenspace, Low Country natural resources, and heritage lands were ranked by the public as the top three most important parts of the greenbelts program.

Citizens responded that their top three uses of protected greenspace are wildlife habitat protection, walking and biking, and educational/interpretive parks.

The top three best ways to protect greenspace were "government buys the land," "private trust buys or purchases interest in the land," and "voluntary donation conservation easement". Of those who chose "government buys the land," 36 percent said they'd prefer for Charleston County to purchase the land and 26 percent said they'd prefer for a municipality (town/city) to purchase the land.

Workshop attendees were asked to write comments on various Charleston County maps. Of the 346 comments written on the maps, 34 percent preferred conservation and preservation, 26 percent preferred trail development, and 20 percent preferred bike lanes. Residents in the County's urban areas of the Charleston peninsula, North Charleston, West Ashley and Mount Pleasant said they'd prefer greenspace for trail development, bikeways and sidewalks, while residents in the rural areas said they'd prefer preservation of the native or rural landscapes.

Defining "greenbelt" was a challenge for the Greenbelt Advisory Board. The public provided 72 responses on the working definition, with less than 12 containing substantive changes. The majority of comments indicated the definition was acceptable, or were general comments that repeated what was recorded on the maps. The recommended changes included the addition of the words "wildlife habitat" and "health and wellness."

Responses to the greenbelt definition also reflected two points of view on what the public thought they were approving when they voted for the Transportation Sales Tax. The first viewpoint is that active greenspace should be a major component of the program. The second viewpoint is that the definition of greenbelts should not include boat landings, baseball fields, golf courses, playgrounds, soccer fields, and the like.

Based on the overall acceptance of the definition, the Greenbelt Advisory Board approved the following greenbelts definition that includes the two recommended changes (the definition will remain a “working” definition that can be amended until the greenbelt plan is developed):

For the purpose of the Charleston County Greenbelts Plan, the term *greenbelts* will be used to describe a variety of land types. Greenbelts may include lands in rural, suburban and urban settings. Access to greenbelts varies with the types of land acquired and type of use desired. The various types of greenbelts are listed below. They may include, but are not limited to, their subcategories:

*Passive greenspace:* Trails, greenways, interpretive parks, and access points for water activities, such as fishing, crabbing, boating, etc.

*Active greenspace:* Play fields and parks with low environmental impact

*Low Country natural resources:* Upland forests, swamps, bogs, brackish and freshwater wetlands, Carolina bays, marsh islands, and cypress, backwater, and saltwater marshes

*Productive landscapes:* Lands used for agriculture, silviculture (cultivation of forest trees), and mariculture (cultivation of marine species).

*Heritage landscapes:* Irreplaceable cultural and historical landscapes unique to the County

*Corridors:* Scenic roadways, abandoned rail lines, utility corridors, and scenic waterways

*Natural infrastructure:* Floodplains, wildlife habitat, riparian zones, and lands critical to clean water

*Reclaimed greenspace:* Brownfields, abandoned sites, and other green infill projects

These greenbelts collectively form a protected living system of landscapes that serve the residents, businesses, visitors, and future generations of Charleston County by preserving and improving the health and quality of life for all.

The Greenbelt Advisory Board was created by Charleston County Council to make recommendations on transportation sales tax expenditures for greenbelt projects. For the 2006 fiscal year, \$5.9 million has been budgeted for greenbelts.

Call Cathy L. Ruff at **(843) 202-7204** for more information about the Greenbelt Advisory Board or upcoming meetings. Visit the official Charleston County Transportation Sales Tax Web site at **[www.smallchangeformbigchange.org](http://www.smallchangeformbigchange.org)** for up-to-date news and information, meeting notices, and to view minutes from advisory board meetings for both the greenbelts and transportation portions.