



Community Engagement Council
July 9, 2026
Meeting 9
86 Wentworth Street
(hybrid)

Meeting Minutes

Attendees

Facilitators	Joanna Gilmore, LaSheia Oubre, Clay Middleton
CEC Members * = attended virtually	Harlan Greene, Millicent Brown, Walter Brown, Madison Lee, Jerome Harris, Abigail Dairaghi*, Stephen Cofer-Shabica*, Lisa Jones*, Luqman Rasheed*, James Njonjo, Sharon Ramirez, Jim Newhard*, Norm Dickerson, Jeff Harjo*
Advisors	Omar Muhammad, Demetria Clemons
Consultants	--
Liaison	Courtney Howard
Staff	Mark Berry, Paul Patrick, Christine Mahoney
Invited Guests	--
Other Guests	Paul Garbarini, John Fisher, Tom and Marybeth Orth, Debra Holt, Robert Davis, Darryl J. Fyall (BOT).

- I. Call to order at 6:09pm (Joanna)
 - a. Agenda is to go over ceremonial event, engagement with funeral directors, project updates, and future planning
 - b. Jerome - Motion to move project updates up on the agenda as those updates will inform other items on the agenda
 - i. Seconded by Harlan
 - ii. Approved by voice vote (unanimous)
- II. Project Updates
 - a. Board of Trustees response to CEC's April request for clarification
 - i. Read aloud by Courtney Howard and will be uploaded to the Google Drive
 - ii. Discussion
 1. Walter – the message is “thank you for your input but be reminded that you are advisory only”
 2. Jeff Harjo – no mention of tribal nations in the response that was read *Response*: the letter was a direct response to a letter sent from the CEC to the BOT. That letter did not mention

Native Americans or any other group, so that is why the response did not either.

b. Permitting update and updated project timeline

i. Geo-enabling land disturbance permit diagram provided by Laura Lee Worrell. Current progress is:

1. Former YWCA demolition - approved by BAR
2. PUD height variance – approved by city zoning
3. Former YWCA demolition - approved by state engineering, measured drawings completed and sent to SHPO
4. Land Disturbance Permit
 - a. Work plan version #4 – acknowledged by SHPO
 - b. Coastal Zone Consistency (CZC) – certification approved by SCDES BCM
 - c. MS4 permit – initial city approval
 - d. DES Review of MS4 for NPDES Approval – IN PROGRESS
5. GPR #2 – initial findings presented to CEC
 - a. Awaiting Final Report

ii. Project status and next steps (see slide)

1. Former YWCA demolition is expected to take place by the end of July
2. Meeting with city before LDP issuance, ground disturbance SWPPP (anticipated in August)
3. Abby – can you confirm that the permit conditions have been internally issued, but not the permit itself? *Response:* That is correct.
4. Madison – does the College ask for permission for burial removal before or after public notice? *Response:* we will ask Laura Lee to confirm the order and the timeline for going to the city council. (**Note from Laura Lee:** 30-day notice occurs leading up to the City Council Request.)
5. Walter – what are we still waiting for regarding the Y demolition... What is the item that is keeping the building from being demolished at this point? *Response:* Nothing
6. Lisa – Do remains have to be found in order to go to the City for approval to remove, even though it is known to have been a municipal cemetery? *Response:* we can check that, but it is my understanding that you have to have evidence of human

remains before you go to the City (**Note:** See pages 16-18 of the *Archaeological Work Plans, May 2026*).

7. Jerry – regarding the pre-disturbance ceremony, have the dates been determined based on the approvals that are already in place? No.
8. Abby – in minutes from meeting 8.5, in reference to silt fencing going up prior to the issuance of the Land Disturbance Permit. Abby read the definition of "land disturbing activity" from S.C. Code § 48-14-20 and expressed the view that installation of silt fencing constitutes land disturbance under that definition.
Response from LaSheia: I misspoke. *Additional response from Joanna:* when the building is demolished, for safety a metal fence will be placed on the asphalt surface and held in place by sandbags. The slab will remain in place. This fencing is not the same as the silt fencing allowed in the LDP.
9. James – when does the College go back to the Joint Bond Review Committee again? *Response from Paul:* College has Phase 1 approval, so we need to go back to JBRC and SFAA for phase 2 approval regarding construction budget. We are not at that point, as that review depends on BAR conceptual and other things. The phases are different based on the funding that is authorized to be spent.

iii. Reference to Project Timeline graphic

1. Jerry – what is geo-enabling demolition? *Response:* removal of the asphalt and leveling the ground, once the land disturbance permit is issued.
2. James – who issues that permit? *Response:* That is part of the LDP. The City issues the LDP.

iv. BAR Conceptual Design Outcome

1. The BAR decided to defer the project until additional information can be provided so that archaeology can inform the design
2. Lisa – BAR-L asked the question if they were allowed to consider archaeology in their decision and then went into executive session with attorney. What BAR-L can consider is building design that is appropriate given its surroundings. Historic Preservation referenced Secretary of Interior's standards that take historical context into account.

3. Harlan – BAR meetings are not normally well-attended, but yesterday’s meeting was packed. The public presence there did help sway members of the BAR. It is important that we continue to show up.
4. Jerry – when does the College expect to receive clarification regarding what additional data will trigger additional review/submission? *Response from Paul:* we have not had a chance to connect with BAR staff since yesterday evening’s meeting
5. Jerry – when you receive that information, will the CEC be provided that information from the College? *Response from Paul:* sure
6. Abby – a lot of gray area on wording regarding “approval” and “accepted” This needs to be clarified. *Response:* thank you
- c. The GPR report is pending. We remain in communication with Dr. Harris and are awaiting submission of the report. Once, received, the report will be provided to SHPO for review and concurrence regarding any site location information that should be withheld from public distribution until project completion, consistent with the treatment and disclosure provisions outlined in the project Work Plans.

III. Ceremonial Event

- a. This is a continuation of previous discussion and the CEC motion that passed two weeks ago regarding ceremony prior to land disturbance. We would like the CEC to provide recommendations regarding timing, purpose, participants, and cultural/spiritual elements of the ceremony
- b. Decision point for CEC
 - i. If ceremony is to occur prior to land disturbance, then it needs to be held August 3-8
 - ii. If ceremony can take place after land disturbance, then later date can be selected
- c. Examples of other ceremonial activities
 - i. NY African Burial Ground, Anson Street African Burial Ground, Harlem African Burial Ground, Asylum Hill, Portsmouth African Burying Ground, Eden Cemetery/Morton Collection Return, Native American Repatriation, Oneida Indian Nation/Cornell University repatriation, Caddo ancestral reburial, Wounded Knee/Lakota-associated remains discussions
 - ii. Key takeaways from the different site examples (see slide)

1. Three phases – before ground disturbance, during excavation, laboratory analysis, after analysis

d. Discussion

- i. Abby – asked where was the information about Native Tribes sourced from and questioned whether they adequately reflected the perspectives of Tribal Nations represented on the CEC. *Response from Joanna:* I put this together and will be happy to share sources. Abby – emphasized the importance of consulting directly with descendant and Tribal communities (MCN) regarding appropriate ceremonial practices. *Response from Joanna:* we would be happy to hear that.
- ii. James – what does the College see as the purpose of having a ceremony? *Response:* to memorialize and interpret the site. This came up in earlier discussions and in the initial letter you received
- iii. Jeff Harjo – what is the rush in doing everything by August 3-8? You cannot lump all Tribes in one bucket.
- iv. LaSheia – are we going to honor the ancestors before there is land disturbance should the land disturbance permit be issued?
- v. Harlan, James, etc. – Y will be demolished in July. Land disturbance may be in August.
- vi. Luqman – in order to have a ceremony, we need to meet and plan
- vii. Abby – this is all very rushed. Not moving, digging up, or disturbing would be the best way to respect the ancestors.
- viii. Millicent, James – have concerns about the College saying it wants to honor and respect the ancestors right before wanting to build on top of them. The idea that the entity doing permanent damage and harm to the site is the same entity initiating a ceremony to honor and show respect seems contradictory and insulting
- ix. Millicent – I suggest we think very carefully about the timing of what we think would be an appropriate commemoration
- x. Walter – we heard from the Trustees that the CEC is just advisory. Since we are just advisory, if the CEC says it does not want to do a pre-disturbance commemoration, will the College move forward with a commemoration anyway? This seems to be something that the College wants. This is not something the community is asking for or that the CEC is recommending or suggesting at the August dates that keep coming up.

- xi. Harlan – It's interesting that we are just advisory, and now all of a sudden, we are given the power to do something. *Response from Joanna*: noted that the College had accepted or partially implemented 21 of the Council's 23 recommendations and suggested this demonstrated that the Council's recommendations had influenced the project. *Additional response from Clay*: reminder that the notion of the CEC being advisory and the focus on commemoration are not new ideas and both were included in the initial letter you received from President Hsu.
- xii. James – does the College feel like a ceremonial event pre-disturbance is an essential element of the process in community engagement? If so, then the dates not matter. *Response*: there could be something honorable and small soon, and then something larger later
- xiii. Abby – the College has put all of us in the CEC in a catch-22 position. If we say yes to a ceremony, then the College says that the CEC is all in. If the CEC says no, then the College says that the CEC does not want to honor the ancestors. *Response*: the College has not said that the CEC approves the disturbance because that was the College's decision. If any College representative here wants to clarify anything that has been said, then they are welcome to.
 - 1. Paul – It has been clear that the College has been seeking a land disturbance permit. When we get that permit then we will continue the process and move to archaeology. If the CEC is not ready to make a decision on a ceremony, then that's fine. The College will continue to follow the process.
- xiv. Luqman – the College has continued to follow an iterative process. This is a done deal. We can't stop this process, so I will agree with La'Sheia to have a smaller ceremony and then plan a larger one for the community.
- xv. Harlan – there is the possibility that we can protest. We don't have to limit it to a memorial or honoring service. This body can also protest.
- xvi. Jim (comment in the chat) – The university goes in with eyes wide open knowing this is a former burial ground. What is the proper prayer?
- xvii. Millicent – I don't want us to go on record of saying that we don't want to have a ceremony to honor the ancestors.
- xviii. La'Sheia – are we saying that we do not want anything before the building comes down?

- xix. James – is there a situation where the College would delay the building demolition. *Response:* No
- xx. James - Would the College delay the land disturbance. Is a pre-disturbance ceremony honoring the ancestors a necessary part of the process? *Response from Mark:* I can't speak for President Hsu or the BOT. I understand the catch-22. This is not tacit approval. The College may have its own event that would not incorporate the CEC. The College has been in communication with other organizations regarding potential commemorative activities.
- xxi. Lisa – Here are the options that I think we have as a group: (a) sure let's plan (b) small one now, big one later, (c) no, because we don't believe the site should be disturbed, (d) the CEC decides what the CEC wants with the understanding that the College is going to do what it wants with this project. I want to ensure that this group gets the best outcome possible for commemoration for this space.
- xxii. James – how does a blessing work for a temporary resting place? *Response:* you can have more than one blessing
- xxiii. Jim – In Joanna's research, most the examples were from sites that accidentally discovered remains. Is there an example of a site where the remains were known to be there in advance? Another response is to make a motion to ask the College to defer land disturbance until a proper ceremony can be planned. *Response:* No example that suits us exactly—Harlem African Burial Ground, which was previously a Bus depot where the community and archaeologists are working together prior to development, and Asylum Hill may be useful examples.
- xxiv. Jim – most of the examples that were shared involve remains being discovered inadvertently. This is a different situation. In those examples, there was community buy-in and engagement. What are the proper prayers? There is a spiritual difference here.
- xxv. Jerome – in the minutes from the last meeting, there is a specific motion that was passed by the CEC concerning postponing any ceremony until it can be properly planned, even with a land disturbance permit
- xxvi. Walter – In May, I remember that it was said that the building would not come down until the land disturbance permit was approved. Tonight we are being told that the building can come down prior to the

LDP. Which is it? *Response:* the building can come down before the LDP

- xxvii. Walter – if you get permission to do ground disturbance, then of course you want to do a blessing, and get input from indigenous communities, and have educational programs (pros and cons),
- xxviii. Harlan – we want the students to be here, so August 5-8 is not a good time. This building will be built for them, so they should be involved
- xxix. Walter – what was key to that motion that passed during the last meeting was that this ceremony is to be planned with the CEC
- xxx. James – what was the response to the motion we made? *Response:* the timeline was moved from July 11 to August 5-8
- xxxi. Clay – Suggestions we have heard today: (1) No to holding a blessing (2) Yes to holding a blessing, and (3) hold a small one now and a larger one later
- xxxii. Madison – is the goal to have an answer today on timing and whether we are doing this? This is a really important topic that deserves more time and care. If we are asked to make a decision tonight, that speaks to the fact that this very rushed.
- xxxiii. Clay – The YWCA is coming down this month. It is not land disturbance. There will be no blessing before the Y comes down. If the LDP is issued in late July as anticipated, then August 3-8 is the proposed new timeframe for a blessing prior to land disturbance
- xxxiv. Harlan – is the College planning any sort of groundbreaking ceremony? I know the College has a golden shovel. *Response:* that type of groundbreaking ceremony would happen after archaeology is complete.
- xxxv. James – the next CEC meeting is August 6 to plan a ceremony that is supposed to take place August 3-8?
- xxxvi. Harlan – would people be comfortable with a sub-committee to work on planning
- xxxvii. Luqman – Black Student Union and other bodies of similar interest should be involved in planning a ceremony
- xxxviii. Harlan – does the CEC want a ceremony August 3-8? Charleston Orphan House is also a descendent community
- xxxix. Sharon – I wasn't asked to be on a subcommittee, but I would love to be on one. I have learned a lot during my time at the College. I think we should consider a separate space that is created for the community—grant writers, and other community members as a

community-building project. I would like to have that conversation, but not tonight. Let's not put all of our focus into what we are talking about right now.

- xl. Harlan – if we have a sub-committee, maybe we can call on religious studies faculty to assist
- xli. Lisa – it seems to me that we are all in agreement that we are not in favor of having the ceremony in the immediate timeline. And maybe have a motion to establish a subcommittee to work on planning.
- xl. James – Question to the advisors, since the LDP is coming from the DES, how does the DES view the CEC (advisory or stronger mandate)?
Response from Omar: CEC is not part of the stormwater management permit that DES will issue.
- xl. Millicent – moving forward, we need to be more careful that major activities and discussions are not happening when students are not around
- xl. Norm – is there anyone against having a blessing or commemoration? Do we want to do it on a different timetable so that students can be there? Do we want a sub-committee?
- xl. Abby – Muscogee (Creek) Nation will not be participating in a ceremony because these ancestors already had their ceremony back in the day and we don't want to be disrespectful and make anything up for the ancestors up who are already in the ground.
- xl. Luqman – for Muslims, we have a tradition to give a ceremony of proper respect if someone was buried without one
- xl. Luqman – I agree with having a ceremony when students are present; a smaller ceremony first and then larger
- xl. Jerome – ground disturbance ceremony could be accompanied by broader community education/dialogue and student engagement about the site. In that context, I would be more comfortable. I support the sub-committee context.
- xl. Lisa – I want to clarify that I think everyone's participation is important and a subcommittee would be useful given the College's timeframe for a ceremony. The more inclusive the better. I think we all agree that the timeline is rushed.
- l. Millicent – I'd like to offer up that we plan symposium/open community forum at which some ceremonial practices may be incorporated. The emphasis can be more educational in nature (the

process, substance of the project) with some ceremonial aspects incorporated.

- li. Harlan – Once the LDP permit is issued and ground disturbance is in progress, would anybody be allowed on site to hold a ceremony there? *Response*: the site has to be seeded with grass. Will need to check on that.
- lii. Joanna – summary of discussion
 - 1. Student presence is important
 - 2. Form a sub-committee to research religious/spiritual perspectives
 - 3. Educational elements
 - 4. Not August 3-8
- liii. LaSheia - Does anyone agree with August 3-8? No
- liv. LaSheia –
 - 1. Sub-committee deadlines - By next CEC meeting (Aug 6)– need roster of subcommittee members, including non-CEC members
 - a. James, Jerome - Will the College delay land disturbance until the ceremony can be planned? *Response from Paul*: I hear you, but we can't wait until August 6 to name the committee and then encounter delays with them starting their work
 - b. Harlan – the timetable says archaeology is to begin in October. Can the ceremony take place prior to archaeology. *Response from Paul* – we will do what we can.
 - c. Abby – as a reminder, noted that planning at Asylum Hill extended over multiple years, including discovery of remains in 2012, exhumations beginning in 2019, subsequent state legislation, and state funding for exhumation efforts. She contrasted that process with the comparatively short planning timeframe available to the CEC.
 - d. Luqman – this is an iterative process
 - e. LaSheia – we will send an email to send out for subcommittee volunteers and suggestions
 - f. Jerome – how/when we be notified when the demolition of the YWCA is about to happen? *Response from Mark*:

the CEC will get the same notification as the community/campus, usually based on road closure. Jerome – but as an advisory group, we should have the courtesy of special consideration. *Response:* understood.

- g. Harlan - Motion to form a subcommittee as expeditiously as possible to plan a ceremony to be held on a date determined by the CEC and give a report on protocols and ideas at the next meeting and that other experts can be part of that subcommittee
 - i. Seconded by Norm
 - ii. Approved by voice vote (unanimous)

Discussion Summary: *Members expressed a range of perspectives regarding a pre-archaeology commemoration. While there was broad agreement that the individuals buried at the site should be honored with dignity and respect, several members reiterated their continued opposition to the proposed disturbance of the burial ground. Some expressed concern that planning or participating in a ceremony could be perceived as endorsing the proposed development, while others viewed commemoration as an opportunity to acknowledge the site's significance regardless of differing views about the project. Members also expressed concern that the proposed timeline did not provide sufficient opportunity for thoughtful planning, student participation, descendant engagement, and broader community involvement. Following discussion, the CEC voted unanimously to establish a subcommittee to develop recommendations for a pre-archaeology commemoration that would address these concerns and report back to the full Council.*

- lv. Madison – note from Patty Ploehn recusing herself from the CEC due to conflict of interest with her job. She will send a note to the CEC tomorrow.
- lvi. Meeting adjourned 8:17pm (LaSheia)

Note: *Due to time constraints, the remaining agenda items were deferred to a future meeting. One member requested an additional meeting to address the remaining agenda items. The unfinished items will be carried forward to the next scheduled meeting.*