



Community Engagement Council
June 23, 2026
Meeting 8.5
Virtual

Meeting Minutes

Attendees

Facilitators	LaSheia Oubre
CEC Members	Lisa Jones, Patty Ploehn, Abigail Dairaghi, Madison Lee, Sharon Ramirez, Jerome Harris, Lisa Jones, Walter Brown, Luqman Rasheed
Advisors	Judge Arthur McFarland, Omar Muhammad, Demetria Clemons
Consultants	--
Liaison	Courtney Howard
Staff	Mark Berry, Christine Mahoney, Laura Lee Worrell
Invited Guests	Jay White (Liollio) and colleague
Other Guests	Jeff Harjo, Graham Glaab, Kevin Sack, Lance Eubanks, Savannah Waters, Kayla Z, James Deese, Sarah Cox-Stewart, Carolina Chaves, Sue Steed

- I. Call to order at 6:17pm (LaSheia)
 - a. Apologies for the technical difficulties
 - b. Today's meeting is to continue the agenda items from our previous meeting
- II. New Business
 - a. Laura Lee - Supplemental responses were sent to the CEC and comments from SHPO on work plan (version #4) were provided. Any questions?
 - i. Several CEC members indicated that they had not received this information
 - ii. Clarification that this information was already included in the May work plan update but was extracted as a separate document for easy access to CEC members
 - iii. This information will be sent out again via email after the meeting
 - b. Liollio presentation for Board of Architectural Review (BAR) conceptual review for new construction (Jay White)
 - i. Presentation of the document that will be shared at the July BAR meeting

- ii. Jay is a 14-year veteran of the BAR; what will be shared addresses only what is within the scope of the BAR--height, scale, mass, general architectural direction, and general aesthetics
- iii. Brief run-through of slides showing
 - 1. Community engagement process
 - 2. Maps and diagrams depicting the site in relationship to the city and campus
 - 3. Site photographs
 - 4. Sanborn fire insurance maps (historic maps)
 - 5. History of the YWCA (required per city ordinance)
 - 6. Documentation of the existing building (HABS-like surveys)
 - 7. Salvaged items of historical value
 - 8. Allowable building heights per zoning
 - 9. Material palette of historic Charleston– materials, colors, scale
 - 10. Pedestrian movement
 - 11. Overall master plan – two-phase site development
 - a. Phase 1 building (600 beds)
 - b. Phase 2 building (400 beds) – fronting Vanderhorst
 - c. To be a surface parking lot for the time being
 - 12. Surface materials
 - 13. Massing
 - 14. Concepts of the commemorative exhibits – Liollo is not proposing the design of the commemoration, as that will be handled by another expert
 - a. Renderings of how the site might speak to the legacy of the YWCA
 - b. Renderings of how the site might address the burial ground
 - c. The sculpture in the drawing is just a place holder and not the actual design of the sculpture
 - d. Winding path leading to contemplative space
 - 15. Massing and scale diagrams (4-story façade, 7-story rear structure)
 - a. Unlikely that 8 stories will be approved by the BAR
 - b. Diagrams of existing buildings with base, middle, and top to show different types of massing and scale
 - 16. Material and color palette
 - 17. Mid-century modern, flat roof,

18. Drawings of different elevations as required by the BAR

19. Renderings/visualizations of different views

iv. Discussion

1. Luqman – was the community involved in selecting the artifacts to be kept from the YWCA building? *Response:* that was handled through the state permitting process. General thought is if it seems valuable, then keep it. Much of the interior and exterior of the building were in poor condition and bricks made during that era are hard to separate from the mortar.

2. Luqman – I understand that removing the mortar can be hard, but salvaging some for the commemoration space is important.

3. Jerome – what is the purpose of this presentation to the BAR? *Response:* to gain the first of three stages of approval of the architectural proposal (height, mass, footprint, overall architectural style). Additional reviews will go into more detail on materials, etc.

4. Jerome – will any of these approvals have any bearing on request for demolition? *Response:* No, separate process

5. Sharon – Is there going to be some additional space and thought on what could be added? You are the designers, not just construction manager, correct? *Response:* Yes, Liollo is just the architect. The College has selected a construction manager. We are mindful of student safety concerns, but we endeavor to keep the commemorative space open to the public and don't want any of this to be kept behind a locked door.

6. Walter – please reiterate the BAR's three-step review process. *Response:*

- a. Conceptual review (height, scale, mass)
- b. Preliminary review (specific materials and construction details)
- c. Final review (remaining details, questions, BAR stipulations, etc)

7. Walter – is salvaging brick completely off the table because it is a very tedious process? *Response:* the College can talk to the

demolition crew about saving brick fragments, but the brick will be fragile

8. Luqman – will any of the material in the commemorative space come from West Africa? *Response:* it certainly could, and that is something the College could stipulate in its request for proposals to artists. Liollo is not designing the commemorative space, but is creating a space for it.
9. Patty – any movement on identifying an artist, group, or design firm to work on the burial ground commemoration? *Response:* not yet. Until the building gets conceptual approval, we won't know what space will be needed. *Additional response from Mark:* we want the CEC to help suggest artists or design firms
10. Patty – working on monument across the street about the enslaved that built the Cathedral Church of St. Luke & St. Paul
11. Luqman – statue in front of the building is not actually what will be there, correct? *Response:* it's just a placeholder for what could be there.
12. Luqman – could community artists design the statue?
Response: it depends on the qualifications that the College decides to put in the RFP.
13. Jerome – are there massing restrictions from the BAR?
Response: the legal purview of the BAR is what is visible from the street. Office of State Engineer has authority of construction permit.
14. Walter – what is the interval between BAR approvals?
Response: depends on the pace of our work, but generally a few months apart
15. Lisa – Is there any possibility of elevating the structure recognizing the sensitivity of what's underneath? *Response:* it was discussed in earlier planning, but there are pieces of the building's function and program that have to be at grade. Because it's a PUD, it has to be mixed use and some of those elements (grab and go, lobby, security vestibules) work best at ground level. Lisa – is it so far long that it's impossible to revisit? *Response –* nothing is impossible but the scope of the foundations is extensive. Making the building taller to not use/minimize the ground floor will actually make the foundations have to be even more extensive. We are trying to

find other ways to commemorate the site without taking that drastic step

c. Predisturbance Blessing and Community Recommendations (LaSheia)

i. Purpose of this discussion is to provide the College with recommendations on any ceremonies that should take place prior to ground disturbance

ii. July 11 is proposed date of a ceremony

iii. Examples of types of ceremonies that could take place, such as with Anson Street

1. Naming ceremony
2. Egungun masquerade
3. Watoto dancers
4. Keepers of the Word Native American group
5. Imam call to prayer
6. And more

iv. The College wants to have pre-blessing before any machinery is brought onto the site. Is that something that is favorable?

1. Walter – July 11 is too premature; need more time to plan
2. Jerome – who is proposing this? How have descendent community been involved in selecting these elements?

Response: these are just examples of what was done on Anson Street

3. Abigail – does that mean that machinery will go on site on July 12? *Response:* soon after, silt fencing will be installed. There will be no ground disturbance until the land disturbance permit is granted

4. Walter – is there a pre-disturbance permit granted? *Response:* no. Walter – so why ask for a pre-ceremony. It's unfortunate that the CEC is only advisory, but if we are going to be partner, I suggest the College slow down a bit. Should not be rushed and haphazard just to meet the goals of the College

a. Multiple CEC members indicated support audibly and via Zoom chat and emoji features

5. LaSheia – College wants to have some sort of ceremony before any work needs to be done

6. Jerome – what about counsel from the descendant communities? The College, in its desire to move forward,

needs to be more collaborative. No considering, or seeking, advice is problematic. The process is problematic. This was not on the agenda.

7. Luqman – the problem is that the College is always back and forth, never a pause. Regarding the ceremony, I see an imbalance of Islam, Christianity perspectives.
8. LaSheia – July 11 was the suggested date from the College. Are we saying we do not want to have a pre-blessing?
9. Walter – will there be heavy machinery on that site prior to the permit being granted? *Response:* No
10. Walter – where did this July 11 date come up. *Response:* silt fencing needs to be put up
11. Abigail – who issues the ground disturbance permit?
Response: City of Charleston
12. Abigail – are we expecting to receive that by July 11? *Response from Laura Lee:* silt fencing is land disturbance and cannot be put up until the permit is granted. I am not sure where the July 11 date came from
13. Walter – is silt fencing considered ground disturbance?
Response: silt fencing is part of the land disturbance permitting process (LDP).
14. LaSheia – what I am hearing is that we don't want a July 11 blessing before anything is done
15. Walter – I am hoping the College, in partnership with the CEC, will have a blessing of the ground before anything takes place, however I am curious about whether or not the College is going to respect the partnership of the CEC to design and plan a blessing prior to land disturbance. To come up with a July 11 date is premature and rushed, particularly if the silt fencing is land disturbance and you don't even have the land disturbance permit
16. LaSheia – then can we agree that at our July meeting we can extensively discuss the blessing ceremony
 - a. Patty – I want to distinguish the concept between navigating the legal permitting process and what communities are saying about spiritual practices; need to proceed with sensitivity because the intention for this site is not 100% commemoration; what does it mean to

bless this land knowing that the next steps are disturbance?

b. Jerome – I suggest that you seek consultation with the advisors on how to structure that conversation. One of the challenges is that the expertise that exists in this group is not being utilized. It may not be that break out into groups is the best approach.

c. Walter – will the College work with the CEC to postpone any land disturbance until such time that the CEC and College plan together a program to bless the site?

Response – will check into that

d. Jerome – suggestion to put that into a motion

e. Motion by Walter

i. That the College of Charleston, in partnership with the CEC, postpone any land disturbance, even with a land disturbance permit, until a blessing of the site can be planned

1. Seconded by Jerome

2. Approved by roll call (unanimous)

III. Reflection/Closing Discussion (Madison)

a. At the last meeting, we all witnessed the resignation of a member due to ethical and moral dilemma and conflicts with personal values. We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that what we are doing is hard and we are contemplating some difficult topics. We don't have to be here, but we want to be here because we care.

b. If nobody has anything to add, another concern is the communication shuffle; we often don't have the information to share with others who ask us for information until the last minute. Please keep in mind that information is not just for us, but for us to be able to share with others in the community

Response: we are posting on the Coming Street Commons site, and please let us know if you have other suggestions of places for us to post

c. Madison – it would be helpful to have the minutes publicly available on the website. Sometimes people want to reflect on the minutes, but they are not there

d. Jerome – I was not at the June meeting and there were agenda items listed (website updates, community engagement framework, community outreach beyond the CEC, and community survey planning) that did not appear in the

minutes and did not make tonight's agenda *Response*: We did not get to those agenda items at the last meeting. *Additional response from Mark*: Joanna was going to present on that but she is traveling and not able to be here, so will make the July meeting.

- e. Jerome- we did not actually address Madison's initial concern, so how do acknowledge the members' service? This is emotional and hard work. We need some healing
- f. Patty – if the CEC does something, it should be CEC only (no public, no CofC staff) for open conversation/safe space. CEC, would you all like to meet informally outside of our regular, formal meeting to discuss and spiritually process these discussions?
 - 1. Walter – interested; a non-retreat retreat
 - 2. Jerome – let's take this conversation off-line
 - 3. Luqman – I agree
- g. Jerome – Charleston City Council Community Development Committee meeting on June 25 at 3pm (City Hall chambers and virtual) to discuss how the city addresses concerns regarding sites with burial grounds. Anyone wanting to speak at that meeting has until 12noon to indicate so on the City's website. Comments can also be submitted.

IV. Upcoming meetings

- a. CEC: July 9 at 6pm. Location TBD
- b. CEC: August 6, Sept 3
- c. BOT: August 20-21
- d. BAR: July 8 at 4:30pm (2 George St.)

V. Meeting adjourned at 7:41pm (LaSheia)