



Community Engagement Council
August 6, 2026
Meeting 10
86 Wentworth Street
(hybrid)

Meeting Minutes

Attendees

Facilitators	Joanna Gilmore, LaSheia Oubre, Clay Middleton
CEC Members * = attended virtually	Sharon Ramirez, Walter Brown*, Jim Newhard, Joshua Shumak, Abigail Dairaghi*, Eric Manning, Harlan Greene, Stephen Cofer-Shabica*, Lisa Jones*, Norm Dickerson, Millicent Brown, Luqman Rasheed, Jalen Evans, Jerome Harris*
Advisors	Omar Muhammad, Demetria Clemons
Consultants	--
Liaison	Courtney Howard
Staff	Mark Berry, Christine Mahoney, Paul Patrick
Invited Guests	Darryl Fyall, Sandra Upchurch
Observers	Paul Garbarini, Mary Beth Orth, Tom Orth, Georgette Rivera, Easton Long, (student), Chris Judge, Victoria Hansen (SCETV).

- I. Call to order at 6:03pm (Joanna)
 - a. Welcome
 - b. Jim – request for unanimous consent to move Project Updates to the first item of business
 - i. Response: out of respect for those who have sent in concerns by the agreed upon deadline and to facilitate discussion of all agenda items, the facilitators have decided to maintain the current agenda
 - ii. Eric – if we are going to follow Robert’s Rules of Order strictly, then we need to agree to suspend the rules allowing agenda changes during the meeting. If we are not going to follow Robert’s Rules of Order, then we need to agree to that.
 - iii. Harlan – I respect this position, but also encourage facilitators to stick with the time limits noted on the agenda
 - iv. Millicent – it seems that there are things under New Business that really relate to Old Business, so that may be a point of confusion
 - v. No vote was taken

II. Old Business

a. Site Commemoration Event (pre-archaeology)

- i. Presented by Omar Muhammad and Sharon Ramirez
- ii. Subcommittee is now referred to as a working group – the Burial Ground Commemoration and Memorialization Task Force.
- iii. Proposed event details
 1. Date: Saturday October 10
 2. Oct 3 was preferred with Oct 10 as a rain date, but proposed location is not available on Oct 3
 3. Location: CofC School of Natural and Environmental Sciences building (Calhoun St)
 4. Likely to be a 4-6 hour event
 5. Components:
 - a. Education
 - b. Archaeology
 - c. Basic overview of the project
 - d. History of the site and YWCA
 - e. Student perspectives
 6. Commemoration
 - a. Call to prayer representing different faith traditions
 - b. Libations
 7. Music (ideas include community choir, Oscar Rivers, Harambee dancers, drummers, etc.)
 8. Self-reflection
 - a. Participants asked to bring flowers to lay
 9. Potential speakers for educational sessions include Bernie Powers, Nic Butler, LaVanda Brown from YWCA, Harlan Greene
- iv. Sandra Upchurch (working group member) invited to speak – this is just the first event of many as this is intended to be an ongoing commemoration
- v. Discussion
 1. Who is on the committee? *Response:* 14 community members, including 2 CEC members and 1 advisor
 - a. Julia Eichelberger
 - b. Debra McDaniel
 - c. Ervin McDaniel
 - d. Robert Davis

- e. Debra Holt
 - f. Michelle English Watson
 - g. Sharon Ramirez (CEC)
 - h. Alfreda Brown
 - i. Saundra Upchurch
 - j. Clifton Polite
 - k. Omar Muhammad (CEC advisor)
 - l. Quiwani Primus
 - m. Audrey Lisbon
 - n. Joshua Shumak (CEC)
2. How were these people selected? *Response:* They volunteered after calls for volunteers went out via various email listservs. Reminder that CEC members were asked to volunteer and submit recommendations for this subcommittee.
 3. Why weren't CEC members invited? *Response:* The invitation was sent to CEC members in the same email containing the July 9 meeting minutes
 4. Millicent – concern that communication may not have been sufficient to reach individuals in the community who also want to be at the table. What is the College doing to broaden community engagement? *Response:* the subcommittee is one way that the College is attempting to broaden community engagement
 5. Harlan – this process is meant to be ongoing, so there will be future opportunities for others to get involved
 6. Jim – the motion calls for expeditious convening of a subcommittee, for the subcommittee to give a report at the CEC's August meeting, and for the CEC to select the date. This report exceeds what the motion calls for.
 7. How was the date selected? *Response:* To avoid conflicts with MOJA and to be mindful of the time needed to plan and communicate the plans
 8. Jalen - Concern that Oct 10 is Fall Break and students will not be present
 9. Millicent – thought that the CEC would hear ideas that the subcommittee is exploring, and the CEC would be given the opportunity to vote up or down their ideas. Now it seems this group is making decisions and moving forward.

10. Facilitator - What other ideas does the CEC have?
 - a. Jalen - hold it on a date when students can participate and give the student groups the opportunity to help advertise the event. Who will be responsible for advertising this event—CEC or the College? Suggests October 17 or 24.
 - b. Millicent – did not understand that the education component would be at the same time as the honoring ceremony. There should be discussion about whether these two should be merged.
11. Motion from Jim to remand ideas back to the working group for further development, with concerns noted about the legitimacy of a ceremony involving the university and the community (no second was heard and no vote was taken)
12. Harlan – the committee should bring back more ideas at the next meeting
13. Eric – if we formed a subcommittee to do the work, then we have empowered the subcommittee to make recommendations and we say yeah or nay. Otherwise, we will keep kicking the can down the road and nothing gets done, which is even worse. Time is of the essence, and we want to ensure that something gets done before it's too late. Progress is still happening.
14. Joshua – College is required to have a CEC. If the CEC is not deciding anything, then they can move forward
15. Millicent – if you look at what our mission is as a CEC as an advisory group, the College does not have the right to move forward. The CEC has been asking for legitimate deliberation time and that has not been able to happen. Some of the advice we have been giving is “slow down” because you don't even have the permit yet and there are state regulations that the College has yet to meet.
16. Facilitator - Reminder of the scope of work of the CEC from its inception. Commemoration and funeral homes are not new discussion topics. The working group was formed because we could not get consensus at the last meeting. Ideas that have been brought forward in this conversation:
 - a. New date (Oct 17 or Oct 24)

- b. Social media engagement/advertising
 - c. Luqman wants to join the next meeting of the working group
17. Harlan – could that meeting be open on Zoom so that others who want to participate can do so?
18. Recommendations to the subcommittee
- a. Jim - Focus on the people and not the project so this does not seem to sanction or not sanction the university's plan. *Response:* the committee members agreed to the following:
 - Keep the dignity of those buried at the site at the center of our discussions.
 - Listen with openness and respect.
 - Make space for quieter voices.
 - Speak from your own experiences and perspectives.
 - Assume good intentions while welcoming thoughtful disagreement.
 - Seek common ground where possible.
 - Recognize that participation on this subcommittee does not imply support for or opposition to the proposed development.
 - b. Sandra – the whole purpose of this event is to honor the people who are in the ground and who did not get that honoring upon their death; once the College gets their permit, they can start land disturbance and there won't be time to plan this type of event
 - c. Eric – requests to be added to the subcommittee. Let us please get this opportunity to heal the larger community. This is important and we don't want to miss this opportunity.
 - d. Sharon – on the committee, we were throwing out ideology; I never once thought this was permanent. Let's continue with this positiveness.
 - e. Jalen – reconsider the idea of having education as part of this and focus on healing and honoring. Suggests doing the education piece as a separate event because

it might be contradictory or confusing to do both together

- f. Eric – I agree. We want to focus on the healing, and the education piece may cause confusion and debates that may overshadow the healing
- g. Harlan – the education piece can happen at a neighborhood church rather than at the College
- h. Luqman – what do we mean by education? Response from Jalen – education in this case refers to the education about the project
- i. Eric – this is my area of expertise. I am the pastor of Mother Emanuel and have been healing communities for a long time. Writing a ceremony for healing is in my wheelhouse.
- j. Luqman – what about the Muslim perspective?
Response from Eric - An ecumenical ceremony is what is most appropriate
- k. Jim – what I am hearing is conciliation not reconciliation in honoring the people who were there. Educational history about the site and discussion about the project is not appropriate for this commemoration event
- l. Sandra – I am hearing that the CEC is recommending to only honor the site and that the educational session should not be paired with the honoring on the same day.
- m. Jalen – suggestion that the task force share proposed ideas with the CEC prior to the next meeting so the discussion can be shorter
- n. Millicent – the commemoration cannot be sponsored by the College because the College is not an appropriate institution to honor the site due to its plan to build on the site
- o. Joanna – is this not what reparations are? Institutions recognizing the harm they have done and then using their resources to pay back
- p. Eric – let's not call it blessing, but rather homage, honoring, or remembering. Are we going to honor the bodies or not?

- q. Millicent – one of the issues we want the subcommittee to consider is how they market to the community the honoring of the site and the bodies who are there, and to not confuse the public into thinking the College honors the bodies. Don't send contradictory messages.
- r. Norm – CEC recommends separating and only honoring the bodies. No educational sessions.

III. Funeral Director Engagement (Joanna)

- a. College is seeking input from the CEC regarding trusted funeral directors and considerations that should guide their selection
- b. Invitation to add to the list that has been provided
- c. Jim – is the College looking for funeral home recommendations or criteria that are important to the CEC? *Response: both*
- d. Millicent – we do not know about the technical standards for handling human remains so how can we help provide names of funeral directors? We are doing this backwards.
- e. Harlan – I would want to know if they have experience with multicultural concerns? What about the funeral directors who worked on the Anson Street project?
- f. Walter – the statement of “trusted” funeral director is subjective. Also, the work plan speaks of project-specific requirements, so what are those requirements? *Response: the following statement was read aloud:*
“All funeral directors considered for engagement on Project 205 will be required to maintain all applicable South Carolina licensure and operate in accordance with the standards and requirements established by the South Carolina Board of Funeral Service. Licensure and disciplinary history may be verified through the Board's public resources: <https://www.llr.sc.gov/fs/> . In addition, any facilities utilized for the care or storage of human remains associated with the project would be required to meet all applicable legal and professional standards, including the requirements outlined in the Archaeological Work Plan and relevant standards governing the curation and care of archaeological materials.
The College will procure funeral director services in accordance with applicable State of South Carolina procurement laws, regulations, and policies. Information regarding state procurement requirements can be found at <https://www.procurement.sc.gov/>. The specific procurement approach has not yet been finalized.

At this time, the College is seeking community input regarding the qualifications, experience, and characteristics that should be considered when evaluating potential funeral directors for this work. While the procurement and ultimate selection must comply with state procurement requirements, the College welcomes feedback from CEC members and others regarding factors that may be important to the community. For example, the College is interested in understanding whether considerations such as a funeral home's ties to the local community, proximity to the project area, years of service, experience working with historic or archaeological human remains, familiarity with Lowcountry burial traditions or certain spiritual or religious practices, or other qualifications should be weighed as part of the evaluation process.

With respect to the role of the funeral director, the College currently anticipates that the selected firm would serve as the licensed professional responsible for activities that legally require funeral director oversight and would help coordinate the respectful care, transportation, storage, and eventual reinterment of human remains, as appropriate and consistent with applicable laws, professional standards, and project requirements.”

- g. Walter – asks that the statement that was read be provided to the CEC; the applicable procurement rules have not been shared
- h. Harlan – the CEC is only advisory and it’s too early to discuss funeral director
- i. Luqman – workplan references a “project” funeral director. Is that person different than other funeral directors, what is the role, and who will make the selection? Response: that information will be provided.
- j. Abby – recommendation to have local SC archaeologists present to the CEC. Suggests representatives from the Council of South Carolina Professional Archaeologists and the State Archaeologist? Agrees to provide a list of recommended archaeologists.
- k. Norm – if bodies are going to be disturbed, then what happens next? I really want us to consider their reinterment and where this will be. The College should purchase a plot of land for this.
- l. Lisa – this puts us in an awkward position because many of us do not want this site disturbed. There might be a point when the site is disturbed so we need to have a plan of what we want to see. It doesn’t seem right to have that conversation now, but at the same time if the College is just going to move forward, I don’t want us to miss this opportunity to have input. What is the best case in the worst-case scenario?

IV. Project Updates (Joanna)

a. Planning updates

- i. Preconstruction meeting on Aug 19 (CofC Project Engineering, City TRC Staff)
- ii. Land Disturbance Permit anticipated end of August
- iii. SWPPP Site Walk to be scheduled after issuance of TBD (clarification of attendees provided: CofC, SHPO, DES, City Staff, CEC Facilitator, Demolition Contractor, CRM)

iv. Discussion

1. Millicent – are we getting this as updates or as an invitation for us to participate? *Response from Omar:*

– this is a meeting of the project team, city, and regulatory agencies. Public input is not included.

2. Luqman – this is an iterative process. It's a done deal. All we are here for is to give respect to the bodies.

3. Millicent – it is important to remind the public that there are multiple levels of permitting stages that must be followed. In response to Luqman, this is not a done deal. The CEC is here to advise that there are regulations and stipulations that must be followed before the College is cleared for the project.

Response: the College has, from the beginning, talked about and shared the process, stop gaps, incorporated feedback, and the status of the project.

4. Jim – I understand your concern about the inevitability of the project. We should encourage the agencies to look at the entirety of the project and the College's adherence to the CZC conditions.

5. Norm – even though we don't have a chair at the August preconstruction meeting, the City has to give a Ground Disturbance Permit. We have the ability to talk to Council members as community members. I am also starting to believe that it's a done deal.

6. Harlan – Aaron Polkey, a Councilman, has attended several meetings.

7. Millicent – as a CEC, it is important that we remind ourselves that other agencies are also asking probing questions and putting in restrictions. We are not the only ones. How much will

it cost? Where will thousands of bodies be reinterred? Multiple serious concerns about the viability of this project.

8. Clay – if there are recommendations that the CEC can offer to broaden the College’s community engagement, please make them
9. Abby – there are federal laws that will protect this site as well. The College has no NAGPRA plan. Suggestion that the College consult with Melanie O’Brien.
10. Joshua – The CEC should go on record with statements of concern so that it cannot be said that there is no consensus on anything.

b. Tribal communications

- i. Letters have been sent to 4 additional federally-recognized Tribes and 1 state Tribe
 1. Abby, Jim – request for a list of the tribes the College sent letters to
 2. Request for information about who the letters were sent to and how they were contacted.
- ii. CofC representatives and state archaeologist Chris Judge met with Catawba Nation. Details about that conversation cannot be shared because Catawba is a sovereign nation, and any communication between the College and the Catawba is intended to stay between those two entities.
- iii. Abby – Chris Judge does not work for the College. It’s not a consultation to have the state archaeologist meet with tribes.
Response: The College did meet with the tribal representatives. The Catawba representative asked for the state archaeologist to be there.

c. GPR report

- i. Final report is being finalized for SHPO. SHPO has a 30-day review period before it can be shared with CEC. The report has over 7000 pages.
- ii. SHPO already has the raw data files
- iii. Using more refined analysis, Dr. Harris believes there is evidence of possible burial features
- iv. Jim – for clarification, this means there are anomalies with signatures that may be consistent with interments or other features. GPR does not identify human remains and can produce false positives and false

negatives. GPR data helps you decide whether to use a toothbrush or a shovel.

- v. Luqman – I have heard College representatives say they will not dig one grave at a time. They will put the bodies in storage.
- vi. Jim – any archaeological recovery plan may change once the reality of the circumstances come to light. Plans change. You won't know until you get into the ground.

V. New Business

- a. Abby – motion for a continuation meeting (10.5) to discuss the six New Business items on today's agenda. Suggests August 20.
 - i. Seconded by Jim
 - ii. Approved by voice vote (unanimous)
 - iii. Vote to determine meeting time
 - 1. 6pm – 7 in favor
 - 2. 5pm – 2 in favor
- b. Next meeting (10.5) to be held August 20, 2026 at 6pm (Zoom only)

VI. Meeting adjourned at 8:00pm (Joanna)