



Community Engagement Council
September 3, 2026
Meeting 11
125 Bull Street (hybrid)

Meeting Minutes

Attendees

Facilitators	Joanna Gilmore, LaSheia Oubre, Clay Middleton
CEC Members <i>* = attended virtually</i>	Jim Newhard, Walter Brown, Stephen Cofer-Shabica*, Madison Lee, Abby Dairaghi*, Norm Dickerson, Luqman Rasheed*, Jeff Harjo*, Jerome Harris*
Advisors	Omar Muhammad, Demetria Clemons
Consultants	--
Liaison	Courtney Howard
Staff	Mark Berry, Christine Mahoney, Paul Patrick
Invited Guests	Ralph Bailey

- I. Call to order at 6:02pm (Clay)
 - a. No quorum at this time, therefore consensus from those who are here
 - b. Approval of prior minutes
 - i. Walter – regarding the August 6 meeting minutes (page 8, item i), twice previously asked for clarification of which CEC member raised a particular question during the meeting. Has not seen a response to date. The minutes record the questioner as Luqman but may need correction to Walter. *Response* (LaSheia): Recording will be checked for confirmation.
 - ii. Walter - Once that question is cleared up, moves that the approval of the minutes be tabled. No second was heard and there is no quorum.
 - c. Adoption of agenda
 - i. Jim - Since we don't have quorum, what are we able or not able to do?
Response (Clay): will still provide the information and can respond to any questions from the CEC, but no decisions can be made
- II. Project Updates
 - a. BAR Update (Joanna)
 - i. Conceptual design changes included changing the grab-and-go facility to a commemoration space within the building. BAR approved the conceptual design with stipulations.

- ii. Norm, Jim, Walter – BAR review for the commemoration elements is separate from BAR review for the building design (scale, mass). This week’s BAR review was for building design only. The College will have to go back to the BAR after the archaeological work is complete.
- b. Land Disturbance Permit Update
 - i. CEC recently received an email about this after confirmation was received. Inquiry about whether all CEC members have seen it. (Joanna)
 - ii. The College received approval for preconstruction from the City. The permit status does not move to an approved status, rather this is regarding the pending pre-inspections. At that Stage has been approved by the City, through the TRC, for installation before site demolition, or Stage 2B, can begin. All Stage 2A, including construction fencing, silt fencing, and tree protection measures must be installed and inspected. Once the City completes these inspections and approves the BMP installations, the permit status will be moved to “construction – active permit,” at which point Stage 2B site demolition activities may begin. The College cannot proceed with work beyond the approved tree cutting to grade until after the anticipated second GPR review by SHPO, scheduled for September 11, to maintain compliance with CZC conditions. (Clay)
- c. Report from the Burial Ground Commemoration and Memorialization Task Force (Omar)
 - i. Task Force has met 6 times
 - ii. More detailed meeting notes were previously provided via email, so today’s report will focus on highlights
 - iii. Purpose of the gathering – honoring and remembering the individuals buried at the Coming Street burial ground; recognize their humanity, individuality, and dignity; create opportunities for prayer, remembrance, reflection, and community participation; acknowledge the history of a burial ground whose occupants were historically marginalized and, in many cases, may not have received formal burial rites; bring together diverse religious, cultural, and community traditions in an act of remembrance and ancestor honoring; provide an opportunity for the broader Charleston community to engage with the history and significance of this site.
 - iv. Key messages from the Task Force –

1. This is one step of a continuous ongoing process of remembrance and community engagement rather than closure or final statement about the future of the project
2. This gathering does not imply support for or opposition to the proposed residence hall
3. Event details
 - a. Date: October 24, 10am-2:30pm
 - b. In response to the CEC's preference to hold separate events for education and commemoration, the October gathering will be a structured commemorative occasion.
 - c. Invitees: Christian denominations and other faith communities, Muslim communities, Native American communities, African and African Diaspora, Gullah Geechee communities, and other cultural and spiritual traditions represented in Charleston
 - d. The program is not set in stone and will be dependent on who accepts to the invitation
 - e. Potential program elements
 1. Muslim call to prayer
 2. Native American prayers and music
 3. African drumming and cultural performances
 4. Libations
 5. Dance
 6. Community choir
 7. Prayers and reflections
 8. Poetry
 9. Collective moment of remembrance
 - f. Invitation letter was previously sent to the CEC for feedback. Task force considered the feedback at length, and the letters were sent out on Tuesday.
4. Questions
 - a. Jerome – request for the report in writing? *Response (Joanna):* CEC members have this report already. It was sent last week along with the invitation letter.
 - b. Jim – request for notes from most recent task force meeting and the final version of the letter that was sent? *Response (Omar, LaSheia, Joanna):* meeting notes from

this Monday will be provided as soon as they are ready. The letter was unchanged as the Task Force was happy with the letter that was written.

- c. Invitees are asked to respond by September 11 (Clay, Joanna)
- d. Norm – Questions about event components. *Response (Omar)*: The event will include prayers, entertainment, food, and time for personal reflection at the site. There will be a stage, podium, and tents. Dedicated space for offerings and flowers. No speeches. Sitting and standing. Will take place at the site.
- e. Jim – appreciation for the statement that the structure is not set in stone yet and is dependent on who agrees to participate *Response (Omar)*: Clarification that the structure of the event will not be set until we get responses from invited participants. The Task Force wants to have prayers and statements provided in advance so translations, as needed, can be available during the program.
- f. Norm – Question about Native American participation *Response (Omar, Jeff)*: Two Native American representatives are on the Task Force
- g. Jerome – reminder that the CEC voted to create a committee, not a task force, to bring recommendations to the CEC and for the CEC to make decisions. Willing to accept this report for information only, without endorsing or not endorsing. Concern that the CEC charged the committee to bring back recommendations for the CEC to act on, and now they have been empowered to call themselves a task force with an ongoing set of activities and responsibilities.
- h. Jim – CEC has not delegated any authority other than bringing recommendations/ideas. Expressed happiness with the progress, but the CEC is not in a position tonight to make any motion or take any action.
- i. Joanna - as a reminder, the updates from the last five meetings have been shared with the CEC with request for comments to be submitted by last Monday.

- j. Clay – reminder that the CEC could not arrive at consensus regarding the commemoration other than to form another group to plan the event. The letters needed to go out in timely fashion. Reminder that several members of the CEC are on the task force. October 24 was decided because of space availability at the College. After September 11, report of which invitees responded will be provided. Suggestions of additional invitees are welcome.
- k. Jim – inquiry about College facilities being used for the event. Reminder that CEC previously raised concerns about the university being seen as a venue for this. Request that the task force consider this concern.
Response (Clay, LaSheia, Omar): The science building across the street from the site will house the food. An accessible indoor facility is needed for air conditioning and shelter from sun and insects. Non-College food vendors will be used. This concern will be shared with the task force.
- l. Norm – Expressed support for the program plans as described. Suggestion to have time limits for speakers and to ensure the event is not boring. *Response (facilitators):* Agree
- m. Walter – To Jerry’s point regarding authority, of which the CEC has none, previously asked the question if the CEC does not support the commemoration, will the College move forward with the event? It appears that the College is moving forward. The task force is supposed to come back to the CEC with their proposal for action, and that is not happening. There’s no need for the CEC to authorize the program because it’s already been authorized.
- n. Demetria – question about how the subcommittee became a task force. *Response (Omar):* The members of the subcommittee thought that the term working group/task force more appropriately described their mandate.

- o. Jim – the purpose of a task force is to provide ideas and options and report back and get approval from the body that formed them.
 - 1. Demetria – I thought the CEC didn't want the responsibility.
 - 2. Jim –The CEC wanted to receive ideas from a smaller group. I understand that timing is a factor, but we need a better communication mechanism in order to retain the original purpose that was intended.
 - 3. Omar – reminder that there was a time crunch regarding timing of the land disturbance permit and removal of the asphalt. Agreement that communication can be improved.
- p. Clay – reminder that commemoration, memorialization, and reflection have been on the table from day one. Some CEC members came to the meeting prepared to share ideas about commemoration because it was on the agenda, but that did not transpire. That is when you all made the decision to have a subcommittee. Any suggestions, ideas about what commemoration looks like, please share.
- q. Luqman – in August 6 meeting, the subcommittee had a slated agenda for the event. That was not their decision to make. The subcommittee decided to call themselves a working group. I said I would join and when I got there, they were calling themselves a task force. This is an iterative process to speed things along so they won't get bogged down in the CEC. The task force was not given the responsibility of bringing a full program. What is the correct title of the group—subcommittee, working group, or task force?
- r. Jerome – Expressed appreciation for the work that the subcommittee is doing. Expressed that concern regarding the authority question that should not get in the way of continued planning.

III. Old Business

- a. Response to CEC motion on Board of Trustees letter clarifying the role of the CEC
 - i. Courtney read the letter from Board Chair Renee Romberger. Letter will be placed in the Google drive. (full letter is attached)
 - 1. Jim – Questions about when the letter was received and comment that the letter makes moot a lot of CEC discussions regarding archaeology and monitoring and narrows the focus of the CEC to commemoration and memorialization. *Response (Courtney, Clay):* Letter was received today. Reminder of what was outlined and asked of the CEC from the beginning.
- b. Response to CEC motion on indigenous and descendant community cultural monitoring during stages 2A and 2B
 - i. Courtney read the following response that was received today: *“We treat cultural oversight with serious care, which is why College leadership is currently engaging with the National Park Service to better understand how cultural monitoring protocols are structured across similar projects nationwide. That said, Stages 2A and 2B involve early site preparation governed by existing, state-approved archaeological plans. Permitted work will continue on schedule, and the College may provide further information after that research is complete.”*
- c. Response to CEC motion on unresolved process concerns and opportunity for corrective action
 - i. Courtney read the following response that was received today: *“The College is responsible for maintaining a structured, compliant regulatory process. The Monthly Exchange Packet is the established, single-point mechanism for transmitting all project updates, advisory feedback and motions to regulatory agencies. Maintaining this predictable rhythm ensures clarity and regulatory compliance without creating fragmented, ad-hoc communication streams.”*

IV. Funeral Director Engagement: Archaeological Human Remains

- a. Ralph Bailey – Vice President & Charleston Branch Chief, Brockington and Associates
 - i. An archaeologist and has been with Brockington since 1992
 - ii. Principal Investigator on four removals of abandoned cemeteries on the Peninsula. Two were affiliated with churches and reinterment was in perpetual care cemeteries. Two were affiliated with potter’s fields

and reinterment was on site. State abandoned cemetery laws are vague. Every project is different and requires patience and nuance. These roles develop on a case-by-case basis. This is much larger than anything I have been involved with (used to dozens or hundreds of remains, not thousands)

- b. Today's talk is about abandoned cemetery law, not NAGPRA
- c. I stand with COSCAPA in opposition to the project; preservation in place is appropriate in this situation.
- d. Part 1 – Prior to City resolution to remove
 - i. Need to Identify who the funeral director is going to be
 1. Only has experience with using one funeral director, but a case as large as this one may need more than
 2. Funeral homes often go back many generations and have deep relationships with the community
 3. Funeral home can be the liaison between the community, the archaeologist, the College and city
 4. Knows the burial practices of the community, including those that have been lost or forgotten. The funeral home's ability to express burial practices and their significance is invaluable.
 5. Facilitates commemorative events. Typically, whoever is doing the project is not doing the commemorative event. That is typically done by the community and funeral home, with both providing guidance on what is appropriate before, during, and after the reinterment.
 6. Main thing is for the funeral director to help to identify places for reinterment. This is a critical stage that needs to happen as soon as possible. Until you know what the reinterment is going to look like, there is no project.
 7. Funeral home knows what the community finds appropriate, has relationships with perpetual care cemeteries, knows best practices, and can help everyone work through what is going to happen.
- e. Part 2 – After City resolution to remove
 - i. Archaeological field component/Disinterment
 1. Funeral home is not very active
 2. Standing by, in communication, may make site visits, emails

3. Stay in the loop about any delays or surprises so they can continue to communicate with the community about what is happening in the field
 4. Involvement of the coroner
 - a. Should be notified prior to breaking ground that human remains are likely to be found in a historic site
 - b. Heads up is better for timeliness and staffing concerns
 - c. May want to be onsite when ground disturbance is happening or they may prefer to be called when remains are found
 - d. When remains are found, coroner's office comes out, views remains, issues case number, and closes the case once it is determined that the remains are historic in nature, not medical or legal. No additional involvement after the case is closed.
 5. Funeral home is standing by and will help handle getting permits from DES for reburial
 6. Funeral homes in Charleston typically are not involved in excavation or storage of remains
- ii. Reinterment
1. Funeral home is very active in this stage
 2. Funeral home dictates the pace of how this happens
 3. Funeral home sets up the burial service based on community preferences, rites, and rituals
 4. Funeral home makes sure the reinterment happens the way the community wants
 5. Funeral home makes sure the site is closed and back filled, so the City resolution to remove is properly executed
- f. Questions
- i. Luqman – is the process different in the case of mass graves?
Response: the process is the same
 - ii. Madison – how does the coroner determine if the remain is historic or not? *Response:* visual determination; no testing unless there is some question; rely on the archaeologist on site unless tests are needed by the coroner's forensic archaeologist
 - iii. Norm – if funeral home typically doesn't store remains, for a site of this size, who can? *Response:* that's a good question. Norm –

Currently, there is no plan for reinterment. I urge the College to make some kind of plan for reinterment.

- iv. Jim – work plan says disinterred individuals will be given to funeral home in a short period of time, which sounds different than what you are saying about stabilizing the remain first. For a project of this scale, how is this to be managed? *Response*: no idea how something of this scale should be managed.
- v. Norm – there are people on both sides of this issue, but the biggest issue is that the College does not have a plan for reinterment
- vi. Clay – summary of role of funeral director per Ralph; College may have contracts with more than one funeral home; when a remain is found, there are options about what happens and if Native American remains are found, that is different. There have been thoughts about potential cemetery locations, including Jenkins Institute, and conversations about places with negative connotations that should not be considered
- vii. Norm – if all we need is an acre of land, the College could close the gap and find an acre of land, not necessarily on the peninsula.
Response: the reinterment is much condensed
- viii. Luqman – what about mass graves? How do you deal with that? Maybe someone from the College or a funeral home can come and talk to us about that
- ix. Ralph – the community dictates what the lab investigations are (DNA, basic measurements)
- x. Joanna – we want to hear from the CEC about what is appropriate and that's one reason the College has not made plans because we want to hear from the CEC.
- xi. Omar, Walter – it sounds like there has been discussion about reinterment locations, but the CEC has not been involved. Jenkins is just one idea, it's not the plan.
- xii. Norm – has a friend who can find the College a place to put the burial site. It won't cost anything for him to find the site. *Response (Ralph)* – not sure what the laws are on creating new burial sites
- xiii. Walter – Appreciation to Mr. Bailey for sharing information about the relationship between the funeral home. There has been some conversation among the facilitators about where reinterment has taken place? *Response (Clay)*: correct, there have been conversations about options but no decisions have been made. The broader

community has been involved with these conversations, not just the CEC.

xiv. Walter – it is interesting that the CEC has been given the charge to participate in this process. The earlier response that “the selection of the funeral director or directors is currently ongoing and will be vetted by a community engagement group who will provide input.” Based on the letter from the BOT, I am not sure how much input the CEC can provide that will impact the selection of the funeral director

1. Clay – in full transparency, the College could do an RFP and make a selection. Before the CEC was formed, the College was talking about a certain radius to allow for timely response; The CEC suggested that the radius be increased to allow for broader consideration of funeral homes.

2. Walter – I don’t recall that discussion, but I’m fine if it did. Has done research on funeral homes and licensing status. Suggest that the CEC be careful about recommending funeral homes to avoid appearance of partiality, but rather contact SC Morticians Association and SC Funeral Directors Association. What are the activities that are legally required for the oversight of funeral directors?

3. Jeff – Have you ever come across a situation like this where an organization is in such a big hurry to dig up some people, but they have not figured out where they will reinter them?

Response (Ralph Bailey): Not in a situation where the graves are in a stable environment. We have had situations where the graves were exposed and vulnerable, so they had to be moved first and then plan for interment. This is a manufactured rush.

4. Jeff - Expressed discontent and sense of disrespect with President Hsu not coming to the meeting and sending a “messenger” to relay his responses. States that he has never met President Hsu and does not desire to meet him because of perceived opinion that President Hsu wants to “dig up all of these ancestors” without a plan for reburial.

5. Clay – clarification that that list of funeral homes was first collected two years ago, and licensing statuses then may be different than their current status

6. Walter - What are the activities that legally require a funeral director’s oversight? *Response (Ralph Bailey):* in addition to

the more nuanced role of communicating with and being the liaison to the community on appropriate burial practices, when the city passes a resolution for removal and then turns the site over to the archaeologist, the funeral home is there on behalf of the municipality and the general public to make sure the work plan is done the way it is supposed to be; oversight on behalf of the citizens

7. Walter – how much of a role will the CEC have in vetting who the project funeral director/establishment is?
 - a. Clay: not every funeral home has an account with the College procurement office, so CEC suggestions help the College make contact with funeral homes to inform them of the RFP and the process for submitting a response.
 - b. Walter – I have already suggested that the College reach out to professional associations to inform them of the opportunity so they can share with their membership in the established radius versus having the CEC make recommendations which could be perceived as giving preference
 - c. Mark: the state procurement process works to establish an even playing field, but the College can work with a new vendor to get set up as a vendor so they can respond to an RFP. This does not give the vendor a leg-up in the review process. It simply gives them the opportunity to bid.
 - d. Walter – if we do not go through the associations and we do not get recommendations from the CEC, how will these establishments know about the opportunity?
 - e. Mark – The College has to reach out to different funeral homes. That's why we have identified a radius so we can create a list and make contact. It's not that everyone will be interested.
8. Abby – Expressed appreciation to Ralph Bailey for speaking to the group and expressing his experience and position. When funeral homes are on site for a number of days for a large project, could that be very expensive? *Response (Ralph)* – the funeral home has minimal involvement during the disinterment

stage. May come on site from time to time. They are not on-site monitoring. In a 6-weeklong process, they may be on site twice for 10 minutes.

9. Abby – regarding storage of remains, the cost to store is something for the College to consider. Regarding RFPs, how many people want to do this work? *Response (Ralph)* - RFPs for funeral homes are unprecedented, in my experience. We have never sent out RFP for funeral home involvement. The community suggests funeral homes that have worked in that community, and we have a conversation with them. These projects are collaborative. The project is dictated by the community, not the client/developer. The community tells us if they are comfortable with the funeral home, then the archaeologist subcontracts with them.
10. Jerry – Can you give some sense of the time needed for disinterment to storage to reinterment and does this vary based on the number of remains? *(Response – Ralph)*: 6 months, with no difference based on the number of remains.
11. Jerry – what would be the costs associated for disinterment, storage, and reinterment? *(Response – Ralph)*: the College's consultant should give that. I am just here to give information and will pass on that question.
12. Luqman – CEC has not had input on this iterative process because the College has its own timeline. Suggests that the CEC consider reinterment at Jenkins Orphanage because it's a safe and stable place. Also, if taxes are not paid, then the graveyard can be bought.
13. Madison – how much storage capacity does a funeral director have? *Response (Ralph)*: Very little, in my experience. Funeral homes space and staffing are not built for this kind of storage. Madison – Brockington has storage on site but still very small for what we are looking at *Response (Ralph)*: correct.
14. Walter – references a portion of the Terracon workplan (page 5) - Terracon will retain human remains only until they are collected by the funeral director. Mr. Bailey says the funeral home will not store remains, but the work plan says otherwise. Norm – that is a big hole in the College's plan. *Response*

(Joanna): That is not a question we can answer and may be appropriate for an amendment to the work plan

15. Jim – Terracon has been saying that human remains will be transferred to the funeral director within 24 hours, but that is not consistent with the time needed for the appropriate archaeological processes that must occur before the transfer.

16. Jim – in your experience, will the city give its approval for removing the remains if there is no reinterment location?

Response (Ralph): The public notice includes the solution (reinterment) so that needs to be established before going to the city

17. Jim – you just expressed that the funeral director is the subcontractor to the cultural resource management company, rather than being procured by the client. Is this industry standard? *Response (Ralph)*: My company takes the lead on coordinating all the parties--the funeral home, attorneys, the reinterment location, public notice, city resolution, monument on reinterment site, etc.. I don't know if this is industry standard.

V. Closing and Meeting Adjourn

- a. Demetria – Clarification that CEC has three facilitators, a liaison, advisors, and consultants. The person who gave the report is Dr. Courtney Howard, Vice President for Community Engagement at the College. She has attended all the meetings and, as liaison, gives reports to the Board of Trustees. Please respect her position. The President did not just send a messenger; she is performing one of her duties.
- b. Norm – given the potential for the number of human remains on this site, why would you recommend leaving the bodies where they are? *Response (Ralph)*: any archaeologist is going to say preservation in place is number one. This is an opportunity, given that we have a situation where there is a known and we can act deliberately in advance. I don't feel the avenue of preservation in place has been exhausted. Speaking from the perspective of having been with Brockington for 34 years.

VI. Meeting adjourned at 8:04pm (Clay)