



Columbia Health Social and Environmental Affairs Committee Meeting Minutes Tuesday, March 24, 2026

Call to Order

The Columbia Health, Social, and Environmental Affairs Committee conducted a meeting on March 24, 2026 at City Hall (Mayor's Conference Room), 1737 Main Street, Columbia, South Carolina 29201. The Honorable Sam Johnson, Chair called the meeting to order at 1:06 p.m. The Honorable Edward H. McDowell, Jr. and The Honorable Tyler D. Bailey were present.

Approval of Minutes

1. February 24, 2026 Health, Social, and Environmental Affairs Committee Meeting Minutes

Upon a motion made by Mr. McDowell and seconded by Mr. Bailey, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the February 24, 2026 Health, Social, and Environmental Affairs Committee Meeting Minutes.

Presentations

2. Riparian Buffer Zone Considerations – Mr. Bill Stangler, Congaree Riverkeeper

Mr. Bill Stangler, Congaree Riverkeeper explained the role of riparian buffer zones in protecting aquatic resources by filtering pollutants before they reach waterways. They noted that buffer widths vary depending on purpose, with 50 to 100 feet on both sides of a stream supporting water quality, and 100 to 300 feet benefiting wildlife habitats. For designated scenic rivers, such as the Saluda River, a minimum buffer of 100 feet is recommended. Within the City of Columbia, there are approximately 14 miles of river frontage, including 9 miles along the Broad River, 3 miles along the Lower Saluda River, and 2 miles along the Congaree River. He recommended increasing the City's buffer requirement from 50 to 100 feet, noting that the change would impact a limited number of properties.

There was discussion about the scenic river designation; rivers selected for buffer increase; example of lower quality buffers; the surrounding municipalities' buffers; and conversations with stakeholders.

3. Tree and Appearance Commission Update – Ms. Viola Hendley, Chair

Ms. Viola Hendley, Chair / Columbia Tree and Appearance Commission outlined priorities for 2026–2027, including participation in year one of the three-year Trees for SC grant and efforts to separate the Columbia Landscape and Tree Fund from the General Fund. She emphasized the importance of recognizing the value of trees in development, promoting utility undergrounding as a best practice, and exploring programs such as Line City USA in

partnership with Dominion. She also highlighted the need to hire additional arborists to train crews and address community concerns about tree removal through better communication. She noted the City's responsibility for tree maintenance and discussed environmental initiatives such International Dark Sky lighting to reduce the impacts of artificial light.

Mr. Gray Taylor, Chair-Elect / Columbia Tree and Appearance Commission provided an overview of the Trees for SC grant, describing it as a high-level assessment of the City's tree canopy. He noted that the analysis evaluates overall canopy coverage, currently estimated at approximately 42 percent, and identifies potential areas for future planting. He explained that this broader assessment will help guide the next phase, which is the development of a comprehensive tree inventory. This inventory will involve evaluating individual trees for health, hazards and maintenance needs and supporting more proactive management. He emphasized that the grant provides a strategic foundation for long-term planning and informed decision-making regarding the City's urban forest.

There was discussion about including tree canopy data including Fort Jackson; tree pruning; Line City USA locations; potential canopy assessment; and the financial component of tree mapping.

4. Animal Services Ordinance Revisions - Ms. Victoria Clary, Superintendent / Animal Services

Ms. Victoria Clary, Superintendent / Animal Services provided a recap of proposed amendments to the City's animal ordinances, focusing on modernization and alignment with Richland County. Changes include revising breeding regulations by removing outdated provisions and requiring a City business license, as well as strengthening language around the sale of animals to address irresponsible breeding practices. She noted updates to tethering standards, including clearer definitions and a proposed reduction to a two-hour limit. Additional revisions address general animal care, refine medical exemptions for neutering to prevent misuse; and removal of the trained service animal exception. She also outlined updates to the licensing program to include increasing the annual fee for unaltered pets to \$100 and introducing a one-time lifetime license option to improve resource allocation and generate revenue.

There was consensus of the committee to endorse the revisions for City Council consideration.

5. City Beautification Update – Mr. Robert Anderson, Director / Public Works

Mr. Robert Anderson, Director / Public Works shared details from a recent multi-department meeting focused on strengthening neighborhood support initiatives. Discussions included coordination with the Community Development Department on grants, establishing grant guidelines, and exploring recurring annual funding opportunities for neighborhoods. He also noted the potential inclusion of a Council of Neighborhoods representative on a committee to support these efforts. Additional topics included developing standardized, durable signage with consistent materials and design; expanding landscaping and planting education, and enhancing litter control through main corridor maintenance, pet waste stations, and annual neighborhood cleanups. He highlighted the importance of community engagement through initiatives such as cleanup luncheons to foster neighborhood pride and shared that proposed signage would align with existing the City of Columbia parks designs.

There was discussion about keeping young people at the core of beautification efforts and school involvement.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:29 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Erika D. Moore Hammond, MMC, CPM
City Clerk