



FRIENDS

ANNUAL REPORT • 2025

Friends of the *Lowline* 2025

A year of groundbreaking milestones, from the first commitment of public dollars to the first shovel in the ground- on the path to 1.7 miles of connected, green, living corridor through the heart of Charleston.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR TEAM

When we set out to transform 1.7 miles of abandoned rail corridor back in 2012 into a living green space connecting eight Charleston peninsula neighborhoods, we knew the path forward would require patience, partnership, and persistence. In 2025, that work came to life.

This was the year the City of Charleston made its historic \$15.8 million commitment through the Cooper River TIF, a landmark moment that signals what public-private collaboration can achieve when a community rallies around a shared vision. It was the year we welcomed our first Executive Director, deepened our board governance, and on December 15th broke ground on the Lowline.

None of this happens without the donors, partners, neighbors, and advocates who showed up at every step. This report is our thank you and our promise that the best is still ahead.



Frank Haygood

Board Chair, Friends of the Lowline

2025 AT A GLANCE

\$15.8M

City of Charleston
commitment

\$2.5M

Matching grant for
Bradford Park

1

First full time
Executive Director of
Friends of the Lowline

2025 Q1	CITY OF CHARLESTON \$15.8M committed from the Cooper River TIF A historic public commitment the largest single investment in the Lowline's history made possible through the Cooper River Tax Increment Financing district. This funding anchors Phase 1A construction.
2025 Q2	DESIGN DesignWorks selected as design firm Scott Parker's firm DesignWorks, led by our founding Board member and longtime champion of the Lowline was selected to bring the corridor's design to life. A full-circle moment for the project.
2025 Q2	ORGANIZATION Friends of the Lowline hires its first Executive Director A pivotal moment for our nonprofit's capacity and credibility. Bringing on our first Executive Director signals a new chapter of professional management, donor stewardship, and community engagement.
2025 Q3	FUNDRAISING \$2.5M matching grant from the Speedwell Foundation The Speedwell Foundation pledged a transformative \$2.5 million matching grant — the single largest private contribution to the Lowline to date. Every dollar raised is doubled, making this the most powerful fundraising opportunity in our history.
2025 Q4	GROUNDBREAKING Groundbreaking ceremony — December 15, 2025 After years of planning, community engagement, and coalition-building, the first shovels went into the ground on December 15, 2025. A celebration of every person who believed in this project and helped make it real.

Mike Messner has been with the Lowline since the earliest days of its vision as a founding Board member, a steadfast champion, and, together with his wife Jenny, the most consequential financial partner this project has ever had. In 2025 alone, the Speedwell Foundation contributed more than \$1.4 million to Friends of the Lowline: retiring our outstanding debt, funding the hire of our first Executive Director, and delivering the first installment of their transformative \$2.5 million matching grant. That matching gift which doubles every qualifying private dollar raised during our Phase 1 campaign was made in honor of Tom Bradford, Mike's dear friend, fellow co-founder of Friends of the Lowline, and a man whose belief in this corridor never wavered. It is a profound privilege to be building Bradford Park in his memory, and we are grateful beyond words for the Speedwell Foundation's generosity, trust, and love for this city.

Speedwell Foundation

Founding Partner · \$2.5M Matching Grant

THE SPEEDWELL FOUNDATION

Through a \$2.5 million matching grant for the naming opportunity of Bradford Park, the Speedwell Foundation doubles every qualifying private gift to the Lowline turning a \$25,000 pledge into a \$50,000 impact, and a \$300,000 corporate gift into \$600,000 toward Phase 1 construction. All qualifying private gifts received during the campaign period are eligible.

\$2.5M

Speedwell Foundation Matching Grant

\$5M

Total impact when fully matched



The selection of DesignWorks to design the Lowline is a story about the kind of community-rooted project this has always been.

DesignWorks · Scott Parker

Scott Parker was among the founding Board members of Friends of the Lowline and one of the earliest believers in the vision of a green linear park threading through the Charleston peninsula. When the project reached the moment of selecting a design firm, his firm Design Works was chosen to lead. His involvement brings both professional expertise and a deep, personal commitment to the outcome.

DesignWorks



Great organizations are built on strong governance. In 2025, we made meaningful investments in how our Board works together.

COMMUNITY PARTNER · BOARD GOVERNANCE

Madeliene McGee brings more than 40 years of nonprofit leadership to South Carolina including decades running Coastal Community Foundation and Together SC and now as Board Chair of The Charleston Horticultural Society. A native Charlestonian and fierce believer in the power of collaborative partnerships, she generously volunteered her time and expertise to guide Friends of the Lowline through one of its most important transitions: from a visionary founding board to a governance structure built for implementation. Her counsel on board development, roles, and processes is helping us build the organizational strength to steward this corridor all the way from groundbreaking to opening day.



The foundation of exceptional organizations are laid with strong partnerships. In 2025, we were proud to deepen relationships with community leaders who believe in what the Lowline means for Charleston.

COMMUNITY PARTNER · FUNDRAISING

In September 2025, Friends of the Lowline partnered with Coastal Community Foundation of South Carolina to host a kickoff event celebrating the momentum behind the Lowline's Phase 1 campaign. CCF has long been a champion of place-based community investment across the Lowcountry peninsula and beyond, and their willingness to co-host this event reflected a shared belief in what the Lowline means for Charleston's future. We are grateful for their partnership and look forward to deepening this relationship as construction gets underway.

Note: This donor list is a draft prepared for Board review ahead of public release. Please flag any additions, corrections, or omissions before our April meeting.

OUR 2025 DONORS

Thank you for *believing*

Every gift to the Lowline whether \$50 or \$25,000 is a direct investment in Charleston's public green future. We are grateful for each and every one.

FOUNDING PARTNER and LEAD DONOR

Mike and Jenny Messner, The Speedwell Foundation

2025 DONORS *Listed alphabetically*

Anonymous Fund of Coastal Community Foundation

Adam Radcliffe

Alison Schmidt

Andrew Batkins

Abbigail Willingham

Arthur Hoey and Kathleen Ferrell

Barney Blakeney

Ben Liebetrau, Greystar Development LLC

Bynum Stokes

DesignWorks

Diane McGuire

Frank Haygood

Henry Lesesne

Justin Moffitt

Marlene and Joe Rotter

Megan Mills

Mike and Courtney Olson

Mimi Sturgell

Mimi Van Wyck

Parker Family Trust

PPC Foundation

Robert Moran

Ron and Myriam Owens

Sharon Fratepietro

Tim McMannis, HedHi Media

W. Andrew Gowder, Jr.

Winslow Hastie, Magnolia Plantation Foundation



Total income 2025
\$1.58M
vs \$78.7K in 2024

Total expenses 2025
\$101.8K
vs \$20.5K in 2024

Net income 2025
\$1.48M
vs (\$733) in 2024

Total assets 12/31/25
\$1.17M
vs \$31.5K end of 2024

2025 income breakdown
Total: \$1,577,312

- Unrestricted donations \$577K (37%)
- Bradford Park restricted \$1M (63%)



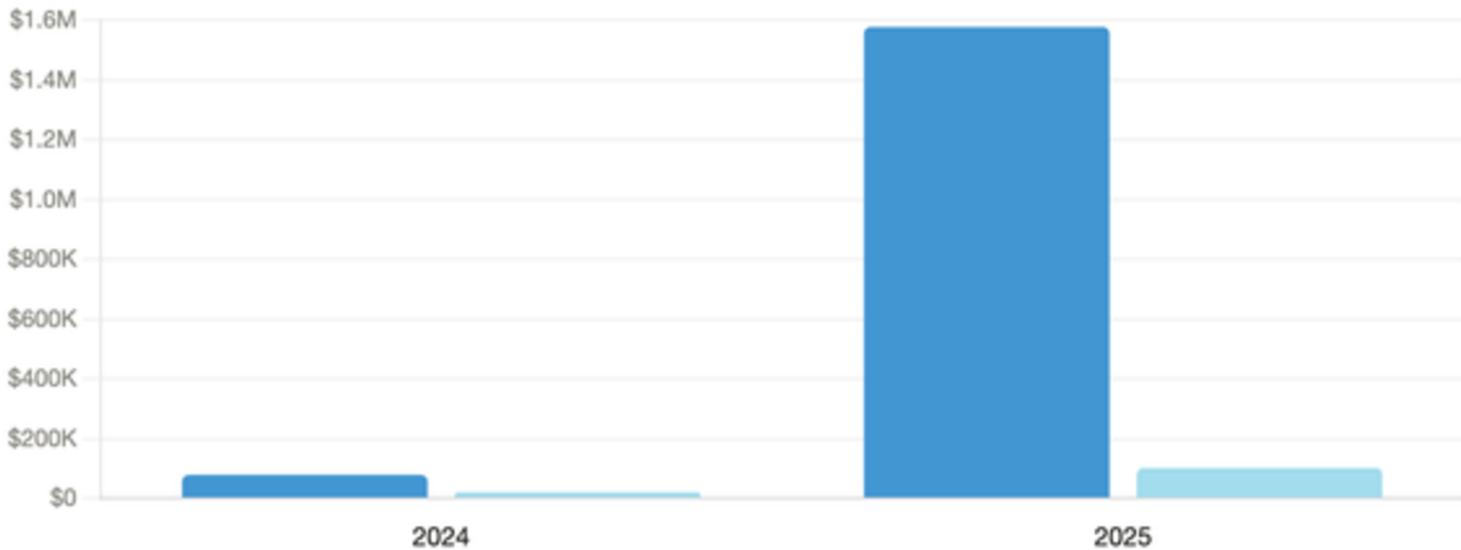
2025 expenses breakdown
Total: \$101,839

- Payroll \$66.5K (65%)
- Interest paid \$14.3K (14%)
- Marketing \$11.3K (11%)
- Insurance \$6.6K (6%)
- Other \$3.2K (3%)



Year-over-year comparison — income vs expenses
2024 (Form 990) vs 2025 (Statement of Activity)

- Income
- Expenses



Dear Friends of the Lowline,

Groundbreaking day, December 15, 2025, was one of the most meaningful days of my professional life. Standing in the future Bradford Park with our board, our partners, and our neighbors, I felt the full weight of everything it took to get there, and the full promise of everything still ahead.

Now the real work begins. In 2026, construction moves into the ground. Phase 1 will deliver bike and pedestrian pathways connecting Mt. Pleasant Street to Line Street, with neighborhood connections along the west side of the corridor. Our target opening is 2027, and we intend to meet it.

To date, Friends of the Lowline has secured more than \$2 million in commitments and pledges toward Phase 1, with \$1.25 million already in the bank. To fully complete Bradford Park, our signature three-acre gathering space, with the restrooms, landscaping, and site furnishings that will make it a true destination for every Charlestonian, we need an additional \$3 million in cash in hand by early Q2 2027. That is the goal. That is the ask.

The Speedwell Foundation's \$2.5 million matching grant means every dollar you give is doubled. There has never been a better moment to invest in what this corridor will become. If you believe in Charleston, in its neighborhoods, its people, its future, we need you in this campaign.

Thank you for being part of this story from the beginning. The best chapter is the one we write together.

Together in Parks,



Courtney Olson

Executive Director, Friends of the Lowline



Since 2012

*Our Mission has been to build, promote
and program the Lowline as a great
public space for all.*

Board of Directors

Frank Haygood, Board Chair
Ronald Owens, Treasurer
W. Andrew Gowder, Jr., Secretary
Barney Blakeney
Ben Liebetrau
Harry Lessesne
Megan Mills
Michael Messner
Mimi van Wyck
Rev. Matthew Rivers
Winslow Hastie

Staff

Courtney Olson, Executive Director

Volunteers/Supporters/Consultants

Dana Hutchins
Bailey Pope
Madeleine McGee
Ellie Tiller
Stitch Design Co.

DONATE 

**Friends
of the** **LOWLINE**

Friends of the Lowline is a registered 501c3 in South Carolina
c/o 1629 Meeting St. Suite A, Charleston , SC, 29405