

FLORENCE COUNTY COUNCIL RETREAT, THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 2012, 9:00 A.M., MOORE FARMS, FIRE TOWER CENTER, 1698 PINE BAY ROAD, LAKE CITY, SOUTH CAROLINA

PRESENT WERE:

K.G. Rusty Smith, Jr., Chairman
Waymon Mumford, Vice-Chairman
H. Morris Anderson, Secretary/Chaplain
Mitchell Kirby, Member
Russell W. Culberson, Member
Johnnie D. Rodgers, Jr., Member
Alphonso Bradley, Member
James T. Schofield, Member
Roger M. Poston, Member
Thomas B. Robinson, County Administrator
D. Malloy McEachin, Jr., County Attorney
Connie Y. Haselden, Clerk to Council

ALSO PRESENT WERE:

Suzanne S. King, Administrative Services Director
Kevin V. Yokim, Finance Director
Arthur C. Gregg, Jr., Public Works Director
Bonnita K. Andrews, Human Resources Director
Sheriff W. Kenney Boone (left at approximately 11:15 a.m.)
Barbara Coker, Sheriff's Office
Connie Reel-Shearin, Clerk of Court (left at approximately 1:40 p.m.)
Ray McBride, Library Director
John Sweeney, Morning News (left at approximately 12:30 p.m.)
Herbert V. Christmas, Environmental Services Officer
Joe Eason, Parks & Recreation Director (afternoon session only)
Dusty Owens, Emergency Management Department Director (afternoon session only)
Elijah Jones, Citizen

A notice of the Florence County Council Retreat appeared in the Wednesday, March 21st edition of the Morning News. Copies of the Meeting Agenda were faxed to members of the media and posted in the lobby of the City-County Complex, the Doctors Bruce and Lee Foundation Public Library and all branch libraries, and on the County's website (www.florenceco.org).

Chairman Smith called the meeting to order and expressed appreciation to Ms. Darla Moore of Moore Farms for the use of the facility and her hospitality. Secretary/Chaplain Anderson provided the invocation.

CURRENT YEAR UPDATE, FUND BALANCE, FY2013 FORECAST:

County Administrator Tom Robinson and Finance Director Kevin Yokim began the retreat with a financial overview of current year budget, status of fund balance and a forecast for fiscal year 2013. Since fiscal year 2009 and projected through fiscal year 2013, the County lost approximately \$6,290,038 in funding, due to the decrease in the Local Government Fund (LGF) by the legislature. Councilman Mumford asked how the County could increase fund balance. Mr. Yokim responded it could only be done by one of two ways or a combination of the two: increase revenue or cut expenditures. Councilman Mumford stated he didn't see how the departments could reduce expenditures any further. Chairman Smith stated Council members and elected/appointed officials needed to contact members of the legislature and request that the LGF be reinstated at the level that was statutorily required. In response to a question from Councilman Mumford, Mr. Yokim responded that one mil would be equal to approximately \$4 on a \$100,000 residence. Chairman Smith added that one mil on a business would be calculated at 10.5% (an additional 6 mils on a \$1 million business would equate to approximately \$625). (A copy of the presentation is attached and incorporated by reference.)

SHERIFF'S OFFICE:

Sheriff Boone and Barbara Coker of the Sheriff's Office presented Council with information regarding the status of the Sheriff's Office and potential issues as a result of the reduced budget. Mrs. Coker provided an overview of the Sheriff's Office proposed FY2013 budget. Sheriff Boone stated they were mandated by the State to conduct an annual staffing study of the jail and, based on the minimum standard for SCDC, Florence County Detention Center was 14 employees short of meeting the minimum standard. Councilman Mumford asked if the per diem received for transporting federal inmates was sufficient to cover the Sheriff's Office costs. Sheriff Boone responded that after the County entered into a contract to provide transport services, the number of federal inmates decreased from about 80 to 100 inmates to around 50, which was basically a break-even point. Councilman Mumford asked if any of the funding the County received through 911 collections could be used to fund some of the IT items needed by the Sheriff's Office. Chairman Smith stated that he didn't think so, that the funds had to be used for dispatch/communications. Councilman Mumford asked how much money was generated by the phone system used at the jail for inmate calling. Mrs. Coker responded that the commission from the Paytel System was around \$85,000 annually. Councilman Kirby asked if it wouldn't be cheaper for the County to purchase fuel in bulk as opposed to the current system. Mr. Yokim stated that in order for the County to realize any worthwhile savings fuel would need to be purchased on the open market but staff could check into bulk fuel purchases to determine if it would be beneficial. The Sheriff added that one of the advantages to the current system was the ability to purchase fuel in various areas of the County instead of the need to travel back to a County facility to refuel. Chairman Smith asked the Sheriff to contact the State legislators regarding the LGF and inform them of the impact the cuts have had on law enforcement. (A copy of the presentation is attached and incorporated by reference.)

Councilman Anderson asked if there would be a possibility of Council meeting with the Legislative Delegation to discuss the effects the cuts to the LGF had on local government. Mr. Robinson suggested maybe a breakfast or lunch meeting with the Delegation in Florence County. He further suggested that the information provided to Council at the Retreat be provided to the public to educate them on the effects of the cuts implemented by the State, possibly by running the presentation on the Government Access Channel.

CLERK OF COURT:

Clerk of Court Connie Reel-Shearin stated she was present as the self-appointed spokesperson for employees and citizens that enter the City-County Complex on a daily basis. She stated she wanted to provide the public perspective she received from the jurors, judges, litigants, and attorneys that enter the Complex:

- Inadequate/Unsafe Parking
- Constantly Broken Elevators (with court rooms on the 10th and 11th floor, many times jurors, etc. were late due to inoperable elevators)
- Court Rooms Too Small
- Jury Rooms Too Small

She stated the present situation was just not acceptable for the citizens of Florence County and, although we were required to seek justice, it could not be done in the current environment.

She stated she wanted to address matters on behalf of the employees who, in her “humble opinion, are the biggest asset Florence County has.” Since July 1979, when she began working at the Complex, she watched the building age and deteriorate into a toxic environment. There was no safe or convenient parking for staff; no security for staff (or their vehicles) who must park across Irby Street behind the old Sears building and cross Irby Street to enter/exit the Complex. The carpet in the 11th floor court room was the original carpet that was installed when the building was built in the mid-70s. Due to the elevator situation, many employees end up being late arriving at their desk waiting on elevators, some days as much as 10 to 15 minutes. The Clerk of Court’s office was charged with the storage of permanent records such as deeds, and storage space was running out for maintaining these valuable records. Records in the basement were being kept on top of sump pumps that had no back-up generators to operate in case of a storm. She encouraged Council to construct a new judicial center to meet the needs of the citizens of Florence County. She stated, “The price of Florence County *not* building a new judicial facility is too high for all of us.”

Councilman Schofield stated the public needed to understand it was a life/safety issue with the City-County Complex. He stated that the main switch gear that operated the City-County Complex was made by a company that no longer existed; a replacement switch could not be ordered, so if the switch went out, the Complex would be shut down, potentially for weeks.

Council recessed at 11:03 a.m. and reconvened at 11:11 a.m.

SOLID WASTE:

Greg Peverall with Waste Management presented Council with the history of solid waste collections in Florence County. He stated that in the next ten years the County needed to consider shifting to total curbside service countywide, which would cost an additional \$50 to \$60 annually per household or about \$4 per household per week, but would provide the County with the benefit of controlling the volume and users, as well as modernizing the facilities. (A copy of the presentation is attached and incorporated by reference.) It was suggested this item be referred to Committee for additional review/study.

(Councilman Bradley left the meeting at approximately 11:15 a.m.)

Public Works Director Carlie Gregg and Environmental Services Officer Herbie Christmas provided Council with a report on litter and animal control. (A copy of the report is attached and incorporated by reference.) The past year was difficult for Environmental Services (ES) to schedule trash pick-up, due to the unavailability of inmates to assist. Chairman Smith asked if there was any explanation as to why inmates were not available. Mr. Gregg responded that only sentenced inmates could be used for this type of work. Mr. Christmas called earlier in the week and there were only 12 inmates that would potentially be available. Mrs. Shearin stated that, although the Sheriff had already left the meeting and she didn't want to speak for him, she was aware that several of the judges were requiring additional officers in the court room, which eliminated officers available to supervise litter detail. Mr. Christmas stated there were instances where individuals were sentenced to pick-up trash on the weekend, but did not show up on the weekend they were scheduled. Mr. Gregg said ES was aggressively writing tickets for littering, but when the defendant appeared before the Magistrate the fines were being reduced. According to records, if the maximum fine assessed on each citation issued was collected the County would have collected \$37,840 but the actual amount collected was \$12,578.25. Mr. Robinson reiterated that the two major issues were that the number of inmates available for litter pick-up had decreased and assessed fines were being reduced by the Magistrates' Offices. He stated the County needed to enhance its efforts to educate the public, particularly the children, to be more responsible.

At the request of Councilman Anderson, Mr. Christmas provided an update on the animal control facility. Councilman Anderson asked if a spay/neuter ordinance would assist with animal control. Mr. Gregg responded that it would, but the hunting community would be in an outrage over a mandatory ordinance.

(Councilman Kirby left the meeting at approximately 11:51 a.m.)

(Councilman Bradley returned at approximately 11:56 a.m.)

Council recessed for lunch at 12:16 p.m. and reconvened at 1:00 p.m.

(After the lunch break, Councilmen Kirby and Bradley did not return to the meeting.)

CAPITAL PROJECT SALES TAX:

The Chairman opened the afternoon session with a discussion on the Capital Project Sales Tax (CPST). The current CPST contains a 'sunset clause' and would expire on April 30, 2014 (7 years). He stated Council needed to determine: 1) if it wanted to represent a CPST to the people and 2) if it did, what would be included in the new list of projects. He provided a list of items that could be included: highways, roads, streets, buildings, public parking garages and related facilities, courthouses, administrative buildings, civic center, EMS facilities, police stations, fire stations, jails, correctional facilities, detention facilities, libraries, coliseums, educational facilities, cultural, recreational, historical facilities, water and sewer projects, flood control, storm water, beach access, jointly operated projects in the county if special purpose districts involved. The current CPST was estimated to bring in \$148 million in revenues. If Council elected to move forward with the implementation of another CPST, a courthouse could be included in the list of projects, as well as an upgraded radio system. Councilman Anderson stated he thought the CPST was an excellent idea; better than an additional property tax. Councilman Schofield stated he was in favor of the CPST and suggested Council needed to consider getting an architect on board to provide direction on a potential courthouse project. Councilman Mumford stated he was in favor of the CPST. He stated further that he thought the first item on the list should be a courthouse, the second item should be the update on the communications system and the third item should be the completion of US301 By-Pass. Several members of Council expressed support of the CPST. After some discussion, the Chairman stated he would send out information on the qualifications for CPST and hold a meeting of the Committee on Administration & Finance to determine a path forward and try to develop a list of projects. He asked the County Attorney to review State law to determine if any of the projects currently included in the CPST were incomplete at the conclusion of the seven-year cycle, would the State require that the County complete any incomplete projects, prior to implementing/establishing any new projects for funding under the CPST; and, what happened to the funding if there was not enough to complete the final project in the current list, but more than enough to complete the other five projects listed.

RADIO SYSTEM UPGRADE

Emergency Management Department Director Dusty Owens provided Council with a brief overview of the need for the upgrade of the radio system. The need for an upgrade to the radio system was due to the current system being obsolete, at the end of its life-cycle, and no longer being manufactured. In 1992/93 the system purchased was state-of-the-art technology at the time, but was an analog system, not digital. Staff was diligent in acquiring/stockpiling parts as other counties upgraded systems; but, after about 2015 the County would be on very thin ice and might not be in a position to operate the radio system with any amount of reliability. The top of the line system was estimated at \$28 million, but the price range/capability needed by Florence County was around \$13 – \$14 million.

IT UPGRADE/INTEGRATION

Councilman Mumford stated he wanted the County to look at upgrading the technology system so that all offices could communicate electronically. Mr. Robinson stated that the County was at the mercy of Time Warner and to avoid a lot of the problems, the County would need its own fiber optic system. In response to a question from Councilman Schofield, Mr. Robinson responded that he was talking about the County establishing its own linkage, its own fiber optic network to link its buildings and communication systems.

CPST

Council further discussed holding a referendum for the CPST and asked the County Attorney Malloy McEachin to research to determine if the law had changed and a referendum could be held in November 2013, when there would not be a general election but would allow the County more time to get the information out to the public and determine the list of projects to be included, or if the referendum must be held in conjunction with a general election.

COST OF LIVING INCREASE FOR EMPLOYEES

Chairman Smith stated the next item for discussion was the Cost of Living Increase for Employees. The cost was \$560,000 for a 2% cost of living increase for employees. Council would need to determine how to fund the increase. Councilman Mumford stated he was in favor of giving employees a cost of living increase. Chairman Smith stated this would be discussed further during the budget process. Several members commented that although they wanted to provide employees with a raise, finding funding was difficult, when departments were already asked to cut operating expenses to bare minimum.

FIRE DISTRICT FUNDING

Chairman Smith stated the next topic was not something that Council needed to take any decisive action on, but something that Council needed to be aware of and be pro-active on the issue. The National Association of Volunteers reports that volunteerism in the USA has declined in the last seven years by an average of 10% per year. The rural fire departments experienced this decline; youth don't volunteer like they did in the past. A disparity existed between the fire districts regarding the level of funding due to the variance in the value of the mil per district; millage ranged from 25.5 mils in Johnsonville with a value of \$8,000 per mil to 8 mils in West Florence with a value of \$110,000 per mil. If administrative services were centralized, a countywide fire millage could be implemented by Council (20 mils would generate an additional \$1.25 million) and it would be up to County Council to determine the needs of each fire district. While some districts would experience a decrease in millage, it would create a more equal level of funding for all districts. By improving available tools and equipment for each district, the County could effectively improve the overall ISO rating countywide.

WELLNESS PROGRAM

The next item on the Agenda was discussion of a Wellness Program. Chairman Smith stated that several years ago, the County implemented a Wellness Program and received a State Award recognizing the program. The Chairman stated it was a very beneficial program, not only from a health and safety standpoint, but to assist in making employees more productive and cut down on insurance costs. Councilman Mumford expressed approval of implementation of a wellness program. Mr. Robinson provided additional information on the subject. Chairman Smith asked Mr. Robinson to develop a proposal for Council's consideration.

SENIOR CENTERS

Chairman Smith stated the County had a wonderful Senior Citizens organization, but there were some issues with the operation of the Senior Center in Florence. Councilman Schofield expressed concerns over the operation of the Leatherman Senior Center and stated the County needed to either get in or get out. If taxpayer dollars were going to be invested in the facility, programs needed to be administered fairly to all citizens and oversight by the County needed to be in place. Other members of Council expressed concerns regarding the conflict between the two organizations involved: the Senior Citizens Association (SCA - a private, self-sustaining organization) and the Senior Center Commission (appointed by County Council). Parks and Recreation Director Joe Eason stated there was great potential for senior programs at the Center that had never been reached. Council discussed the option of putting the SCA on notice that the County would withdraw from the Agreement for operation and funding of the Center. After some discussion of the issues, it was suggested this item be referred to the appropriate committee for additional review.

MUSEUM BID

Chairman Smith stated a question was presented to Councilman Schofield in reference to the Museum Bid, regarding the 2% local preference: On a project as large as the Museum, what was the County's intention in relation to the 2% local preference? The language in the bid states Council "may" waive the requirement, provided such bids did not exceed 2% of the low bid from out of County, but there was no cap established. Councilman Schofield asked if Council would be willing to allow administration to write the contractors a letter, and attach a copy of the Ordinance, notifying bidders that the County *may or may not* honor the local bidder preference. Administrative Services Director Suzanne King stated it could be included in the addendum being sent to the bidders.

BRIEF OVERVIEW – TOM ROBINSON

Mr. Robinson stated Council had previously been provided with a list of objectives he prepared for Council's consideration. He stated one of the items discussed during the retreat was a need to provide better communication and better education to the public regarding County issues. He suggested a PIO/Media Relations person on staff to write articles for submission to the local media. Another resource that needed improvement

was the County website, which needed to be more dynamic to entice users to visit the site more frequently to be better informed. He stated that if Council was not measuring its success based on facts and figures, it would have no way of knowing what needed to be improved and what was working well. In a previous County he worked, incentives were built in for the departments to save money on operating expenses. He suggested an update to the formal bid process to modify the standards to meet current needs and best practices. He suggested maybe partnering with the South Carolina Association of Counties to establish benchmarks to compare County departments. He stated he believed the County needed to focus on being even more effective and efficient than it was. Mr. Robinson stated he wanted/needed Council's endorsement to implement items discussed, so unless Council told him to the contrary, he would begin implementing the programs and incentives discussed.

COUNCIL PRIORITIES DISCUSSED

Councilman Mumford stated his top three priorities would be: 1) Cost of Living for Employees, 2) Judicial Center, and 3) Radio System Upgrade.

Councilman Anderson stated he wanted Council to pursue the '1¢ Makes Sense.'

Councilman Rodgers stated he agreed with Councilmen Mumford and Anderson.

Mr. Robinson stated he would prepare a summary for Council. He stated he understood Council wanted him to set up a breakfast meeting with the legislators and provide them with the presentation by Mr. Yokim, pursue the 1¢ Makes Sense project, and, down the road, work on acquiring the services of an architect to work on the design of a proposed judicial center.

LAKE CITY PARK

Chairman Smith informed Council of a project that Dr. Eddie Floyd and the Drs. Bruce and Lee Foundation were supporting for the construction of a Community Park in Lake City in the Lions Park area.

There being no additional items for discussion, Councilman Rodgers made a motion to adjourn. Councilman Anderson seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

COUNCIL ADJOURNED AT 3:02 P.M.