

SPECIAL CALLED MEETING OF THE FLORENCE COUNTY COUNCIL, THURSDAY, JUNE 28, 2012, 4:00 P.M., COUNCIL CHAMBERS ROOM 803, CITY-COUNTY COMPLEX, 180 N. IRBY STREET, FLORENCE, SOUTH CAROLINA

PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Thomas F. Sullivan, Assistant Director, Emergency Management Department
Kevin V. Yokim, Finance Director
Ryon Watkins, EMS Director
Ray McBride, Library Director
Randy Godbold, VA Officer
Tiffany Wallace, Sheriff's Office
John Sweeney, Morning News

ABSENT:

Johnnie D. Rodgers, Jr., Council Member

Notice of the special called meeting of the Florence County Council appeared in the June 27, 2012 edition of the **MORNING NEWS**. Copies of the agenda were faxed to members of the media, posted in the lobby of the City-County Complex, at 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. Secretary/Chaplain Anderson provided the invocation and Vice Chairman Mumford led the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag. Chairman Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting.

ORDINANCES IN POSITION:

ORDINANCE NO. 01-2012/13 – THIRD READING

The Clerk published the title of Ordinance No. 01-2012/13: An Ordinance To Provide For The Levy Of Taxes In Florence County For The Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 2012 And Ending June 30, 2013; To Provide For The Appropriation Thereof; To Provide For Revenues For The Payment Thereof; And To Provide For Other Matters Related Thereto. Councilman Mumford made a motion to approve third reading of the Ordinance. Councilman Kirby seconded the motion.

Councilman Schofield made the following comments: “Mr. Chairman and fellow members of Council, I came up here today, fully prepared (as I said at the last Council meeting) to advocate that we fully make up the funding in the LGF that the State has shorted for the last three (3) years. Thanks largely to the efforts of Senator Leatherman, Senator McGill and others in the Senate, the Legislature has allocated an additional \$720,000, which is equal to 1.7 mills of tax for this County. So we still have a 5 mill shortfall to have full funding of the LGF to be able to pay for services that the State mandates that we provide that we have no control over; that we cannot cut; and we don’t get a say in it; and, in fact, the State makes us do them. So I came here today fully prepared, even though I don’t want to, to ask this Council to raise millage by 5 mills to make up that amount, put it at the bottom of the tax notice and explain to the public that for three (3) years we did without the money when the State did not have the money, but it’s a different situation today. The State came up with an additional \$200 million and to me that means you pay for what you committed to first, and State law says they will fund 4.5% and they are still not doing it. They are doing better, but they are still not doing it. I understand that at this time on this Council, there is not sufficient vote to do a 5 mill increase and like all the rest of you that don’t want to do it, I don’t want to do it because I know there are people out there that can’t afford it. A 5 mill increase on a \$100,000 house owner occupied will cost the tax payer about \$20 a year. And if you don’t own the house, it will be blended into your rent on the house at about \$30 a year. I still think we should explain to the public how much we are losing from the LGF, because my opinion is that this problem is going to continue year after year and there are members of the House that are advocating completely eliminating the LGF and if you think 5 mills would be bad, if they completely eliminate it, I assure you this Council or some Council is going to put a whole lot of millage down there if they can, within State limitations, to make up that amount of money. We must replace this revenue to some extent that the State has not funded for the last three years, and with the mind-set of the House of Representatives and some of our local House members, I, as I said, see continued difficulty in the years to come for this County and other counties. And, along with it, the State is mandating more and more money be spent. This is, in my opinion, become a matter of public safety and this is why I’m going to vote for a tax increase today. Because we are not able to maintain sufficient public service to protect the public. We do not have the ambulance capability in this County that we should have and it is making a negative difference in the response time of ambulances to people having heart attacks or injured in traffic incidents. In the last 30 days I know of a case of a citizen in this County who had a heart attack, at home in the City of Florence. The ambulance was dispatched from the Ebenezer station; it took the ambulance about 11 minutes to get there and that was because the 2

ambulances available in the main station in Florence were tied up on calls. Yesterday I was at my Dad's former home, doing some work there for my son, and I heard the ambulance coming from five points. It was with all haste and speed heading to McLeod's; I think it was a wreck across from the Post Office involving three vehicles, I think I saw that in the paper this morning. It hadn't any more passed the Sundae House on Palmetto Street before I heard another ambulance coming from downtown heading toward five points. As soon as it passed the Sundae House, I hear a third ambulance coming from five points heading toward, I assume, McLeod or Carolinas. So, after I left there, I called Ryon Watkins and asked him, I said, 'Tell me where we were at 4 o'clock yesterday afternoon with ambulances in Florence County.' We had one ambulance available to cover the rest of the City of Florence and all around here. We had three ambulances in the Lower Florence County. That ambulance, I think, was stationed at Francis Marion, out that way, so if you were at the Mall yesterday and had a heart attack, the response time that we could give you is not where I am willing to let it be. This is why I am willing to raise taxes. Fellas, I have been on the floor, doing CPR, waiting for the ambulance. It is a personal experience, personally, to have a friend die. The first ambulance got there was an EMT and I needed a Paramedic. The second ambulance got there, and it was a Paramedic, but this person died, in spite of what we tried to do. So I know what it means to have ambulance capability and it is every bit as important as anything in this County. When you call for the Sheriff, well at least you might have a gun and you can shoot somebody and keep them out your house. And when you call for the fire department, at least you can run out the house and it might burn down but insurance will cover it. But when you are in a wreck or you have a heart attack, you need an ambulance and you need qualified paramedics. We have lost 10 paramedics since January, because we are not paying a competitive wage rate. This is unacceptable to me. As I said last week, if you want a councilman up here to provide less than adequate service in our County, I'm not your person. This County government for less than a \$1 a day, on a \$100,000 home, provides you with law enforcement, ambulance service, court system to lock up dangerous individuals, a jail to put them in, a family court system, a recreational department to try to influence our children in a positive manner instead of letting them be involved in gangs and criminal activity, planning and codes to try and protect the public from shoddy construction, a library system that is second to none in the US, economic development activities to bring new jobs, Probate court and the list goes on and on, for less than a \$1 [a day] on a \$100,000 house. So when we talk about raising millage up here today, 5 mills it would cost \$20, if its 3 mills its \$12. To a commercial business, like I own a shopping center, its 50% more; its \$6 for every mill so if we do 3 mills it's going to be \$18. We are in a situation today that general government has been cut 1%, 2%, 3% over the last three years; we have raided the reserve fund to where we can't raid it anymore without affecting the bond rating. We have to do something. We can't let service deteriorate any further. The employees have gone with no raises; we have deferred capital maintenance until we can't defer it any more. The State should be fully funding, in my opinion, the LGF this year. And if they were, there would be no tax increase and, in fact, we could do a tax decrease. But they are not. So we have to deal with it and we are at the eleventh hour and that's not the way we should do. The State of South Carolina over the three years have done nothing but increase the cost to provide public services; State mandated Case Management computer systems for the court,

additional magistrates that are not needed, storm drainage regulations and personnel to administer that. The latest is that we got to have a doctor in the jail and the State continues to give more directives to spend more money and at the same time they are cutting the revenue to pay for the State services. It cannot continue. I may be the one that's going to vote to raise your taxes and if there is enough votes up here to do it, but any of us that vote for it are against it and those voting against it, I hold nothing against you for voting against, because I really want to vote against it, but those of us that are voting for it, we may be voting for it, but we are not causing it. The cause lies at the House of Representatives of this State for them not understanding that they should fulfill the obligations they made to the counties of this State and fully funding the LGF. I am not going to continue to gut the heck out of essential government services in order to make the State look good so that some people can tell you they lowered your taxes, when in essence they are actually raising them, they are just doing it in a different place. They are doing this to give certain small businesses, is what they were trying for, a tax decrease. I want the public to understand that 10 years ago, the public of Florence County was paying about \$2 million more on their automobile taxes than they are today. That's 5 mills worth of tax that this County does not have. So the people that say to me that taxes haven't decreased, I say they just don't understand what has been done. We've got a lot of things that need to be done, we need a new judicial center, and we have put it off and put it off and put it off. We cannot continue to put things off and this Council needs to begin making efforts to solve that problem and others. I'm going to vote for the tax increase today and be happy to make that motion or whatever is deemed appropriate."

Councilman Mumford stated that he agreed wholeheartedly with Councilman Schofield and that Council had been backed into a corner because of the General Assembly. Council has neglected employees and needed equipment and Council was going to have to bite the bullet.

Councilman Anderson stated he was serving his last year on Council and everything Councilman Schofield said was the truth. What the public had to understand was that if Council raised taxes on the local level then the State Legislature would take that as a pass and the blame would fall on County Council, not the House of Representatives. He stated that what members of the House did exhibited that they had no compassion for the citizens. He urged the public to contact Representatives Lowe and Crawford and ask them why they chose not to fund the Local Government Fund.

Councilman Schofield stated he advocated and wanted the public to understand, and he wanted to show on the tax notice this year, the Deficit in the LGF or Unfunded State Mandates and show 5 mills as the cost to provide these State mandates, even though the County was not raising taxes by that amount of millage. The County General Fund millage will then be reduced and other County millage would remain the same. He stated further that if the State did not fund the Local Government Fund where it needed to be next year, he would take the same position next year.

Councilman Kirby stated Council members were good stewards with County money and he commended the members that would vote for the tax increase. He was of the opinion that County Council was becoming the tax collector for the State and he would not vote for the tax increase. He stated further it was not County Council's job to be a tax collector for the State.

Chairman Smith stated that he has said for years that it was the basic function of county government to protect the lives and property of the citizens represented and he understood what Councilman Schofield was saying. Rural councilmen have dealt with delayed emergency response times for years and he would like to see that minimized. He asked Finance Director Kevin Yokim to provide information on what a 3 mil increase would provide. Chairman Smith suggested that revenue generated by the proposed 3 mills and the \$100,000 funding proposed for the Wellness Program/PIO/Website be set aside in a reserve fund to be used for a comprehensive county-wide study to address EMS and fire districts and then as seed money for the upgrades for EMS.

Mr. Yokim provided Council with a spreadsheet containing various options for Council's consideration and requested Council approve the Summary of Third Reading Changes as presented to Council. (A copy of the information provided is attached and incorporated by reference.) Councilman Schofield made a motion to amend Ordinance No. 01-2012/13 in line with Option #2 on the spreadsheet, with a 3 mil tax increase, eliminating the \$100,000 Wellness Program/PIO/Website and merging that amount with the amount generated by the 3 mil increase, and adding a line item in the budget for the study and implementation of corrective actions for EMS and fire/public safety. Councilman Anderson seconded the motion. Mr. Yokim asked Council, for the record, to include the third reading changes in this amendment. Councilman Schofield asked, for clarification, if the CPI increase related to the contract for household solid waste disposal was included in the budget. Chairman Smith confirmed that it was at an increase of \$1 per household per year. Councilman Schofield added to his motion that Council adopt the Summary of Third Reading Changes as presented. Councilman Anderson seconded the motion for the amendment and stated he wanted the public to know that Council had to do this because the House members chose not to do what they said they were going to do and recanted it. The motion to amend was approved unanimously. Third reading of the Ordinance was approved with a 6 – 2 vote. Voting in the affirmative were Councilmen Smith, Culberson, Mumford, Anderson, Bradley, and Schofield. Voting 'no' were Councilmen Kirby and Poston.

There being no further business to come before Council, Councilman Culberson made a motion to adjourn. Councilman Anderson seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

COUNCIL MEETING ADJOURNED AT 4:31 P.M.