

**WORKSESSION OF THE FLORENCE COUNTY COUNCIL,  
THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 2014, 7:30 A.M., CONFERENCE ROOM,  
ROOM 802, COUNTY COMPLEX, 180 N. IRBY STREET,  
FLORENCE, SOUTH CAROLINA**

**PRESENT:**

James T. Schofield, Chairman  
Waymon Mumford, Vice Chairman  
Russell W. Culberson, Council Member (entered @ 8:33 a.m.)  
Alphonso Bradley, Council Member (entered @ 7:36 a.m.)  
Roger M. Poston, Council Member  
Willard Dorriety, Jr., Council Member  
Jason M. Springs, Council Member  
K. G. Rusty Smith, Jr., County Administrator  
D. Malloy McEachin, County Attorney  
Connie Y. Haselden, Clerk to Council

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Suzanne S. King, Administrative Services Director  
Kevin V. Yokim, Finance Director  
Dusty Owens, Emergency Management Department Director  
Samuel K. Brockington, Jr., Fire/Rescue Services Coordinator  
Chief Deputy Glen Kirby  
Ben Zeigler, Attorney  
Chief John DeLung, Windy Hill Fire District  
Gavin Jackson, Morning News  
John M. 'Moot' Truluck

**ABSENT:**

Mitchell Kirby, Secretary-Chaplain  
Kent C. Caudle, Council Member

A notice of the worksession of the Florence County Council appeared in the March 12, 2014 edition of the **MORNING NEWS**. Copies of the agenda were faxed and emailed to members of the media and public requesting such documents, posted in the lobby of the County Complex, at the Doctors Bruce and Lee Foundation Public Library and all branch libraries, and on the County's website ([www.florenceco.org](http://www.florenceco.org)).

**DISCUSSION OF FIRE SERVICES AND PROPOSED ORDINANCES NO. 17-2013/14 AND NO. 18-2013/14**

The Chairman stated the first item on the Agenda was the Discussion of Fire Services and Proposed Ordinances No. 17-2013/14 and No. 18-2013/14. County Administrator K. G. Rusty Smith, Jr. provided an update on the efforts to continue the discussion with legislators to amend the current State Law regarding fire districts. Initially, the comments received were encouraging and the SCAC drafted language that was amenable. Then

comments received from legislators in Columbia were not very encouraging. Councilman Mumford talked with several legislators and he stated that it was bad that one of Florence's own was attempting to derail any efforts to improve this legislation. He said representatives from across the State were supportive, but one Senator from Florence was not supporting the efforts. Chairman Schofield cautioned Council to continue to move forward, at least until May, to see what transpires.

Chairman Schofield stated it was a general consensus among parties involved that the minimum millage the County should be able to put on to equalize fire services in Florence County was 15 to 16 mills. Council would have to vote on a budget that would either reaffirm millages that were in the budget that do not adequately fund at least three (3) fire departments or reestablish millage countywide for fire services. Second reading for the fire service related ordinances were scheduled for March 20<sup>th</sup>, with no public hearing scheduled yet. Chairman Schofield stated his opinion was that the public hearings should be scheduled in the individual fire districts to allow the public in each district opportunity to express their desires. He stated the County needed to consider tax fairness on the residents, accountability of the fire districts and the ability to increase volunteerism in the districts. Decisions on the fire service would need to be made prior to the approval or as part of the process of approval of the fiscal year 2015 budget.

Council discussed the impact of Act 388 on public safety and issues faced by each of the districts. Chairman Schofield stated rural fire districts were no longer just providing fire service but also provided first responder services. He expressed concerns regarding operations of some of the departments in the handling of funds as it relates to the law, which limits the districts use of funds for investment purposes. Windy Hill Fire Chief John DeLung stated volunteers took more pride and ownership in the districts when the equipment and fire stations belong to the districts than when everything belongs to the County or the government. He stated when the Fire Chiefs met earlier that week that they agreed there was no problem that if something were to happen and the fire districts had to dissolve, there was no problem turning everything in to the County, but they would like to retain some ownership of the property and equipment currently in use by the districts. Chief DeLung stated fire service in Florence County was the best in the Pee Dee. There were needs in the districts, but overall Florence County had outstanding fire service.

Councilman Mumford stated he was in favor of consolidation, but there was a ton of work that needed to be done between the fire departments and staff before moving forward. He stated Council had too much opposition to make a decision by June 30<sup>th</sup>. He was of the opinion that action on the consolidation needed to be delayed for a year; he did not want Council to act too quickly. Councilman Dorriety stated Florence County was blessed with the dedication it had in fire services. He agreed something needed to be done but Council needed to ensure all the 'i's were dotted and 't's were crossed before making a decision. He said one of his concerns was that the City of Florence was aggressively seeking to grow the City and annex property in the West Florence area. He provided comparisons for West Florence Fire vs. City of Florence on residential and commercial property with regard to property taxes and water services. Councilman Dorriety stated if the County lost the revenue from the West Florence area to the City, it would have a negative impact on the budget.

Councilman Bradley stated he would like to see more information from staff regarding options available. Finance Director Kevin Yokim stated he received inquiries from the Fire Finance Committee members asking if the Council did not approve consolidation, would each department need to submit budgets based on that scenario, as well as budgets based on the consolidation. Chairman Schofield stated the answer to that question would be 'yes' they would need to submit two budgets: 1) based on current circumstances and 2) based on countywide consolidation. Councilman Springs stated he agreed with Councilman Bradley that additional information and options were needed. He also agreed that equalization made sense because the value of your home has nothing to do with the cost of the services provided by the fire departments or first responders. He stated he was of the opinion Council needed to continue to move forward and not wait to take action.

Chief DeLung stated for the record, "I am not against the consolidation of the fire taxes. Never have been because this needs to happen ... we need to get the money where it needs to be and as long as it doesn't affect ... as long as everybody approves of it. I have never been against that. I just want to make sure it is done right so that two years from now it doesn't bite us in the butt. So I just wanted that on record that I am 100% behind the consolidation."

#### **DISCUSSION OF FISCAL YEAR 2015 BUDGET**

Chairman Schofield stated the next item on the Agenda was the Discussion of the Fiscal Year 2015 Budget. Staff provided information on reclassifications and new positions requested. He stated he would like a complete review of accommodations tax revenue and how it's being spent. He stated he believed that accommodations tax revenue could be used more effectively in Florence County than it was. There was a request from the Sheriff's Office for additional employees and from department directors for a raise in salary.

Mr. Smith stated the fiscal year 2015 budget exceeds current year expenditures by \$4,150,000. Some of the issues Council would have to deal with were:

- 1) employer contributions – the State raised the employer contributions for the retirement system again from 10.6 to 10.9 and police retirement from 12.8 to 13.41, which would cost \$105,000 per year;
- 2) health insurance premium – probably 10% increase and current cost was \$4.4 million per year (historically 2010 increased 15.5%, 2011 increased 13.2%, 2012 went down slightly, 2013 was 11% and 2014 was 17.6% increase) staff was reviewing other options with health insurance and asked Council for an RFQ to move forward; the on-site health clinic was scheduled to open on March 31<sup>st</sup> which would help to cut down the experience mod, a factor that caused health insurance premiums to increase;
- 3) COLA – the State, even though funding to the counties was capped through 388, they approved a 1.5% COLA to State employees (in 2009 County employees received a 2.75% COLA, 2010 - 0%, 2011 - \$600 non-recurring bonus, 2012 – 0%, 2013 – 2%); \$470,000 annually in recurring funds was required to provide a 1.5% COLA;

- 4) Discussed possibility of enhancing senior citizens' services in Johnsonville, Pamplico and Timmons ville (construction of a senior center in Timmons ville was approved with the Capital Project Sales Tax);
- 5) Fire services – Johnsonville, Hannah-Salem-Friendfield, and West Florence were in dire need;
- 6) Sheriff's Office – annual recurring cost was \$1,082,000.

Mr. Smith stated he and Kevin would like to continue working on the budget and provide options. There were limits to revenue sources; growth was somewhat limited in respects to the budget, the solid waste fee, and a millage increase. The ice/snow storm sidetracked the work on estimates for countywide curb-side pickup of solid waste, but Waste Management was working on a proposal.

The Governor requested President Obama to declare South Carolina for reimbursement through FEMA for the storms. Emergency Management Director Dusty Owens was working on coordinating that effort. Chairman Schofield stated he wanted to recognize that the Florence County Emergency Management Department recently received a high State Award and the Director of EMS was awarded the highest honor in that association as being the best EMS Director in the State.

Chairman Schofield stated that according to information provided to Council, the last pay increase the Florence County Sheriff's Office received was nine years ago. Since that time the cost of living has increased 21%. He said the Administrator just provided information on the cost of living adjustments that had been provided to employees since fiscal year 2009. Mr. Yokim stated for clarification that the comment in the information was referring to the fact that they had not received a merit increase in nine (9) years. Based on that fact, new deputies that were hired would make as much as a deputy with nine years of service. Chief Deputy Glen Kirby addressed Council on behalf of the Sheriff's Office and expressed the concerns and difficulties they faced. The City of Florence and South Carolina Highway Patrol were aggressively hiring and each of those agencies had a better record of pay increases on an annual basis and had better starting salaries than Florence County Sheriff's Office could offer (e.g. approximately \$27,000 with Florence County vs. \$33,000 with Highway Patrol). In response to a question from the Chairman, Chief Deputy Kirby stated twelve (12) additional deputies were needed, which would provide three (3) per shift and the cost would be approximately \$1 million in recurring funding annually.

Chairman Schofield stated staff needed to present every option available on the budget for Council's consideration so that Council could determine what was necessary to fund and vital to the operation of the County. Mr. Smith asked if Council was interested in leaving any of the other items he mentioned in the budget. Chairman Schofield stated to him the priority was to fund the Sheriff's Office and fix the problem there.

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

**COUNCIL WORKSESSION ADJOURNED AT 9:37 A.M.**