



Richland County Council

SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
September 6, 2017 – 2:00 PM
4th Floor Conference Room

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Joyce Dickerson, Chair; Bill Malinowski, Vice Chair; Calvin “Chip” Jackson; Norman Jackson, Gwendolyn Davis-Kennedy; Paul Livingston; Jim Manning; Yvonne McBride; Dalhi Myers; Greg Pearce; and Seth Rose

OTHERS PRESENT: Gerald Seals, Brandon Madden, Jamelle Ellis, Beverly Harris, Sandra Yudice, Michelle Onley, James Hayes, David Bowser, Stacey Hamm, Larry Smith and Kimberly Williams-Roberts

CALL TO ORDER – Ms. Dickerson called the meeting to order at approximately 2:00 PM.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA – Mr. Malinowski stated that Item (a) should be plural.

Mr. Malinowski moved, seconded by Mr. Pearce, to adopt the agenda as amended. The vote in favor was unanimous.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/ACTION

- a. **Retreat Preparations** – Mr. Seals stated a “Priority Setting Session” with Council was held in September 2016, which assisted staff in setting Council’s priorities and the budget.

The “Priority Setting Sessions” are a time for Council to provide Administration with guidance. Staff will attempt to look at the top 5 things and have an opportunity for some education and direction on those issues.

The issue of annexation has taken up a lot of time and background discussion. In preparation, staff has looked for an expert to address the issue of annexation, in particular when annexation morphs into consolidation. What are the appropriate procedures for addressing that? What are the negatives? What are the benefits?

Last year there was a discussion about the portfolio of services the County provides. (i.e. What level should the County provide those services? Adjustments?). Staff put together a comprehensive portfolio, which needs to be addressed.

The third issue that needs to be addressed is sustainability. In particular, financial sustainability. Where is the County in terms of the economics of Richland County? What are the trends? The County is large enough that it has its own economy.

The final issue is compensation of employees. How does the County begin to address the compensation issues? In terms of costs, insurance is a big issue.

The suggestion is to hold the "Priority Setting Sessions" over a 2-day period of time.

Mr. Seals stated the area the County is most challenged in is constituent services and staff has been working on this area for the last year. For example:

- There is not a simple tool kit for Council to reach into as they are meeting
- Rudimentary discussions need to take place with Council in regards to fine tuning the tool kit
- Funding agencies and/or events, but not knowing when the events are taking place
- Approximately 400 HOAs in the County
- Over 8,900 sites are blighted, abandoned, etc.
- Rebranding the County

Mr. C. Jackson inquired when the budgeting process will begin.

Mr. Seals stated Council will receive a comprehensive document that is an economic sustainability document, which will go through a trend analysis. In addition, Mr. Seals has been looking for an expert Council can talk to about trend analysis and matters that will be facing the County.

The budgeting process needs to begin prior to November. The budget office has begun to work on the analysis and look at where the County is and mapping out and trending the costs. The County needs to be more proactive instead of reactionary.

Mr. C. Jackson stated he would like to hear from the Board of Economic Advisors about the economic forecast for South Carolina and Richland County. Their timing may not be on the same schedule that the Administrator is on since they typically talk about the forecast in November or December.

Ms. Myers stated staff did a really good job of putting together the briefing book of the County's services and what the residents' tax dollars are paying for. The County needs to do a better job of making the taxpayers aware of what their tax dollars are used for. She suggested developing marketing materials to inform the citizens of these services. For example, many of the citizens believe the County has contracted with the City of Columbia for fire service.

Mr. Seals was in agreement the materials available are woefully inadequate.

Ms. McBride stated it is important for the County to look at the priorities when setting a budget for the various funds. Those established priorities would be funded first and then other things can be funded. For example, if poverty was one of our priorities that our budget be driven by that priority.

Ms. Dickerson stated she was out riding in Columbia late at night and noticed they were cleaning the streets so there was not a lot of debris to be find the next morning. Other areas of the County are not as well maintained.

Mr. Seals stated he has noticed that the County as a whole is dark, which lends to increased crime rates in those areas.

Mr. N. Jackson stated one of the major concerns in his district is the maintenance of ditches.

Ms. Kennedy expressed her displeasure with all of the signs in the County. She said she picked up over 100 signs and called the individuals regarding the existing sign ordinance.

- b. Insurance Program – Mr. Seals stated there is a 2-Stage process to address the insurance issues and perhaps lessen the burden. Part of the problem is while Council has authorized increases to the compensation of employees, the increases have not kept pace with the growth in insurance costs.

Ms. Dickerson stated she felt this issue needed to be vetted by full Council and instruct the Administrator on how to proceed. If action is not taken on the matter today it will be forwarded to the Council Retreat for discussion.

Mr. C. Jackson inquired as to when the new increases will take place.

Mr. Seals stated the cure is multi-phased. The first phase is there are approximately 500 employees who are affected by the increases. The recommendation is for the County to absorb the increase for the insurance. The costs will be approximately \$482,000. There is sufficient savings in the insurance line item that will prevent pressure on the fund balance.

The second phase of the cure would involve arriving at a policy that would coincide with taking a look at the overall compensation of employees to ensure the employees do not go into poverty level. This does not change the aggressiveness in terms of mitigating insurance costs by ensuring the employees are healthier. This policy will be presented to Council in the Spring through the committee process.

Mr. Seals stated the Priority Setting Sessions are tentatively scheduled for October 19-20.

Mr. Pearce stated when the insurance was restructured last year there was a 2-tiered system wherein the employees could purchase a richer plan or continue with a basic insurance plan. He inquired as to where the plan fell apart.

Mr. Seals stated he does not think he it fell apart. The employees with dependent coverage are where the major issue lies. It would appear this was not taken into account when the insurance plan(s) were restructured.

Mr. Pearce requested the Administrator to explain the savings within the program that will cover the costs without going into fund balance.

Mr. Seals stated he has prepared a memo for distribution to Council that will explain how the costs will be covered.

Mr. Pearce stated he would suggest moving this matter forward for a vote as quickly as possible since it is time sensitive.

Mr. Malinowski inquired what happens if the County absorbs the costs this year and there is another increase next year.

Mr. Seals stated the County will not be able to absorb 10-15% increases per year. His suggestion is to begin by setting a policy and continue to be aggressive in working with the insurance company, as well as ourselves.

Mr. C. Jackson stated his reason for asking if this was a time sensitive matter was to ensure Council was able to have a broader conversation.

Mr. Seals stated the first deductions from employees' paychecks will be this coming Friday. He stated we will be able to issue a refund, but the more we get into October the employees are going to feel

the deductions. Ideally, if there was some way to take action at this meeting we could foregone that happening.

Mr. Pearce stated when we restructured the insurance plan we talked about things we needed to do in the future. For example, we have not moved forward with exploring the possibility of partnering with Palmetto Health to provide in-house care on a contractual basis to reduce insurance costs. Simply negotiating with the insurance company will not be produce the results needed. We are going to have to think outside of the “insurance company” box.

Mr. Pearce moved, seconded by Mr. N. Jackson, to authorize the Administrator to initiate the change as soon as possible.

Ms. Myers inquired if this speaks to the main issue with the EMS workers.

Ms. Dickerson responded in the affirmative.

Ms. Myers inquired if we are experiencing 12 – 15% insurance increases with CIGNA every year.

Mr. Seals stated there is the potential to have to significant increases if we do not gain control of this.

Ms. Myers stated we need to look at other competitive providers because that is going to be real money for the employees in the future.

Mr. Pearce stated for clarification for Ms. Myers and Mr. C. Jackson who were not here last year. Historically, the County has provided an incredible plan, which got us into problems. We had a very rich, low deductible plan. Then with the changes in healthcare it has crushed us. Last year, we instituted a buy-up plan for employees to retain the rich plan, but also provided a base plan.

Ms. Myers inquired if we have heard back from employees who do not have dependents to ensure they do not feel like they are getting a lesser benefit.

Mr. Seals stated employees who do not have dependent coverage are speaking up and stating it is unfair about how the increase is affecting their fellow employees.

Mr. Livingston stated he knows we promote preventative measures for staff, but is there a way to effect the dependents as well.

Mr. C. Jackson inquired if this motion will cover all employees with family coverage.

Mr. Seals stated there may be additional employees to opt-in for coverage that did not previously due to the increase in premiums.

Ms. McBride inquired if staff has checked with other comparable counties to inquire about issues they may be experiencing.

Mr. Seals responded in the affirmative.

Ms. Dickerson requested the Administrator to ensure the employees know that Council is taking this matter very serious.

In Favor: Pearce, C. Jackson, N. Jackson, Malinowski, Dickerson, Livingston, Myers, Kennedy, Manning, and McBride.

The vote in favor was unanimous.

- c. Personnel Matters: Staff Evaluation – Mr. Pearce moved, seconded by Mr. N. Jackson, to direct the Chair and Vice Chair explore options for the evaluation of the Administrator and the County Attorney. The vote in favor was unanimous.
- d. Personnel Matter: Clerk’s Search – Mr. Pearce moved, seconded by Mr. N. Jackson, to direct the Chair and Vice Chair to potentially develop a template for the evaluation of the future Clerk of Council and to bring back options for hiring someone to assist Council as soon as possible so Council can make a determination of who they would like to engage to perform those duties. The vote in favor was unanimous.

ADJOURNMENT – The meeting was adjourned at approximately 3:45.

X

Joyce Dickerson
Chairwoman

X

Bill Malinowski
Vice Chair

X

Calvin "Chip" Jackson
District Nine

X

Norman Jackson
District Eleven

X

Gwendolyn Kennedy
District Seven

X

Paul Livingston
District Four

X

Jim Manning
District Eight

X

Yvonne McBride
District Three

X

Dalhi Myers
District Ten

X

Greg Pearce
District Six

X

Seth Rose
District Five

The Minutes were transcribed by Michelle M. Onley, Deputy Clerk of Council