



# GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes

## Committee of the Whole

February 19, 2019

5:07 p.m.

County Square – Conference Room D

### Council Members

- Mr. Butch Kirven, Chairman
- Mr. Willis Meadows, Vice Chairman
- Mrs. Xanthene Norris, Chairman Pro Tem
- Mr. Joe Dill
- Mr. Mike Barnes
- Mr. Sid Cates
- Mr. Rick Roberts
- Mr. Bob Taylor
- Mrs. Liz Seman
- Mr. Ennis Fant, Sr.
- Mr. Lynn Ballard
- Mr. Dan Tripp

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting date, time, place and agenda was posted on the bulletin board at the County Square and made available to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned Citizens.

### Council Members Absent

None

### Staff Present

- Mark Tollison, County Attorney
- John Hansley, Deputy County Administrator
- Regina McCaskill, Clerk to Council
- Paula Gucker, Assistant County Administrator, Public Works
- Bob Mihalic, Governmental Relations Officer
- Shannon Herman, Assistant to the County Administrator

### Others Present

None

### Call to Order

Chairman Kirven

### Invocation

Councilor Mike Barnes

**Item (3) Approval of Minutes**

**ACTION:** Councilor Norris moved to approve the minutes of the January 22, 2019, Committee of the Whole Meeting.

Motion carried unanimously by Council Members present.

**Item (4) Phoenix Center Update**

Presenters: Becky Maddox – Executive Director  
Curtis Reece – Director of Community Based Programs and Prevention

Becky Maddox recognized the members of the Phoenix Center staff who were in attendance and stated they considered their employment an expression of service to the community. They were “all in” in terms of meeting the mission of the center, supporting one another and serving their clients. Ms. Maddox stated she hoped the love for their work was evident in the services provided to their clients.

Ms. Maddox has been employed at the Phoenix Center for 16 years; one year as Executive Director. She introduced Curtis Reece; he has been employed with the center for about 16 years in various capacities and currently served as the Director of Community-Based Programs and Prevention. Ms. Maddox also recognized the members of the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission who were in attendance.

Ms. Maddox stated substance abuse was not a new concern for the community; it has been devastating families for years. The recent spike in opiate overdoses has certainly gotten everyone’s attention. It was different from recent drug crisis such as meth and crack as most people have used an opiate at some time in their life. Ms. Maddox stated it was recognized that opiate abuse was something that could happen to anyone and most people know someone who has passed away from opiate addiction.

Ms. Maddox stated opiate overdoses killed an average of 200 people daily which was the equivalent of an airplane full of people crashing every single day.

Ms. Maddox stated the Phoenix Center has been Greenville County’s designated substance abuse treatment center for more than 40 years and served approximately 5,000 clients per year with another 10,000 served through Community Prevention. Payment plans were arranged so that anyone could access services regardless of financial resources.

Greenville County has accessed more substance abuse services than any other county in the state. The county has one of four free-standing detox centers in the state, one of three residential programs for pregnant women and women with children and one of two adolescent residential treatment facilities. Ms. Maddox stated residential programs of any type were expensive but so important to the community. She added that Greenville County also had one of only a few programs that treated children under the age of 6 whose mother either used substances during pregnancy or afterwards.

Approximately 3500 individuals were served annually in the Outpatient Program. Those individuals were able to continue working, live at home and perform all of their normal daily activities while attending the program. Ms. Maddox stated the Medication Assisted Treatment Program combined treatment with traditional counseling therapy. She stated services were also provided in the community at Probation and Parole, Juvenile Detention Center, Department of Social Services, Detention Center and in area schools.

The Phoenix Center was able to provide a comprehensive continuum of services due to support from private donors, Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services (DAODAS) and through the support that the County provided which was critical in order to fund continued services. Ms. Maddox stated the center has been very proactive in meeting the needs of the community as reflected in the depth and breadth of services provided. She stated she could not stress how rich Greenville was in terms of its resources for substance abuse needs.

Ms. Maddox stated the services provided through the Phoenix Center were working. The data collected by the center on a regular basis clearly showed that people were getting better. She stated reductions in substance abuse, alcohol abuse, arrests, homelessness and emergency room visits were noted. Even those individuals that did not successfully complete the program were helped in the long run due to the fact that they had made the effort and were able to connect with services. The community was stronger because of the Phoenix Center.

Ms. Maddox introduced Curtis Reece to discuss some upcoming legislation that could impact the need in the community.

Curtis Reece stated the current opioid issues had been particularly challenging; however, Greenville County was providing some of the most innovative and effective programs in the country to deal with opioid abuse. He added it was very uncommon for an agency to be able to offer the continuum of services as the Phoenix Center was able to do; only 3% of the treatment centers in the country had the level of services that were provided in Greenville County. Mr. Reece added that the Prevention Program offered at the center recently won the National Innovative Prevention Award from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association (SAMHSA) and the National Prevention Network.

In terms of opioids, the Phoenix Center offered some of the best clinical and community training in the country at the Center for Excellence - Gibson Training Center. Mr. Reece stated the Phoenix Center hosted the House Opioid Committee before the last legislative session, assisted Lindsey Graham with the Opioid Roundtable and hosted Governor McMaster to sign over legislation related to opioid abuse.

Mr. Reece stated as bad as the opioid crisis was, it was not the #1 referral for treatment; alcohol was first followed by marijuana. While opioids got the headlines and remained a serious issue, alcohol took more lives, caused more harm and cost more money to the system as any other substance. Mr. Reece stated about 70,000 people die each year from opioid overdoses but about 150,000 die from alcohol abuse. He added it was good to keep perspective on the issues that were being treated.

Marijuana abuse was the second most abused substance in the state and cost millions of dollars each year for treatment. The most dangerous substances in our society were alcohol and tobacco; tobacco took about 450,000 lives per year. In terms of the legalization of marijuana, the type that was being presented was absolutely not medicine. Medicines were controlled at the molecular level for strength, purity and quantity to produce side effects to reduce addiction. He added there were some marijuana-based medicines that had been approved by the FDA such as Marinol to help cancer patients and Epidiolex to help children with seizures. Both had passed FDA scrutiny and were totally supported by the Phoenix Center.

Mr. Reece stated doctors were absolutely not involved in the proposed legalization of marijuana. While prescriptions for marijuana could not be legally written by a doctor, a recommendation could be written. He added the individual could then take the recommendation to a private dispensary where a "budtender" would inform them about the quantity, frequency and purity of the substance. Budtenders had no medical history or medical professional experience which was very concerning from a public health standpoint.

Mr. Reece stated the opioid epidemic was certainly a huge cost to society but the marijuana epidemic was growing. He stated the Phoenix Center leveraged available resources in order to reach more citizens more so than many other communities.

Councilor Ballard stated the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission was one of the more engaged boards. One of the key aspects of the Phoenix Center was its Alcohol Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) Programs. Meetings were offered 3 days a week for AA and 2 days a week for NA. Mr. Ballard stated being in a treatment center became a "safe haven" and once finished, the individual had to deal with the real world again. The AA and NA meetings helped with the success rate once a person was released.

Councilor Roberts stated there was a lack of mental health resources at the local, state and national level. He added that often there was a dual diagnosis of substance abuse and mental illness. Mr. Roberts inquired as to how the Phoenix Center dealt with the situation.

Ms. Maddox agreed that a majority of the clients they worked with also suffered from mental illness. The Phoenix Center has employed a contract psychiatrist and some of the staff at the Phoenix Center were licensed to provide mental health services but not prescribe medication. She stated the Phoenix Center relied on a close relationship with Mental Health to deal with the situation.

Councilor Cates inquired if the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission had taken a stand on the legalization of marijuana.

Mr. Reece stated Sarah Goldsby, Director of DAODAS was present at a recent press conference along with the City of Greenville Chief of Police Ken Miller and the South Carolina Medical Association; they all stood together to prevent the legalization of marijuana. He added many people were confused about medical marijuana.

Councilor Cates asked if the Commission had considered having a press conference in Greenville to express their concerns and objections to the legalization of marijuana.

Mr. Reece stated that was a very good idea. He stated there had been radio campaigns to provide some state leadership as well as awards presented to the Appalachian Council of Governments. Mr. Reece stated training had also been scheduled to inform policy makers and decision makers.

Councilor Ballard stated the Phoenix Center had also put out a position statement.

Mr. Reece stated the Greenville County Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse was one of the first in the state to release a position statement regarding the legalization of marijuana. He commended the commissioners for taking the leadership role; they had received a great deal of respect from other counties looking for leadership from Greenville. Mr. Reece stated a copy of the position statement was in the packet of information given to each Council Member.

Chairman Kirven asked Mr. Reece to update Council on the collaborative efforts with all the other entities that were involved in intervention and prevention of substance abuse.

Mr. Reece stated the Phoenix Center had a number of partners and were blessed with the resources available in Greenville County. There were recovery programs in the community so people would have a lasting support system. The Echo Coalition met earlier in the day with over 40 key partners in attendance including but not limited to hospitals, human service agencies, law enforcement and behavioral health agencies. He stated it took all those agencies working together to be effective. Mr. Reece stated he would be glad to provide information from the Opioid Roundtable that showed what the "safety net" in Greenville looked like.

Chairman Kirven inquired as to what County Council could do to help.

Ms. Maddox stated Greenville County consistently supported the Phoenix Center through the budget process; they would not be able to continue to offer all needed services without that support. The need for services was growing and the need for funding was growing as well.

Mr. Reece stated alcohol and drug issues were the root cause for a number of community issues including EMS and law enforcement. Addressing the contributing factors would have an effect on all other county services.

Councilor Seman suggested discussing the issue with the Legislative Delegation in terms of where they stand on the marijuana issue and for Council to voice its concerns from a public health standpoint.

Ms. Maddox asked Council to take the opportunity to let others know about the services offered at the Phoenix Center, when possible.

**Item (5)      Adjournment**

**ACTION:** Councilor Dill moved to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 5:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Regina G. McCaskill, Clerk to Council