

**GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**COMMUNICATIONS AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

February 28, 2023  
4:00 p.m.  
County Square – Conference Room D

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

***Committee Members Present:***

Chris Harrison, *Chairman*  
Benton Blount, *Vice-Chairman*  
Joey Russo  
Steve Shaw  
Butch Kirven

***Committee Members Absent:***

None

***Others Present:***

Bob Mihalic, *Governmental Affairs Officer*  
Regina McCaskill, *Clerk to Council*  
Jessica Stone, *Deputy Clerk to Council*  
Terrance Galloway, *Information Systems*  
Mark Tollison, *County Attorney*  
Chris Antley, *Assistant County Attorney*  
Tee Coker, *Assistant County Administrator*  
Hesha Gamble, *Assistant County Administrator*  
Shannon Herman, *Assistant County Administrator*

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|------------------------|---|-------------------|
| <b><i>Item (1)</i></b> | <b><u><i>Call to Order</i></u></b>                                      | Chairman Harrison |
| <b><i>Item (2)</i></b> | <b><u><i>Invocation</i></u></b>   | Councilor Russo   |
| <b><i>Item (3)</i></b> | <b><u><i>Overview of Committee Purpose and Responsibilities</i></u></b> |                   |

Chairman Harrison provided an overview of the committee’s purpose and responsibilities. He stated the Communications and Governmental Affairs (CGA) Committee was scheduled to meet the fourth Tuesday of each month at 4:00 p.m. A Citizen Communication Forum would be hosted by the CGA with other Council Members in attendance; it was scheduled for the second Tuesday of each month at 5:00 p.m. During those sessions, other organizations would address Council; followed by discussion. Immediately afterward, citizens would be given the opportunity to address Council on any topic, with each speaker allotted three (3) minutes to do so. The entire session should last approximately 60-90 minutes.

Mr. Harrison stated the committee came about from thoughts and input from the community, staff, as well as past and present Council Members. It was designed to improve, build upon and expand communication efforts across the board. The intent of the committee was not to be a “complaint driven” model; it would actually put forth worthwhile things the County was doing, showcasing what was being done well and what areas needed improvement.

Chairman Harrison stated there were three (3) main areas in which the committee would concentrate its efforts; County Communications, Government Relations and Community Outreach. County Communications included planning for communication, procedures used, implementation of procedures, oversight and transparency. Government Relations included internal relations, e.g., staff, boards and commissions and the Sheriff's Office, as well as external relations, e.g., citizens, outside jurisdictions, stakeholder groups, etc. Mr. Harrison stated Community Outreach included marketing efforts, social media, citizen input and meeting broadcast management.

Mr. Harrison thanked Bob Mihalic, Regina McCaskill and Jessica Stone for their efforts in helping set up the new committee. He also thanked Mr. Tripp and his colleagues for their support in establishing the committee.

Councilor Russo stated the broadcasting of meetings was a big part of moving into the County's new office building. A new platform would be used for the meetings. Mr. Russo stated he wanted to make sure an evaluation of the new platform was completed in the near future. Archiving of meetings was very important; if a citizen was unable to catch the livestream of a meeting they would have the option of viewing it later. Mr. Russo stated the ability to view meetings, after the fact, was important for transparency. Broadcasting of meetings and archiving those meetings should be a huge priority for the CGA Committee in an effort to increase transparency. It was important for the citizens of Greenville County to see how Council voted on specific items of interest. Mr. Russo requested a preview of the proposed platform to be used; he suggested the development of a County Council social media account.

Vice-Chairman Blount stated he was excited about the CGA Committee for multiple reasons. Greenville County was growing rapidly; historically, as cities grew, transparency shrank. It was good to see the County doing the opposite by finding ways to be more transparent. Mr. Blount stated it said a lot about what the County hoped the community would see about Council's efforts. He had heard from some of his constituents that the committee's purpose was to keep the public from having a voice; however, that was anything but the truth and the committee would actually give the public more opportunities to address Council. Mr. Blount stated the CGA Committee was also a good way for the public to get information to Council prior to making decisions regarding issues. He was very excited about the social media aspect of the committee's purpose; it was a great "arm" to reach out to those individuals who were unable to visit the County office or stay engaged like others. Councilor Blount stated if anything in the community appeared to be "off", it was the fact the many people did not understand some of the terminology the County used. Failing to understand that terminology left the County open to misunderstanding and "negative press", something neither side wanted.

Chairman Harrison thanked Councilor Blount for agreeing to serve as Vice-Chairman of the committee. Mr. Harrison requested Mr. Mihalic provide the committee, in the near future, with an overview of the County's current communication efforts, such as social media accounts and newsletters.

Councilor Kirven commended Councilor Harrison for having the vision and initiative to get the CGA Committee up and running. An Intergovernmental Relations Committee was established some years ago; however, the duties of that committee were limited to specific item and was no longer in existence. The communications aspect was a new concept and very appropriate; it was time to see how the County could improve communication with the public, while increasing transparency, visibility and messaging. He stated it appeared that many of the positive things Greenville County accomplished went unnoticed or were misunderstood; hopefully, the CGA Committee would be a way to further explain the County's actions. Mr. Kirven stated Mr. Harrison was not new to Greenville County Government. Prior to being elected to Council, he had worked for the County as a professional planner for a number of years and was a member of the Planning Commission. Councilor Kirven stated Mr. Harrison's expertise was greatly appreciated; his appointment as Chairman of the Committee was an excellent move.

Chairman Harrison stated he was very excited to have Mr. Kirven serve on the committee, given his knowledge and years of experience. He fully expected a plethora of issues to be brought up during the Citizen Communication Forum; however, it was important to give staff, citizens and community groups the opportunity to showcase the good things that were going on in the County.

Councilor Shaw stated he was excited about the committee; he knew Mr. Harrison had generally good motives. Mr. Shaw requested Bob Mihalic outline the responsibilities of his position, as he had never really understood the role of the County's Governmental Affairs Officer.

Mr. Mihalic stated his position as Governmental Affairs Officer encompassed both governmental affairs and communications. From the communications standpoint, it was proactive and reactive. On the reactive side, he answered all media calls and communication with the public; there was always quite a bit of reaction to media calls, responding to FOIA requests and trying to provide information efficiently, quickly and correctly.

From a proactive side, Mr. Mihalic stated his department dealt with the County's divisions such as Animal Care, Parks and Recreation, and the Litter End Here Program, as if they were actual businesses. Social media was used to promote those programs along with media buys such as radio, print and television advertising. Mr. Mihalic stated he had one staff member, Mattie Moon, who was the County's social media coordinator. Ms. Moon was an excellent graphic artist; she focused on the social media counts for Parks and Recreation, Animal Care and for Greenville County.

Mr. Mihalic in regards to the governmental relations aspect of his position, he paid close attention to what was happening in Columbia and how it may affect Greenville County. Through the years, if the County wanted a bill or an issue before the State House, a lobbying campaign would be put into effect. Mr. Mihalic stated it was also important to stay aware of happenings at the State House to ensure Greenville County did not need to get involved. For example, the Local Government Fund was doing well and continued to be fully funded; in years past, that had not been the case and County officials had traveled to Columbia to address the issue. Mr. Mihalic stated his department also worked with local municipalities, businesses, non-profits and other entities on various issues. The Governmental Affairs Department was the link between the public and Greenville County. He did not speak for Council Members; his role was to speak for staff and Greenville County Government.

Chairman Harrison stated for a long time, Council had put governmental affairs and communications on Mr. Mihalic and his team. Given the advances in technology, it was obvious additional resources were needed and were available.

Councilor Kirven stated at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Mihalic and his team devised and implemented a great media campaign. The campaign encouraged citizens to take precautionary steps to tamp down the spread of the virus; it was very effective.

Councilor Shaw stated he recently learned SCAC had hired a new communications director; it appeared SCAC was focused on providing better communication. He would provide the information he had received about the position to his colleagues.

*Item (4)*     *Adjournment*

**Action:**     Councilor Kirven moved to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously the meeting adjourned at 4:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

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Jessica M. Stone  
Deputy Clerk to Council