



GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes
Special Called Meeting
June 23, 2023
4:21 p.m.

County Square - Council Chambers

Council Members

Mr. Dan Tripp, *Chairman, District 28*
Mrs. Liz Seman, *Vice-Chairwoman, District 24*
Mr. Butch Kirven, *Chairman Pro Tem, District 27*
Mr. Joey Russo, *District 17*
Mr. Mike Barnes, *District 18*
Mr. Benton Blount, *District 19*
Mr. Stephen Shaw, *District 20*
Mr. Chris Harrison, *District 21*
Mr. Stan Tzouvelekas, *District 22*
Mr. Alan Mitchell, *District 23*
Mr. Ennis Fant, Sr., *District 25*
Mr. Rick Bradley, *District 26*

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.

Council Members Absent

None

Staff Present

Joe Kernell, County Administrator
Mark Tollison, County Attorney
John Hansley, Deputy County Administrator
Regina McCaskill, Clerk to Council
Pam Gilliam, Administrative Assistant
Phillip Simmons, Information Systems

Others Present

None

Call to Order

Chairman Dan Tripp

Invocation

Councilor Ennis Fant

Item (3) **Reconsideration – Third Reading of the County of Greenville / FY2024 Budget Ordinance**

Action: Per notice provided in the Council Packet, Vice-Chairwoman Seman moved to reconsider the June 20, 2023 vote on third reading of the FY 2023–24 County Budget Ordinance.

Motion carried.

Item (4) **County of Greenville / FY 2024 Budget**

Action: Chairman Pro Tem Kirven moved for adoption at third reading an ordinance adopting the County of Greenville FY 2024 Budget.

Chairman Tripp requested Mr. Kernell provide an overview of the FY 2023-24 County of Greenville Budget.

Mr. Kernell provided an overview of the budget process, including history on the preparation of it. The presentation was followed by a question and answer session.

Chairman Tripp asked Mr. Kernell to explain drops in the Fund Balance.

Mr. Kernell stated property taxes came in late in the year and continued until the beginning of the following year, causing drops in the Fund Balance. Mr. Kernell stated the County’s portion of the taxes was relatively low. Greenville County School’s portion was very large. Monies in the Fund Balance were used to pay for emergencies, such as ice storms, as well as payroll. Mr. Kernell stated the County’s payroll was approximately \$200 million or \$7-8 million every two weeks. The County experienced losses during the Covid-19 pandemic; however, it was able to offset some of those losses with monies received from the Federal Government. Mr. Kernell stated Greenville County had not raised its millage in 30 years; in fact, it had been reduced a number of times.

Chairman Tripp asked how many times had the millage rate been reduced over the past 30 years.

Mr. Kernell stated the County had reduced its millage six (6) times during the past 30 years. The law was very clear about taxing entities. They were unable to get windfalls due to reassessments.

Mr. Kernell stated there were no plans to approach Council in the near future for a millage increase. The Redevelopment Project would help with that and was projected to bring in \$20 million in new taxes. Mr. Kernell stated Greenville County could simply not continue to provide the current level of service without major reductions. There were no new programs included in the proposed budget, even though some people were saying it contained new programs. The proposed budget offered a very sound fiscal plan. A number of man hours went into the preparation of the budget.

Mr. Kernell stated there had been some suggested changes to the budget such as doing away with additional funding for affordable housing, greenspace and public transit. That plan, if implemented, would cut out all new employees, no new deputy, EMS or Detention Center positions. Police officers had to have new vehicles; it served as their “office.” The fleet had to keep rolling. Currently, lease agreements on law enforcement vehicles were for the life of the vehicle. EMS had to have ambulances. Mr. Kernell stated those proposed changes would actually put the County about \$20 million deeper in the hole. He stated the proposed budget was a solid, responsible plan; he was aware it may not be a popular plan with everyone. At the end of the day, he had a responsibility to do what was best for the operation of the County and its residents.

Councilor Shaw asked how much money was needed to maintain the County’s AAA credit rating.

Mr. Kernell stated 25% - 35% of the budget, per Council policy.

Councilor Russo inquired about funding from the Local Government Fund.

Mr. Kernell stated the County received funding from the Local Government Fund. Those funds were used to offset the cost of mandates from the State such as housing for State agencies. Over the past few years, the County has lost \$60 - \$65 million as the funding received was below the statutory limit. In 2012, the County received \$24 million, which was still below the statutory limit.

Chairman Tripp stated the County received monies from the federal government in response to the pandemic. Several COVID-related programs were set to use those funds. He asked if those funds and/or programs could have attributed to the shortfall.

Mr. Kernell stated Greenville County received \$93 million in CARES funding from the federal government. Those funds were used to help small businesses stay in business by purchasing equipment, supplies, PPE, etc. Other programs were set up to help the local municipalities, special purpose districts and non-profits. Mr. Kernell stated once the funds were depleted, those programs were shut down. Monies were also received from the American Recovery Act to assist tenants and landlords with rental and utility payments. Mr. Kernell stated none of the COVID programs were still in place.

Chairman Tripp stated it was his understanding that a homeowner with a home valued at \$200,000 would see a \$56 increase in taxes. He asked if there was any relief for senior citizens.

Mr. Kernell stated a home valued at \$200,000 would see a \$56 increase; for those individuals qualifying for the Homestead Act, their tax bill would increase by \$42.

Councilor Fant stated the Greenville Transit Authority was established in 1970. He asked Mr. Hansley how long the County had help fund GTA since that time.

Mr. Hansley stated Greenville County had helped fund GTA since his employment began in 1977.

Councilor Shaw stated the issue was why Greenville County gave more funding to GTA than the City of Greenville.

Councilor Tzouvelekas asked if the millage increase affected taxes on cars, boats and businesses.

Mr. Kernell stated the millage increase was across the board.

Councilor Tzouvelekas stated he wanted to confirm that the increase would affect rental properties.

Mr. Kernell stated the increase would affect all properties.

Councilor Tzouvelekas stated it was his understanding that an increase of 11 mills was needed in order avoid losing first responders. That amount had been reduced to 7 mills and there was no mention of cutting positions. He asked if the increase was cut to 5 mills, along with eliminating affordable housing, greenspace and public transportation funding, would there still be a need to cut positions.

Mr. Kernell stated when the millage rate increase dropped to 7 mills, building permit fees increased and monies were moved from Hospitality Tax to Parks, Recreation and Tourism to adjust for the reduction in the recreation mill. If the millage dropped lower than 7, the County would be forced to either cut programs or rearrange how they were funded. It was a service issue. Council had been reluctant to raise fees; however, it was good that they had agreed to do so in order to drop the millage increase.

Councilor Tzouvelekas stated the millage was not raised on the last budget.

Mr. Kernell stated that was due to the County having received \$52 million from the federal government to offset loss.

Councilor Tzouvelekas stated the millage rates for local fire districts had increased over the years.

Mr. Kernell stated the millage rates for the fire districts had nothing to do with the County's budget.

Councilor Tzouvelekas stated 30,000 people moved to Greenville between 2020 and 2024; the County's budget increased by \$100 million.

Mr. Kernell stated if the COVID funds were taken out of the equation, the increase would actually not be that much.

Councilor Shaw stated over the last two years, the County received \$93 million in CARES funding and \$110 million in ARPA funding.

Mr. Kernell stated \$30 million was received for rental assistance for a total of approximately \$240 in federal funding in response to the pandemic.

Councilor Shaw asked if affordable housing funding was put in place during the time those funds were received.

Mr. Kernell stated affordable housing funding was already in place prior to the receipt of that funding. So far, the County had given approximately \$5 million to affordable housing, outside of the federal funding.

Action: Chairman Pro Tem Kirven moved to approve the FY 2024 Budget, as amended.

Mr. Kirven stated Greenville County had a long history of having a conservative budget and policies. The new proposed budget carried on that tradition. With the proposed 7 mill increase, the County would have the 7th lowest millage rate in the State, lower than Spartanburg, Laurens and Anderson. He stated Greenville County had the lowest number of employees, per capita, in the State. Public Safety was the County's number one priority. The proposed budget provided the capabilities to protect the citizens of Greenville County. Cutting positions would affect all County operations. Mr. Kirven stated inflation had driven up the cost of services dramatically.

Motion as presented was approved by a roll call vote of eight (Russo, Barnes, Harrison, Mitchell, Seman, Fant, Kirven and Tripp) in favor and four (Blount, Shaw, Tzouvelekas and Bradley) in opposition.

Councilor Shaw asked Mr. Tollison if it was legal to have a public hearing notice that was different from the proposed ordinance. The current numbers were in conflict with the public notice and the amendment that was passed.

Mr. Tollison stated the public hearing notice was in full compliance with State law requirements.

Councilor Tzouvelekas stated there were subjective changes made to the original ordinance at second reading; there should have been another public hearing.

Mr. Tollison stated those concerns should have been raised prior to the vote.

Item (5) **Adjournment**

Action: Chairman Pro Tem moved to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried with Councilor Tzouvelekas voting in opposition. The meeting adjourned at 5:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Regina G. McCaskill
Clerk to Council