



GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes

Committee of the Whole Meeting

February 20, 2024

5:00 p.m.

Council Chambers
301 University Ridge
Greenville, South Carolina

Council Members

Mr. Dan Tripp, *Chairman, District 28*

Mrs. Liz Seman, *Vice-, 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, at 301 University Ridge, Greenville, and made available to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned citizens.

Council Members Absent

Ennis Fant, District 25

Staff Present

Joe Kernell, County Administrator

Mark Tollison, County Attorney

Chris Antley, Assistant County Attorney

Regina McCaskill, Clerk to Council

Pam Gilliam, Administrative Assistant Clerk to Council

Terrance Galloway, Information Systems

Bob Mihalic, Governmental Affairs Officer

Nicole Wood, Assistant County Administrator

Hesha Gamble, Assistant County Administrator

Tee Coker, Assistant County Administrator

Others Present

None

Call to Order

Chairman Dan Tripp

Invocation

Councilor Mike Barnes

Item (3) Approval of Minutes

a. November 7, 2023 – Regular Committee Meeting

Action: Vice-Chairwoman Seman moved to approve the minutes of the November 7, 2023, Regular Committee Meeting.

Motion carried unanimously.

Item (4) Removal of Board Members / Board and Commission Policy – Section 17(c)(i)

Vice-Chairwoman Seman stated Council was given the attendance record for all the Boards and Commissions. It was determined that the following individuals were in violation of the County’s Board and Commission Policy, as it related to attendance. Ms. Seman stated she had requested the item in question be placed on the evening’s agenda in order to remove those members in violation of the policy, giving Council the opportunity to appoint people who wanted to serve, had the time to serve and who were committed to serving.

Action: Vice-Chairwoman Seman moved to remove the following commissioners in accordance to Section 17 (c)(i) of the Greenville County Board and Commission Policy regarding excessive absences: Ms. Barrett (District 28) – Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission; William Taylor (District 23) – Greenville County Historic and Natural Resources Trust; and Justin Brown (District 28) – Human Relations Commission.

Motion carried unanimously by Council Members present.

Item (5) Roads Presentation

Presented by: Hesha Gamble, Assistant County Administrator – Engineering and Public Works
Tee Coker, Assistant County Administrator – Planning and Development

Vice-Chairwoman Seman stated she was really appreciative of the work that staff had done on the presentation. They spent countless hours meeting with their counterparts, the municipalities, and the State. The presentation would give the citizens a comprehensive look at the County’s challenges in regards to its roads.

Hesha Gamble acknowledged representatives from the City of Mauldin, City of Fountain Inn and the City of Greenville who were in attendance; representatives from SCDOT sent their regards, but, were unable to attend due to prior engagements.

Tee Coker stated Council approved a resolution in December of 2023, instructing staff to initiate the Countywide Infrastructure Inventory and Assessment. In response to the resolution, staff developed a website with interactive maps and charts outlining the details of the existing roadway infrastructure, financial information, and information from other communities in regards to how they were handling their road needs.



OUR COUNTY

WE ARE THE LARGEST COUNTY IN SC.
POPULATION: 574K
JOBS: 283K
ROADS: 4K LANE-MILES

WE ARE THE HEART OF ONE OF THE FASTEST GROWING REGIONS IN THE US.

Mr. Coker stated Greenville County was the largest county in the state in terms of population (574,000), jobs (283,000) and roads (4,000 lane miles). The County's 4,000 miles of roads could stretch to the Grand Canyon and back. Greenville County was one of the fastest growing regions in the country. In regards to adjacent counties, Greenville County was absorbing most of the population and most of the jobs. The County's roads were worse for wear; it could be a bit jarring to see the state of its roads.

OUR ROADS

75% OF OUR ARTERIAL AND COLLECTOR ROADS ARE IN FAIR OR POOR CONDITION.

15% OF OUR BRIDGES ARE LOAD-RESTRICTED OR CLOSED.

FROM 2017-21, MORE PEOPLE DIED ON OUR ROADS THAN ANY COUNTY IN THE STATE.

Mr. Coker stated when an individual left their neighborhood, the roads they traveled were called arterial or collector roads. Those roads were used for travel to work, school, shopping, etc.; 75% of those roads were in fair or poor condition. A road in poor condition would have to be milled up and reconstructed to get it back to a good state.

Mr. Coker stated the County's bridges presented challenges; 15% were load restricted or closed. School buses, fire trucks and other heavy vehicles were unable to use those bridges, impacting public safety and quality of life. Mr. Coker stated from 2017-2021, 399 people died on Greenville County roads, more than any other county in the state. On a weighted basis of vehicle miles traveled, the State of South Carolina had the deadliest roads in the country.

ROAD PROJECTS

NEEDED SAFETY AND CORRIDOR PROJECTS ARE NOT GETTING DONE (0 FOR 75 FROM 2014 LIST).

THE COST TO RESURFACE IS ALREADY HIGH AND IS INCREASING EVERY YEAR (2X SINCE 2019).

Mr. Coker stated Greenville County faced a lot of challenges in terms of the quality of its roads. When thinking about what needed to be done, a large number of projects had been identified from different organizations. GPATS had a list of over 180 road projects for the County; 12 of them to be funded by the year 2045.

There was a discussion a decade ago regarding a referendum for the roads; there were 75 road safety corridor and intersection projects on that ballot. Mr. Coker stated all 75 projects were still needed, as none of them had been completed. Four of the 75 were in the early planning stages. The cost to resurface has doubled in the past five years. Monies collected from the County's Road Maintenance Fee were worth less and less each year. Mr. Coker stated what was \$25 in 2019 was now \$12.50.

FUNDING NEEDS

\$2 BILLION TO RESURFACE OUR FAIR AND POOR ROADS.

\$1 BILLION FOR STATE, COUNTY, GPATS, AND CITY-IDENTIFIED HIGH-PRIORITY PROJECTS.

THERE IS NO FUNDING IDENTIFIED FOR THESE HIGH-PRIORITY PROJECTS.



Mr. Coker stated if the County had a “magic checkbook”, the cost to fix all the “fair and poor roads” was \$2 billion. Setting that aside, it would take \$1 billion for State, County, GPATS, and the high-priority projects identified by the six (6) municipalities. He stated there was currently no funding in place for those high-priority projects.

FUNDING OPTIONS

IDENTIFY A FUNDING TOOL FOR UNFUNDED COUNTYWIDE ROAD IMPROVEMENT AND MAINTENANCE PROJECTS.

Tool	Annual Cost	Annual Revenue	Who Decides?	Who Pays?
Road Maintenance Fee Increase (Additional \$25 per Vehicle)		\$133 Million	County Council	County Vehicle Owners
Property Tax Increase (Additional \$0.10)		\$131 Million	County Council	County Residents & Business Owners
Capital Sales Tax (\$0.01 on Purchases (Excludes Groceries))		\$131 Million	Voters	Consumers (Includes Visitors)
Transportation Sales Tax (\$0.01 on Purchases (Includes Groceries))		\$153 Million	Voters	Consumers (Includes Visitors)

NOTE: These figures are based on an eight year timeframe. For the two sales tax options, an additional year would increase each year. The "Annual Revenue" column represents the average annual revenue generated over eight years.

Mr. Coker stated all of the large counties in the state had plans in place for road improvement and maintenance. He stated the question was what would it look like if Greenville County took a serious look at taking a new path and focusing on improving what needs to be improved, taking care of what needed to be taken of, with a goal of putting a big dent into that \$3 billion of work that needed to be done.

As outlined in the chart above, Council had the authority to control the County's \$25 Road Maintenance Fee, that was attached to any vehicle registered in Greenville County. That fee yielded approximately \$12 million per year. Most counties were not raising property taxes for road improvements. The larger counties, Richland, Charleston, York, Berkley, and Dorchester, had some sort of voter approved sales tax in place. A referendum vote in November of a general election year was required to put one in place. It was up to the citizens of Greenville County to decide if a sales tax increase was something they wanted or not. Mr. Coker stated there were two types of sales tax; capital sales tax and transportation sales tax. Capital Sales tax was a \$0.01 tax applied to retail purchases, excluding groceries. It would also exclude medications, fuel, rent, mortgages and utilities. Transportation was very similar with one exception; it would include groceries. According to State the Department of Revenue, the capital sales tax would deliver approximately \$131 million per year in funding, or \$1.045 billion over an eight year period. The transportation tax would deliver approximately \$153 million per year in funding, or \$1.2 billion over an eight year period. Currently, Greenville County invested about \$94 million per year in its roads. That funding was a combination of federal, state and local sources.

Vice-Chairwoman Seman asked how the state gas tax played into funding for the roads.

Hesha Gamble stated the state gas tax was used primarily for the State's Transportation Improvement Program, to include interstates, bridges and other maintenance needs. A small percentage of the state gas tax was used for county and city roads and administered by the Legislative Delegation Transportation Committee.

Vice-Chairwoman Seman stated the County had no control over how those funds were spent.

Ms. Gamble confirmed Ms. Seman's statement.

Chairman Tripp asked if there were any estimates regarding what percentage of the funds collected by the "penny tax" would be paid by visitors to Greenville County.

Mr. Coker stated if the "penny tax" was approved, approximately 35 – 40% of the monies collected would be paid by visitors to the County. He stated of the estimated \$131 million that would be collected each year, approximately \$52 million, or 40%, would be visitor dollars. Greenville County had approximately 7 million visitors per year in addition to 150,000 commuters on a daily basis.

Councilor Bradley asked if the increased sales tax would include electricity and gas.

Mr. Coker stated it would not.

Councilor Mitchell inquired about infrastructure money the County received from the Federal Government and if any of those funds were for the roads program.

Ms. Gamble stated all infrastructure money received from the Federal Government ran through SCDOT and was added to its existing program. SCDOT had beefed up its bridge program; however, there were other aspects of their maintenance for which the money had been used. Ms. Gamble stated inflation had hurt states and counties. Those federal funds had provided SCDOT with a way to get projects done that they would not have been able to do.

Councilor Mitchell stated Greenville County may see the benefit of those federal funds if there were state roads in the County that had been designated for repair or resurfacing. Greenville County had no funds available for repairs to state roads.

Councilor Barnes asked if there would be a penalty on electric cars that used no gas or fuel.

Ms. Gamble stated the proposed capital tax increase would only apply to purchases and would exclude gas purchases.

Councilor Bradley inquired how much money Greenville County budgeted for roads.

Mr. Coker stated Greenville County budgeted \$94.2 million in FY2023; 79% was from state and federal funds and the remaining 21% were local funds.

Ms. Gamble stated Greenville County put in \$12 million of the \$94.2 million budgeted. Those funds were for county roads. The rest of the money was allocated for specific purposes. For example, 57% of the money was from the federal gas tax and had to be used for programs required by the federal government. Similarly, the state gas tax money had very specific usage requirements. Ms. Gamble stated the state and federal funds were not specifically spent to maintain the County's roads.

Councilor Harrison inquired about the miles of state roads and county roads.

Ms. Gamble stated there were approximately 1800 miles of county roads and 1600 miles of state roads; the largest county-maintained inventory in the state and the fourth largest state-maintained inventory in the country.

Councilor Harrison asked if it was fair to say that a large chunk of the \$94 million was used on smaller number of miles because there were fewer state roads than county roads.

Ms. Gamble answered in the affirmative.

Councilor Tzouvelekas stated the number of traffic deaths in Greenville County was 399 from 2017-2021. He asked how many lives would be saved if all the roads in the County were completely redone.

Mr. Coker stated he was unable to answer that question. Each fatality had a story and each fatality was a person or a family.

Councilor Shaw asked if Greenville County was a "donor county" in terms of state gas tax money.

Mr. Coker stated it depended on the year. Currently, Greenville County was a "donor county." For several years, the County saw more gas tax dollars coming in to work on projects such as the I-385 interchange that was completed several years ago. SCDOT had its own plans and the County had no control over those plans.

Councilor Shaw stated it was the Council's job to force SCDOT and to lobby. He asked what the County had done to get the money it was owed. The County had a public relations department and a government relations department. He inquired why the County would ask the taxpayers for more money when it was not getting money that it was owed.

Ms. Gamble stated SCDOT planned road projects on a statewide basis. There were times when the County got the "lion's share" of the funds, such as when SCDOT was doing work on I-85 and I-385; other counties did not get any funding at all. SCDOT's laws were set up to look at everything in one basket, statewide.

Councilor Shaw stated it was not a law issue; it was a will. He asked if the law stated Horry County should get more money than Greenville or was it just a political decision.

Ms. Gamble stated she was unable to answer the question.

Chairman Pro Tem Kirven stated he had served on GPATS for a number of years. GPATS was a Metropolitan Planning Organization; the state was required to have several of them throughout the state. Those organizations were designed to cover urbanized areas, as defined by the federal government. Jurisdictions in a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) had members appointed. Each MPO received allocations and made recommendations to the state on road priorities on an annual basis. Mr. Kirven stated for many years, GPATS received \$18 million in allocations; that figure was now approximately \$27 million per year. Study committees scored projects and also made recommendations. Those recommendations were voted on by GPATS. Mr. Kirven stated the State Department of Transportation Commission had representatives from each of the congressional districts who voted on how federal funds should be used for interstate projects. Mr. Kirven stated it could be a bit problematic to force those entities to do what you wanted them to do.

Chairman Tripp stated it depended on the votes. The Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee lived in Greenville County and that would normally say a lot. He stated there was a coalition in Columbia; it passed a budget every year and that was the way it was. All the wishing in the world was not going to change that. Mr. Tripp stated there were a lot of state secondary roads that were not getting paved.

Councilor Shaw stated his “bigger point” was why would Greenville County want to invest more taxpayer money into a system that was not working. Those systems only worked in cities and counties that Greenville did not want to become, such as Atlanta, York County or Horry County. The proposed sales tax would move Greenville County to spend more and create a place where people did not want to be.

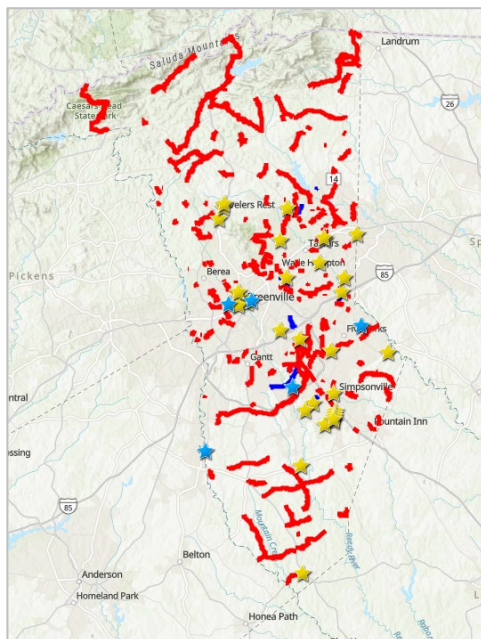
Chairman Pro Tem Kirven stated if the sales tax was approved, it would bring in about \$131 million annually. Greenville County would have control of that money and it would not be sent to the state for allocation. The County would decide, through its citizens, where the money was spent. Projects to be worked on would be included on the referendum ballot.

Councilor Shaw asked if staff decided which projects would be included on the referendum.

Chairman Pro Tem Kirven stated Council would approve the projects.

Chairman Tripp suggested Mr. Coker and Ms. Gamble finish their presentation.

Mr. Coker stated the website contained quite a bit of information; he encouraged everyone to review it. After the resolution was approved in December, staff sat down with its counterparts at SCDOT, GPATS, Roads and Bridges, and the six municipalities. They discussed projects that would improve the quality of life and the health and safety of the residents of Greenville County. Mr. Coker stated the map below was on the interactive website.



Ms. Gamble stated the map illustrated the projects in red that were identified as being high priority; they encompass mostly state and county roads. The map also included some widening projects, bridge projects and intersection improvements. Ms. Gamble stated the map was interactive. A user could click on a project in order to obtain specific details. She stated there were potential project throughout Greenville County. Ms. Gamble stressed that the map was not all inclusive; it only contained those project that were considered to be of the highest priority.

Chairman Tripp inquired how to access the website.

Mr. Coker stated the website could be accessed with the QR code (below) or on homepage of the Greenville County website.



Ms. Gamble stated the public was encouraged to submit ideas for additional projects. There was a link provided to the Road Project Submission form on the last page of the website.

Councilor Mitchell asked how often the website was updated in order to provide the most recent information.

Ms. Gamble stated it had recently been created and would be updated, as needed.

Councilor Shaw asked if the public would be voting on all the projects identified as high priority on the referendum.

Chairman Tripp stated it appeared as if Council was getting a bit ahead of itself. He suggested discussing funding options. Mr. Tripp stated there would be debates regarding the issue and there would be disagreements. Council needed to look realistically at how to start funding those road projects that needed to be completed. He stated he would like to have a workshop, within the next week or two, in order to start the discussion.

Vice-Chairwoman Seman stated she was in favor of a workshop and it would be helpful to have a presentation on the details of the resolution. She inquired if it was appropriate to ask staff to prepare a resolution that could be part of the workshop. It would be helpful to do a “deeper dive” in regards to how SCDOT allocated funding.

Councilor Harrison recognized Mr. Coker, Ms. Gamble and their staff for all their hard work in making the website interactive. He appreciated the fact it was available to the public; it was very “eye-opening.”

Councilor Tzouvelekas thanked Mr. Kirven for the information he had provided. He stated the state allocated money based on miles, not by population; that was the reason Greenville County was still a donor county. He stated the County would probably remain a donor county due to the amount of land and how long its roads were.

Chairman Tripp stated he received a text during the meeting regarding putting political pressure on SCDOT. Mr. Tripp stated according to the text, the SCDOT Commission was responsible for making decisions regarding roadwork and limited pressure could be put on commission members.

Councilor Shaw asked if the County was looking to get the referendum on the November ballot. He asked what deadlines were involved in order to do so.

Chairman Tripp stated he had been looking at both options. There were timelines and processes for each. Mr. Tripp stated all that information would be presented at the workshop. It was his understanding the referendum would have to be submitted to the Election Commission by August 15 in order to have it on the November ballot.

Councilor Tzouvelekas stated if a workshop was held, he wanted to make sure minutes were recorded, it would be held at a time the public could attend, and that it would be advertised.

Item (6) **Executive Session**

Action: Vice-Chairwoman Seman moved to go into Executive Session for discussion of the employment of the County Administrator.

Motion carried unanimously and the Committee of the Whole entered Executive Session at 5:14 p.m.

Reconvened

County Attorney Mark Tollison reported the Committee of the Whole went into Executive Session on a personnel matter for the discussion of the employment of the County Administrator; no action was taken. The regular Committee of the Whole meeting reconvened at 5:45 p.m.

Item (7) **Adjournment**

Action: Chairman Pro Tem Kirven moved to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Regina G. McCaskill
Clerk to Council