



GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes

Committee of the Whole Meeting

June 4, 2024

5:32 p.m.

Council Chambers
301 University Ridge
Greenville, South Carolina

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, at 301 University Ridge, Greenville, 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

Kim Wunder, Assistant County Attorney

Regina McCaskill, Clerk to Council

Jessica Stone, Deputy Clerk to Council

Council Members Remote Participation

Benton Blount, District 19

Dan Tripp, District 28

Pam Gilliam, Administrative Assistant Clerk to Council

Terrance Galloway, Information Systems

Nicole Wood, Assistant County Administrator

Hesha Gamble, Assistant County Administrator

Bob Mihalic, Governmental Affairs Officer

Others Present

Capital Projects Sales Tax Commission:

Ray Lattimore, Chairman

Hunter Howard, Vice-Chairman

Gaye Sprague, Secretary

Thomas Epting

Lisa Stevens

Keith Smith

Call to Order

Chairman Dan Tripp

Invocation

Councilor Stan Tzouvelekas

Item (3)

Approval of Minutes

- a. **May 20, 2024 – Special Called Committee Meeting**
- b. **May 21, 2024 – Regular Committee Meeting**

Action:

Vice-Chairwoman Seman moved to approve the minutes of the May 20, 2024, Special Called Committee Meeting and the May 21, 2024, Regular Committee Meeting.

Motion carried unanimously.

Item (4)

Capital Projects Sales Tax Commission Resolution Report *(information only)*

Chairman Tripp introduced Ray Lattimore, Chairman of the Capital Projects Sales Tax Commission. He stated the commission would be presenting its Resolution Report to Council; he commended the commission for all its hard work, stating what they had accomplished in 45 days was nothing short of amazing. Mr. Tripp also thanked Tee Coker, Heshia Gamble, Kim Wunder and staff for their input as well. He asked Mr. Lattimore to introduce the members of the Capital Projects Sales Tax Commission and walk Council through the report.

Mr. Lattimore stated he was really excited to present the report to the Council. He thanked Council for their wisdom, counsel and leadership; what they did for Greenville County was simply amazing. He introduced the members of the Capital Projects Sales Tax Commission. Mr. Lattimore stated the commission had worked extremely well together. He also thanked staff members for their hard work.

Mr. Lattimore stated Council had a plan and a vision. The commission was able to take that plan and that vision and run with it. Greenville County was the largest county in the state of South Carolina, ranking number four or five in publications throughout the world; however, it came in last for its roads and bridges. That was a shameful fact. Mr. Lattimore stated he got involved with the project as he was concerned about the safety of the County's citizens, which was a major problem. There were over 4000 roads in the County, with decades of neglect. He stated they were going to get worse unless something was done. Not only were they going to get worse, it would cost more money to fix them in the future.

Mr. Lattimore stated Council asked the commissioners to work with staff, develop a plan of action and formulate a resolution for a one cent capital sales tax to raise enough money to fix the area's roads and bridges. He stated the resolution was extremely well written. A lot of time, energy and thought was put into it. The commission also formulated a ballot question for the November 5 ballot. The commission met four times; if a commissioner was unable to attend in person, they participated remotely. Mr. Lattimore stated there were four community meetings held in Mauldin, Greer, Travelers Rest and Greenville. Those meetings were not just "dog and pony" shows. The public was able to interact with the commission members and staff. It was apparent that the citizens had studied the website. They were very knowledgeable and asked great questions. Their input was heavily considered in formulating the resolution. Mr. Lattimore stated the commission wanted the process to be open and transparent, in order to give the citizens of Greenville County the ability to make an informed decision about the proposed tax. He stated as a commission member, he hoped it would be approved. Mr. Lattimore stated the commission members wanted the public to have the utmost trust in the process; therefore, the resolution recommended a six member Oversight Committee.

Vice-Chairwoman Seman thanked the commission members and staff for all their hard work. She stated that she appreciated the municipalities and state partners for being willing to participate in the process. Their participation helped provide more comprehensive information. Ms. Seman stated she was pleased to know that the public had participated at the community meetings. In addition to the public meetings, citizens had been given the opportunity to view the website, interact with the information, provide feedback, and contact the County directly.

Chairman Pro Tem Kirven asked Mr. Lattimore to describe the discussions that went on within the commission, once feedback was received from the public and how they dealt with information provided by staff. Mr. Kirven asked if they had specific discussions about specific projects, locations and roads.

Mr. Lattimore stated the commission had several robust discussions regarding the projects. Staff brought the projects to the commission, divided into four tiers. Approximately 51% of the projects were paving. There were some funds left over from the initial project; and that was when the robust discussions began. Mr. Lattimore stated the commission members were adamant that there would be no money in the resolution that was not allotted. There were three projects that were added, based on input from the public. He asked Heshia Gamble to provide the names of those projects.

Ms. Gamble stated two school projects were added; one at Fork Shoals Elementary School and one at Blue Ridge High School. She stated a project at Glassy Mountain was also added.

Chairman Tripp stated one of the reasons the Capital Sales Tax option was chosen was due to the fact that appointing a commission took the process out of the political hands of Council. He asked Mr. Lattimore if the proposed projects were spread across the County or concentrated in particular districts.

Mr. Lattimore stated the commission discussed if the projects were evenly distributed throughout the County. They discussed it on more than one occasion. Knox White, Mayor of the City of Greenville, wanted the lion's share of the funds to be spent within the City of Greenville. However, the commission was able to come up with a plan they felt was balanced within the four tiers and represented each area of the County well. Mr. Lattimore stated he spoke with Mr. White recently and he was pleased with the proposed projects. He stated the citizens would see the equitable division. They may not see a specific subdivision road in the plan, but they would more than likely see the main artery that they traveled every day to and from work.

Vice-Chairwoman Seman inquired about any feedback the commission received from citizens in terms of the difference between city roads, county roads and state roads. She stated that topic had been a point of contention. It was important to help the citizens of Greenville County understand what could be accomplished with the funding, and that the list of proposed projects contained a little bit of everything.

Mr. Lattimore stated the citizens of Greenville County were very smart and very astute. Many of them did not know the difference between city roads, county roads or state roads; they just wanted the roads fixed. He stated the biggest concern he heard was the fact that it was a tax. The public wanted to know if a better method could be used. Mr. Lattimore stated he had voiced that concern all early on in the process. Staff informed him it was state law; the County had no choice. The law was written as a tax. Mr. Lattimore stated there was more contention in the Travelers Rest area as opposed to other parts of the County.

Councilor Fant commended the commission for a job well done. He stated that he shuddered at the thought of Council trying to develop a plan, particularly in an election year. Instead, Council gave it to citizens to work with staff and come up with a plan. Mr. Fant stated he had heard nothing but positive feedback about the community meetings. He stated eight years was a long way out. Mr. Fant inquired about inflation and the possibility that some projects may end up being more expensive than projected.

Mr. Lattimore stated the commission had been informed by staff that they would start on tier one projects first; those projects would have to be at 70% completion before work could start on tier two projects. There would not be multiple projects going on at the same time. He stated there would more than likely be some cost overruns in some areas, but there could be savings in other areas. It was a massive project. Mr. Lattimore stated he felt it would take more than eight years to complete all the projects. Creation of the Oversight Committee would ensure someone looking at the costs along the way.

Ms. Gamble stated there was a possibility that there could be overruns. Once the money was gone, it was gone. She stated it was also possible they would be unable to complete all the projects. Council would have to make a new decision about what to do next in terms of funding.

Vice-Chairwoman Seman stated one project could not be substituted for another, even if staff knew there would be overruns. Some projects may fall off the list at the end. She stated Council would have no authority to change the project list.

Councilor Harrison inquired what would happen if there was money left over at the end.

Ms. Wunder stated the project was a very robust list. It was 37 pages long, with a location and description of each project. She stated crews would start work on the projects listed on page one of the list and ended with the last project, if funds were still available. If there were excess funds, state law directed that County Council would need to adopt an ordinance to determine additional projects that could be funded with the excess funds. Ms. Wunder stated all projects must be eligible under the capital project sales tax.

Councilor Harrison thanked Ms. Wunder for the explanation. He thanked the commission and staff for a phenomenal job.

Chairman Tripp asked Ms. Wunder to explain Section II of the proposed ordinance.

Ms. Wunder stated the commission had the responsibility of adopting the ballot question and project list, as well as defining the terms conditions and restrictions around how the funds were to be spent. By state law, priority was defined as how the funds were spent. The commission found that Council did not have the authority to adjust the numbering or priority of the projects, except in some very narrow circumstances. Those circumstances were not predictable at the present time. For example, tremendous delays in a project or the discovery of wetlands. Ms. Wunder stated there could also be positive, unexpected circumstances such as new sources of revenue. She stated the commission thought it was important to bring in some narrow exceptions in which Council could allow a project to move forward in funding based on objective criteria presented by the Program Manager.

Chairman Tripp stated Section F. 1. stated that all revenue associated with the capital projects sales tax must be deposited into a separate account and not commingled with any other funds.

Ms. Wunder stated part of the feedback that was received during the public comment sessions was how important it was to the community to know up front how the funds were going to be spent, how the projects were proceeding, and how much was being spent along the way. She stated all funds would be deposited into their own account, never commingled with any other County funds.

Councilor Mitchell asked if it was possible for any of the municipalities to work directly with the County on projects that may overlap.

Ms. Gamble stated they had worked very closely with the municipalities, SCDOT and GPATS developing the project list and project scopes. For example, when resurfacing a road, it was important to consider all aspects of the project. She stated all involved entities would be a part of the process, working closely with the program managers.

Chairman Tripp asked if utilities were part of the projects.

Ms. Gamble stated utility coordination would be a bottleneck for some of the larger projects. The program managers would have a utility coordination plan for each project. It would be a big undertaking, but was not dissimilar to how the County currently handled projects. Ms. Gamble stated they would try to be very robust with utility coordination up front.

Councilor Bradley stated during the initial phase, the projects were listed with an exact amount for each. He stated a total of \$30 million was listed at the bottom of each tier; he assumed that amount was for overruns. He asked if those funds were allocated.

Ms. Gamble stated those figures were an early iteration. The commission made changes and tied all funding to specific projects, and not big buckets of funds.

Councilor Russo stated he attended the community meeting that was held in Travelers Rest and was glad to see there was a lot of discussion. It was important to note that the members of the commission were not elected officials; they were members of the community. He stated it was crucial for the public to be involved in the process. He asked Mr. Lattimore to speak about the feedback the commission received from the public, specifically at the Travelers Rest meeting.

Mr. Lattimore stated the commission received a lot of pushback from groups parks, bike trails and other things besides roads and bridges. He stated the commission made the decision that, if approved, the funds would only be used for roads and bridges, with no exceptions. Mr. Lattimore stated after talking to those special interest groups, he hoped there would be other opportunities in the future for those items. Those causes were certainly worthwhile; however, 10 years of neglect would be a billion dollars, or more. He stated he was really impressed with Travelers Rest. The Travelers Rest City Council was in attendance and made themselves available to the community. Given the tremendous turnout, it was obvious that the citizens really cared. They provided a lot of input into what was needed in that area and the commission made changes to the project list, based on their input.

Councilor Tzouvelekas asked who would oversee the projects and the allocation of funding. He stated that even though it had been stated that \$1 billion was not enough money to fix all the roads, it was a lot of money to him.

Mr. Kernell stated a new division of the Roads and Bridges Department would be created. It would be staffed with engineers to oversee the projects from start to finish. Ms. Gamble would be involved, as well. It would be a large undertaking for the County.

Councilor Tzouvelekas asked if those salaries were included in the funding that the capital sales projects sales tax was expected to generate.

Mr. Kernell stated funding generated by capital project sales tax would not be used for staffing needs; those funds would come from the County's regular budget. Fixing the County's roads and bridges was such an important issue that the amount of money needed for staffing was minimal compared to the project list.

Councilor Tzouvelekas asked if the County had a budget in place for those positions.

Mr. Kernell stated no budget had been put in place for those positions as the County had not received any of the anticipated revenue from the capital projects sales tax.

Councilor Tzouvelekas stated County staff needed to be thinking about those positions and how they would be funded.

Mr. Kernell stated they were already in the process of studying the budget. If the sales tax was approved, the appropriate staffing would be put in place.

Councilor Barnes thanked staff and the commission for the community meeting that was held in Greer; there had been a fair turnout. He inquired about any pros or cons the commission had heard.

Mr. Lattimore stated the meeting in Greer was outstanding. Stephanie Trotter, reporter from WYFF-4 was in attendance. He stated that she asked him some really tough questions. The attendees had a lot of input and were well represented.

Chairman Pro Tem Kirven inquired about oversight in regards to adherence to engineering and quality standards during construction of the projects?

Ms. Gamble stated all general industry standards would be followed. The municipalities, Greenville County and the State of South Carolina currently followed them and would continue to do so.

Vice-Chairwoman Seman stated it was her understanding if the capital projects sales tax was approved by the citizens of Greenville County, collection of the taxes would start in May of 2025. There would be some preparation work that would need to take place before the County was able to start collecting the tax.

Mr. Lattimore stated if approved, collection of the taxes would start on May 1, 2025. The County would not receive any funding until September, unless Council chose to accelerate the process. He stated that he hoped Council would do so; it would give the public some gratification to see things moving quickly.

Chairman Tripp asked if the ballot included the bonding question.

Ms. Wunder stated the bonding question was only for County Council. It was the only change that could be made to the ballot question.

Mr. Lattimore stated the only amendment recommended by the commission was the inclusion of the Oversight Committee.

Chairman Tripp asked if the amendment to include an Oversight Committee would be part of the ordinance in question or a separate ordinance.

Ms. Wunder stated it could be handled either way. It could part of the ordinance that imposed the tax, subject to the referendum. She stated if the tax passed, the Oversight Committee could be automatically created, or it could be done by separate, standalone ordinance after passage of the referendum.

Chairman Tripp inquired if the commissioner’s report and the ballot question was the “vehicle” on which Council was expected to vote.

Ms. Wunder stated Council would be asked to vote on an ordinance that would incorporate the commission’s work product. She stated the commission's work product was the “meat and potatoes.” There was a little more work to be done that would be presented in the form of an ordinance.

Councilor Tzouvelekas asked how any “soft costs”, “hard costs” and attorney fees related to the projects would be covered.

Mr. Kernell stated those costs would be covered from revenue generated by the sales tax.

Councilor Blount inquired as to where the \$30 million was allocated.

Ms. Gamble stated the commission realized there were additional projects that needed to be added to the list. The \$30 million was allocated to those projects.

Councilor Tzouvelekas asked what would happen to staff hired specifically for the projects, after they were completed.

Mr. Kernell stated staff was in the process of putting together a proposed budget. The County did have a Road Program and staff in place; however, that group was mainly focused on maintenance. Currently, all of the County’s paving was contracted out. The new hires would concentrate on the sales tax projects and consist of engineers, along with some administrative staff. If the sales tax passed, staff would have a budget put together. He stated it was unknown what that budget would look like. There were approximately 1400 proposed projects and the time frame of eight years was very short. The key was to get the projects done in a timely manner.

Item (5)

Adjournment

Action:

Chairman Pro Tem Kirven moved to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 5:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Regina G. McCaskill
Clerk to Council