



GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes

Committee of the Whole Meeting

June 18, 2024

4:31 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

Pam Gilliam, Administrative Assistant Clerk to Council

Terrance Galloway, Information Systems

Council Members Remote Participation

None

Caleb Steele, Information Systems

Tee Coker, Assistant County Administrator

Nicole Wood, Assistant County Administrator

Hesha Gamble, Assistant County Administrator

Keith Brockington, GPATS

Bob Mihalic, Governmental Affairs Officer

Others Present

Beverly James, Executive Director, Greenville County Library System

Ray Lattimore, Chairman, Capital Projects Sales Tax Commission

Gaye Sprague, Secretary, Capital Projects Sales Tax Commission

Call to Order

Chairman Dan Tripp

Invocation

Councilor Benton Blount

Item (3)

Approval of Minutes

a. June 4, 2024 – Regular Committee Meeting

Action: Vice-Chairman Seman moved to approve the minutes of the June 4, 2024, Regular Committee Meeting.

Motion carried unanimously.

Item (4)

Library System FY2025 Budget Presentation

Presented by: Beverly James, Executive Director
Greenville County Library System

Ms. James stated that each year during the Library System's budget preparations, the current value of the mill was obtained from the County's Budget Director in order to estimate the property tax revenue for the coming year. Ms. James stated the Library System had not requested a millage increase since 2015. The estimated property tax revenue included in the FY2025 proposed budget used the same millage rate County Council approved for the system's FY2024 budget. An increase in the County's value of the mill from 2023 to 2024 accounted for all of the 6.2% increase in the proposed revenue. With the exception of a few minor changes in some expenditure categories, all of the 6.2% increase was needed to cover the cost of wages and benefits for two new full-time staff positions and two part-time positions, as well as a pay increase for all employees. The pay increase was calculated using the December 2023 Employment Cost Index for state and local government workers, prepared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the US Department of Labor, in accordance with the Library System's compensation plan.

Councilor Shaw inquired about the few minor changes in some of the expenditure categories.

Ms. James stated the Library System was spending a bit more in facilities and professional services. Its contingency fund was increased according to the 2% of operating expenditures. She stated the majority of the requested 6.2% increase was related to personnel.

Councilor Shaw stated he was aware of the increase related to personnel. He inquired about the minor changes in some expenditure categories that Ms. James had referenced.

Ms. James stated library materials cost more. For example, they were required to meet a minimum of 15% according to state library regulations. That number always increased to ensure the minimum was being met. She stated downloadable materials had become extremely popular with the public. The Library System was plateauing at about \$80,000 a month to meet the demand for that type of material.

Councilor Tzouvelekas asked if there had been increases in the Library System's budget for FY2024, FY2023 and FY2022.

Ms. James stated there were more than likely some increases in those budgets. Operating costs, such as utilities and fleet maintenance, continued to rise.

Chairman Tripp thanked Ms. James for explaining the budget increases.

Item (5)

Capital Projects Sales Tax Referendum Ordinance

Chairman Tripp stated Kim Wunder, Tee Coker, Heshia Gamble, Ray Lattimore and Gaye Sprague were in attendance to answer any questions Council may have about the Capital Projects Sales Tax referendum. Mr. Tripp stated he hoped to move the item out to full Council during the Regular Council Meeting scheduled for later in the evening.

Councilor Tzouvelekas stated it was his understanding that expenditures for staff, as well as “soft and hard costs”, would be paid out of the County’s general budget. He stated Mr. Kernell had answered the question during the previous week’s presentation; however, he wanted to confirm the answer.

Mr. Kernell confirmed those costs would be paid out of the County’s general budget. Council Members had indicated numerous times that they wanted all revenue generated to be used for roads.

Councilor Shaw stated he was trying to get a general case study. For example, one of the Tier One projects was East Mountain Creek Road and Mountain Creek Church Road intersection improvement, the site of Robert's Farm. He stated for the last four years, he had been “intimately” dealing with that intersection and had received a quote of \$750,000 to install a stoplight at the intersection. The projected costs according to information provided by staff was \$5 million. Mr. Shaw requested staff explain the difference.

Ms. Gamble confirmed the amount of \$750,000 to install a stoplight was correct; however, the project would encompass more than just a stoplight. There were a number of other issues that had to be dealt with. The quote of \$5 million came directly from SCDOT. She stated there was a ton of additional earthwork that would have to be done in order to extend the turn lanes that were needed to go along with the stoplight.

Councilor Shaw asked if a consulting firm was used to project the costs. It appeared as if an engineering group out of Columbia had been used.

Ms. Gamble stated there were so many projects, staff was unable to do all the work alone. They enlisted a consultant that was already on contract with the County to assist. She stated the estimates were conceptual; there were no detailed designs in place as of yet. Staff had worked very closely with the municipalities because some of them already had preliminary cost estimates. She stated SCDOT was a very big part of it due to the fact that many of the projects would involve them.

Vice-Chairwoman Seman inquired the next steps in the process.

Ms. Wunder stated the commission’s work product was the resolution that was previously presented to Council. Included in the ordinance was the resolution along with the ballot question and the project list. Ms. Wunder stated Council’s immediate task was to vet the ordinance at committee and give it first reading during the Council meeting scheduled for later in the evening. The ordinance would require second reading, a public hearing and third reading; those tasks had to be accomplished by noon on August 15. If approved, the ballot question would be transmitted to the local election commission. Ms. Wunder stated the August 15 deadline gave that commission time to get the ballot question ready and physically prepare it for the November 5 ballot. She stated if the referendum was approved on November 5, the next step for Council would be to certify the results.

Chairman Tripp stated one component of the ordinance allowed the County to bond out up to \$150 million. If the referendum passed in November, the County would not start collecting revenue until May. The option to bond out monies would allow the County to move forward as soon as the citizens starting paying the extra tax. Chairman Tripp asked Ms. Wunder to comment on some of the high level conditions that were placed on the funding.

Ms. Wunder stated the terms and conditions began on page three of the ordinance. The first condition was priority. She stated when there were multiple projects that were to be funded with the sales tax revenue, the ordinance had to lay out the priority of funding. In terms of priority, it was not about which projects were the most important, it was where the money was spent first. The project list was 26 pages long. The priority set out in that 26 page project list was "set in stone." She stated there were a few exceptions to when funding could move up and down that priority ladder. The project list was divided into five tiers of funding. Within each priority level, there were four purposes. Those four purposes were spelled out on the ballot. Ms. Wunder stated within a tier, the County could pursue the projects within that tier using the method viewed as most advantageous; however, they had to stay within that tier. When 70% of the construction contracts in that tier had been let, the County could move to the next tier. All revenue from the sales tax had to be deposited into a separate account and never commingled with other funds. Ms. Wunder stated the County was required to submit quarterly reports to the Department of Revenue, detailing how the funds were used. She stated those reports were a requirement of state law. The commission wanted to see that reflected as a required term and condition of using the proceeds of the money.

Chairman Tripp stated in terms of the Oversight Committee, the ordinance indicated it should be comprised of at least six members. He asked if it could consist of more than six members.

Ms. Wunder stated that was a recommendation from the Commission. Council had the ability to accept or reject that recommendation. She stated there was some discretion for Council to decide on the exact number.

Chairman Tripp asked if there was anything in ordinance that required the County to post the "checkbook" for the separate fund on its website.

Ms. Wunder stated here was nothing in the resolution or the ordinance regarding posting disbursements from the account online. She stated it was a common practice across the state.

Councilor Bradley pointed out a discrepancy in the project list.

Ms. Gamble stated she would review the project and follow-up with Council.

Action:

Vice-Chairman Seman moved to approve an ordinance enacted pursuant to the Capital Projects Sales Tax Act, Title, 4, Chapter 10, Article 3 of the Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, as amended; providing for the imposition of a one percent sales and use tax upon referendum approval; the form of the ballot to be used in connection therewith; the authorization of the issuance of general obligation bonds of Greenville County, subject to such referendum, to defray costs of projects and issuance costs; and other matters related thereto.

Motion as presented carried by a roll call vote of nine (Tripp, Barnes, Harrison, Mitchell, Seman, Fant, Bradley, Kirven and Tripp) in favor, three (Blount, Shaw and Tzouvelekas) in opposition.

Item (6)

Adjournment

Action:

Vice-Chairwoman Seman moved to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 4:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Regina G. McCaskill
Clerk to Council