



Richland County Council
ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE COMMITTEE
MINUTES
September 26, 2023 – 6:00 PM
Council Chambers
2020 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29204

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Jessica Mackey, Chair; Yvonne McBride, Paul Livingston, and Don Weaver.

NOT PRESEN: Jason Branham.

OTHERS PRESENT: Leonardo Brown, Ashiya Myers, Stacey Hamm, Michelle Onley, Angela Weathersby, Lori Thomas, Anette Kirylo, Kyle Holsclaw, Patrick Wright, Chelsea Bennett, Geo Price, Brittney Hoyle Terry, Venyke Harley, John Ansell, Jennifer Wladischkin, Tamar Black, Abhijit Deshpande, Michael Maloney, Michael Byrd, Dale Welch, John Thompson, and Thomas Gilbert

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – Chairwoman Jessica Mackey called the meeting to order at approximately 6:00 PM.

Ms. Mackey noted Mr. Branham would not be attending tonight’s meeting due to a work obligation.

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. July 25, 2023 – Mr. Weaver moved to approve the minutes as distributed, seconded by Mr. Livingston.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

3. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA** – The County Attorney, Patrick Wright, requested to add an Executive Session item to the agenda, “Hospitality Tax Discussion.”

Mr. Livingston moved to adopt the agenda as amended, seconded by Mr. Weaver.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

4. **ITEMS FOR ACTION**

- a. Community Planning & Development – Planning Services – Town of Blythewood Intergovernmental Agreement – Mr. Leonardo Brown, County Administrator, stated this is an item that staff has been working on regarding infrastructure, engineering services, and maintenance, and to include the review of land development projects, stormwater, and roadways. With Blythewood being their own entity, there are certain services they have, and certain services the County has. They are creating an environment where the Town of Blythewood will utilize specific standards by utilizing certain services of the County.

Mr. Wright noted that the staff is requesting to defer this item until the potential annexation matter has been resolved.

Mr. Livingston inquired if this item was time-sensitive.

Mr. Brown responded that it is not time-sensitive.

Mr. Livingston moved to defer this item until the October committee meeting, seconded by Ms. McBride.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

- b. I move County Council fund EdVenture Children’s Museum Hospitality Tax request for facility improvements and enhancements to improve safety and attract new visitors [MACKEY – August 29, 2023] – Ms. Mackey stated, in the agenda packet, there is a formal request from EdVenture for Hospitality Tax funding for an exhibit and safety features at the facility.

Finance Director Stacey Hamm noted that the Hospitality Tax fund balance is \$13.6M.

Mr. Livingston moved to forward to Council with a recommendation to approve EdVenture’s request for Hospitality Tax funding, seconded by Ms. Mackey.

Mr. Livingston inquired if EdVenture requested funding from the City of Columbia.

Mr. Andy Marquart, EdVenture CEO, responded the City of Columbia has been approached to do facility upgrades to the HVAC system. The City also provides all the in-kind services to manage the exterior facility and ongoing repairs and improvements.

Ms. McBride indicated she has concerns regarding the transparency and ad hoc funding of programs without following procedure, given that we have a grant funding cycle for Hospitality Tax funds. This may end up being a cherry-picking process where an entity can come in and request funding from any source at any time. She believes there should be a process (i.e., budget) to request funding unless extenuating circumstances exist. She would support this request if it were in the FY23-24 budget process; therefore, she cannot support this motion.

Ms. Mackey requested clarification on the Hospitality Tax grant process.

Ms. Lori Thomas, Assistant County Administrator, acknowledged there is a Hospitality Tax grant application process. There is only \$500,000 assigned to the process. Other entities that would apply for Hospitality Tax funding typically come to the Council through other means.

Ms. McBride maintained there is a formal process within the budget process, not through the Hospitality Tax Committee.

Ms. Mackey responded it was not her understanding that an organization could not request funds outside of the budget process.

Ms. McBride stated that only the established entities know you can request funding outside the budget process. She wants us to be transparent and fair to everyone by ensuring everyone knows this funding is available to others.

Mr. Livingston made a substitute motion to forward this item to Council without a recommendation, seconded by Ms. McBride.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, and Mackey

Opposed: Weaver

Not Present: Branham

The vote was in favor.

- c. I move to direct the County Administrator to add Paid Parental Leave as a benefit available to all full-time Richland County employees and to update the Employee Handbook with a policy that reflects a minimum of six weeks of available paid Parental Leave. The goal for implementation date of this new benefit is January 1, 2024 [MACKEY – April 18, 2023] – Ms. Mackey stated at the April 18, 2023, Council meeting Council unanimously agreed to move forward with the “Paid Parental Leave” policy. What is before the committee is the draft language for the policy. Before the policy is included in the Employee Handbook, it will come back to Council.

Mr. Brown noted he is excited about the new policy.

Ms. McBride stated this is a good policy and appears to be a companion to the State’s Family Leave Policy.

Mr. Livingston inquired if the policy would take effect in January 2024.

Ms. Mackey responded in the affirmative.

Mr. Livingston inquired if the additional funds would come from the General Fund and if there would be a need for a budget amendment.

Mr. Brown replied the additional funds were anticipated; therefore, it would not require a budget amendment.

Ms. Mackey inquired where the option for utilizing short-term disability comes into play.

Ms. Venyke Harley, Human Resources Director, stated employees have policies that sometimes will coordinate with our existing benefits. She noted we do not administer that internally, so the employee

would work with the insurance company directly. She indicated sometimes the policies run concurrently, and the employee is being paid by the County and through their short-term policy.

Ms. Mackey moved to add language to the policy that would allow an employee who has experienced a stillbirth to have paid parental leave for them to heal both physically and emotionally, seconded by Mr. Weaver.

Ms. McBride inquired if this amendment would impact the County's costs.

Mr. Brown responded it would, but the additional costs would not be significant.

Ms. Harley stated if an employee were to experience a stillbirth, we would allow the employee to take leave under the Family Medical Leave Act. She noted that one distinct difference between the County's and the State's policies is that we will offer the co-parent six weeks of leave.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

For discussion, Ms. Mackey stated that the draft policy says, "Eligible employees will receive a maximum of two weeks of paid parent leave for the placement of a foster child over the age of six months." She expressed that six months seems relatively young, only to have two weeks.

Ms. Harley indicated there was discussion on whether it would be operationally challenging if an employee were to foster children under six months 3 to 4 times per year.

Ms. Mackey would like to see the draft policy amended as follows: "Eligible employees will receive a maximum of six weeks of paid parental leave for the placement of a foster child twelve months or younger."

Ms. Mackey moved to amend the language in the policy to allow eligible employees to receive a maximum of six weeks of paid parental leave for the placement of a foster child twelve months or younger, seconded by Mr. Livingston.

Mr. Weaver inquired if the employee would get one six-week period per year, not multiple six-week periods.

Ms. Harley responded in the affirmative.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

Ms. Mackey moved to forward to Council with a recommendation to approve the proposed Parental Leave Policy and to include the amendments made at tonight's committee meeting, seconded by Ms. McBride.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

- d. Department of Public Works – Solid Waste & Recycling – Landfill Capital Expansion – Mr. Brown stated Solid Waste & Recycling requests approval for Task Order #9 to Civil & Environmental Consultants, Inc. in the amount of \$225,000 specifically for the expansion at the Richland County Landfill. He indicated the landfill is reaching its useful life. As a result, we are looking to expand.

Ms. McBride moved to forward to Council with a recommendation to approve Task Order #9 to Civil & Environmental Consultants, Inc. in the amount of \$225,000 for the expansion of the Richland County Landfill, seconded by Mr. Livingston.

Mr. Weaver inquired if we allow commercial haulers to bring their loads to the landfill.

Mr. John Ansell, Solid Waste & Recycling General Manager, responded that in Richland County, we utilize our landfill for certain services and Waste Management for other services. It is more cost-effective to divert a truck to our landfill, where we can manage those costs.

Mr. Weaver asked if we accept trash from commercial haulers outside Richland County.

Mr. Ansell responded it is specifically Richland County. Waste Management is a private entity that accepts out-of-county and out-of-state waste.

Mr. Weaver inquired if Waste Management is the only other option.

Mr. Ansell replied L & L is another landfill down the street from Waste Management. In addition, there is another Class III landfill at the bottom of Hwy. 601.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

- e. County Administration: Convention Center – Tourism Development Fee – Mr. Brown indicated the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center requests 50% of the collected Tourism Development Fee for operational expenses and marketing to fill a portion of their budget deficit. For a period of time, there was an agreement between Richland County, the City of Columbia, and Lexington County that applied funding from the collection of the Tourism Development Fee. The funding would be utilized for operations, marketing, and payment toward the bond debt. Once the bond debt was satisfied, the County retained the collected fee in their coffers. Now, the Convention Center is saying that even though the bond is satisfied, they still have operational needs and request the County remit 50% of the collections of the Tourism Development fee.

Mr. Livingston moved to forward to Council with a recommendation to approve the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center's request for fifty percent (50%) of the collected tourism development fee to be used for operational expenses and marketing to fill a portion of their budget deficit, seconded by Mr. Weaver.

Mr. Livingston stated, for clarification, that the entire amount of the Tourism Development Fee has gone to the Convention Center in the past.

Mr. Brown responded the amount Richland County collected was remitted to the City of Columbia, which would then remit the funds to the Convention Center.

Mr. Bill Ellen, President & CEO – Experience Columbia, replied that 100% of the fees collected were submitted to the Convention Center. The bonds were paid off on June 30, 2022, so the debt service is no longer there. However, operational and marketing expenses continue to go forward. He noted the area hotels collected the Tourism Development Fee. This fee has supported the Convention Center without asking for any funding from the citizens of Richland County. He indicated the request is for 50% but noted two-thirds of the fee had been going toward marketing and operations in the past.

Ms. McBride inquired if the remaining 50% of the tourism funds would have to be utilized for tourism-related items.

Mr. Wright responded in the affirmative.

Ms. Mackey inquired if there is an end date or if it will be recurring.

Mr. Brown responded he was positive the intent was for it to be recurring as long as the fee is collected.

Ms. McBride noted that often, we do things based on the budgetary year, and there is an annual assessment to determine the funding.

Mr. Brown stated there has not been a decision, so you can potentially decide each fiscal year how to apportion the funds.

Ms. Mackey inquired if other governmental entities are providing funding to the Convention Center.

Mr. Brown replied it is his understanding the City of Columbia is still providing a significant portion to the Convention Center.

Mr. Weaver moved to call for the question, seconded by Mr. Livingston.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey.

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

5. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Mr. Livingston moved to go into Executive Session, seconded by Mr. Weaver.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey

Not Present: Branham

***The Committee went into Executive Session at approximately 6:47 PM
and came out at approximately 7:01 PM***

Ms. McBride moved to come out of Executive Session, seconded by Mr. Weaver.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

- a. I move the County Council authorize the County Administrator to enter into negotiations with Divine Auro Development, LLC or its Assignee regarding the potential sale of the property located at 1430 Colonial Life Blvd., also known as, the old Harvety's property [TERRACIO – July 18, 2023] – Mr. Weaver moved to forward to Council with a recommendation to authorize the County Administrator to enter into negotiations and bring back to Council, seconded by Mr. Livingston.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

- b. Property Inquiry – 1221 Gregg Street, Columbia, SC 29201, TMS # R11406-16-16, TMS # R11406-16-17 – Mr. Livingston moved to forward to Council with a recommendation to authorize the County Administrator to enter into negotiations and bring back to Council, seconded by Ms. Mackey.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

- c. Hospitality Tax Discussion – No action was taken.

6. **ADJOURNMENT** – Ms. McBride moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Weaver.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Weaver, and Mackey

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:04 PM.