



Richland County Council  
Coronavirus AD Hoc Committee Meeting  
**MINUTES**  
May 16, 2023 – 1:30 PM  
Council Chambers  
2020 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29204

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Gretchen Barron, Chair; Jason Branham, and Chakisse Newton.

OTHERS PRESENT: Paul Livingston (via Zoom), Chelsea Bennett, Michelle Onley, Sarah Harris, Ashiya Myers, Stacey Hamm, Dale Welch, Lori Thomas, Leonardo Brown, Angela Weathersby, Anette Kirylo, Kyle Holsclaw, Aric Jensen, Patrick Wright, Zachary Cavanaugh, and Susan O'Cain.

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – Chairwoman Gretchen Barron called the meeting to order at approximately 1:33 PM.
2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
  - a. **April 5, 2023** – Ms. Newton moved to approve the minutes as distributed, seconded by Mr. Branham.  
In Favor: Branham, Barron, and Newton  
The vote in favor was unanimous.
3. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA** – Ms. Newton moved to adopt the agenda as published, seconded by Mr. Branham.  
In Favor: Branham, Barron, and Newton  
The vote in favor was unanimous.
4. **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/ACTION**

Councilwoman Barron stated that because she will need to recuse herself from Item 4. A and 4. B Councilwoman Newton will lead the discussion on these two items.

***{AUDIO PROBLEMS}***

- a. **American Rescue Plan Application Review and Recommendation:**

Mr. Brown, County Administrator, stated some of the conversations occurred when certain Councilmembers were not a part of the initial discussion. He noted we discussed the importance of ensuring that when we utilize American Rescue Plan funds, marrying what the Federal government said was the focus of the funds. In many instances, they communicated a successful utilization of the funds if we affect individuals in a positive way that are in “qualified census tracks” or in the “low-moderate income area,” which would limit any of our concerns about whether the County made a good decision in providing the funds to an agency or sub-recipient.

Mr. Branham inquired if “qualified census tracks” exist in other areas of Richland County besides those listed.

Ms. Newton responded in the affirmative.

Mr. Branham inquired if there are “qualified census tracks” in every zip code in Richland County.

Ms. Sarah Harris, Grants Director, indicated there are pockets in every community.

1. **Senior Assistance** – Ms. Newton moved to allocate up to \$500,000 to each organization: SC Uplift and SCACAP-SC Association of Community Action Partnerships, seconded by Mr. Branham.

Mr. Branham inquired if we want to factor in the “Unhoused Persons” category as it relates to the amount we grant in the “Senior Assistance” category.

Ms. Newton stated the funds a group receives in one category could affect the funds they receive in another category. She noted she would be happy to discuss the “Unhoused Persons” category first if Mr. Branham would prefer.

Mr. Branham mentioned SCACAP is an affiliate of the Alston Wilkes Society, which is also an applicant under the “Unhoused Persons” category.

In Favor: Branham and Newton

Recuse: Barron (due to volunteering/working with one of the organizations)

The vote in favor was unanimous.

2. Unhoused Persons Categories – Ms. Lori Thomas, Assistant County Administrator, indicated there are crossovers for the Alston Wilkes Society, the Midlands Housing Alliance, Mental Illness Recovery Center, and Transitions.

Ms. Newton noted we allocated \$2M for this category, and the requests exceeded the funding by \$94,950. She also mentioned that Transitions is listed as a pre-selected project and requested to confirm we are recognizing previous funds allocated to Transitions.

Ms. Thomas responded that it was the FY23 allocation of \$200,000. Therefore, there is \$1,894,950 remaining to allocate.

Ms. Barron stated her ongoing concern is that the applicants are not supplanting the funds. The main objective for these dollars is to supplement what they do not have. Alston Wilkes and Mental Illness Recovery Center are the two organizations in this category that give her pause.

Ms. Newton indicated the two organizations recommended for funding in other categories are the Midlands Housing Alliance and the Alston Wilkes Society.

Ms. Newton inquired if she needed to recuse herself if a family member had previously received services from one of these organizations.

Mr. Patrick Wright, County Attorney, advised Ms. Newton to be on the safe side she should recuse herself from this particular item.

Ms. Newton recused herself from this category.

At this point, the committee no longer had a quorum to discuss further or make recommendations about this category.

Any action related to the “Unhoused Persons” category will be sent to Council.

**POINT OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE** – Ms. Barron thanked Ms. Newton for being transparent and recusing herself from this category.

b. Staff Updates:

1. Affordable Housing – Mr. Brown noted, in reviewing this process, one of the things they found was that we want to set Council up for success. To move this item forward, they recommend Council allow staff to utilize available funding in the County’s budget to address affordable housing. Staff would then address the method determined by Council. Staff does not want you to limit yourself as a body.

Ms. Barron indicated we have already decided to disburse the funds through the budget, but we need to be able to authorize staff to do so. We need to determine if we want the available funding and the methodology to go forward together or separate them.

Ms. Newton stated she would recommend taking them separately. As a part of allocating the available funding for affordable housing, do you feel we need to commemorate that we are spending those General Fund dollars via motion?

Mr. Brown responded there is a level of understanding in the staff’s recommendation. We understand there is flexibility within the budget, and we will stay within the budget’s constraints. No additional funds will be utilized other than what has been authorized.

Ms. Newton noted as we look at the ARPA funding, we allocated \$4M, but ARPA funding was too restrictive to allow us to meet the goals we wanted to meet for affordable housing.

Mr. Brown replied that this is not how the staff views this, and it is not in the best interest of staff to view it that way. We understand the County has committed to serving affordable housing. A specific amount was discussed. In utilizing the entirety of the County’s budget, staff has done a review, and

we understand the pot of funding should remain up to the amount set aside in ARPA funds. The best method of providing the funds to affect affordable housing will be determined internally with the constraints of the approved budget.

Ms. Newton inquired if the following motion would be appropriate: "Authorizing the Administrator to allocate up to \$4M of available funding for affordable housing."

Mr. Brown responded in the affirmative.

Mr. Livingston indicated he thought, at the last meeting, the committee requested the Administrator to come up with a proposal to appropriate funds for affordable housing.

Mr. Brown replied part of the discussion was the funding opportunity which potentially allows us to address affordable housing in multiple ways. He noted some of the applicants wanted to utilize the dollars to effect physical structures. There were also requests for the County to potentially develop a housing trust fund. One is putting money in a place where it could have some future use, and the other is distributing funds today. Then there is the question of whether affordable housing adds new units versus someone making current units less costly. He noted we potentially have the funding, which allows all of those things, but to get deeper into that would be a discussion about whether you want a multi-prong approach where you want investments and infrastructure.

Mr. Livingston responded he thought we would have staff and those in the affordable housing area come to him with recommendations.

Mr. Brown noted if the takeaway from this meeting is that all things are on the table, we can move forward that way.

Ms. Barron stated in her mind she thought this was a budget item. Because we are no longer going to use ARPA dollars, but in turn, we are going to authorize the Administrator to look within the confines of our budget to allow us to address affordable housing in that area. She believes we need to have additional discussions about giving the Administrator detailed guidance. We may need to have a third-party person assist us with identifying what affordable housing is. As we move forward in the discussion, and if it is to take a two-prong approach, this body will need to come back and have further conversations about the method.

Ms. Newton inquired if there are any notable disadvantages to approving the funding now and following up later with the mechanism.

Mr. Brown responded there is not.

Ms. Newton moved to authorize the Administrator to allocate up to \$4M in available funding for affordable housing, seconded by Ms. Barron.

Mr. Branham stated he is looking for to seeing the County supporting affordable housing, particularly efforts to add new units to the community. He supports the \$4M in ARPA funds for affordable housing, but he would like more details about where the funding is coming from and how it will be budgeted. His understanding is that this is a motion to recommend that Council allocate \$4M from the General Fund for affordable housing, and we would not be voting for ARPA funds on this particular category.

Mr. Brown indicated the motion states "available" funding and does not designate what fund the dollars will be coming from. We can have a more in-depth discussion about why you want the flexibility and provide clarity about what that means. In short, the County is able to address what it wants to do, and its limits are "lifted." The American Rescue Act funding the County chose to make available for these grants funds are all by choice. You have the ability, within the constraints, to make choices that best reflect what you want to accomplish and make the best use of the dollars you have. Potentially tying yourself to one particular mechanism may not allow you to do as much as you want, so we are trying to broaden that so you can accomplish it. No new dollars are being asked for. Anything funded with the funds would have to be approved by Council.

Mr. Branham noted the motion is too broadly worded for him.

Ms. Newton stated the purpose of the motion is to set aside funds in the budget that we can use once we pick the specific mechanism. She noted it does not remove any obligation we have to thoroughly vet what will come before us. If we do not set aside the money, it would potentially not be available.

Mr. Livingston specified we are using ARPA funds to take care of General Fund matters and supplant those funds to take care of affordable housing. It will not make a negative impact on the General Fund.

Mr. Wright asserted that to a certain extent, with any Federal funds, there will be stringent limitations, time constraints, and the potential of being audited. He indicated many things would be impossible or limited with ARPA funds. This takes those restraints off and does not limit you to ARPA funds.

In Favor: Barron and Newton

Opposed: Branham

The vote was in favor.

2. Desk Reviews – Ms. Thomas confirmed they have met with Guidehouse to begin desk reviews. She noted she received back desk reviews on 3 of the 5 applicants. Guidehouse is in the process of discussing their concerns and will be working with the groups to lay out the groundwork of what acceptable and compliant funding is. As a reminder, this is not a funding scenario where the County funds the projects upfront, but on a reimbursement basis. We will not know the exact amount of expenditures until the projects are complete. However, updates will be provided by Guidehouse.

Ms. Barron inquired if staff needed a motion to move forward with the applicants who have completed their desk reviews.

Ms. Thomas responded Council has already taken action on these groups. Guidehouse will now set up groups' agreements and begin their drawdowns.

Ms. Barron stated she does not want us to have a blanket press release that the funds have been awarded. She inquired if we could go ahead and issue an acknowledgment of the funds that have been awarded.

Mr. Brown responded in the affirmative.

5. ADJOURNMENT – Ms. Newton moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Branham.

In Favor: Branham, Barron, and Newton

The vote in favor was unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:40 PM.