



Richland County  
 Coronavirus Ad Hoc Committee  
**MINUTES**  
 December 14, 2021 – 2:00 PM  
 Council Chambers  
 2020 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29202

Yvonne McBride	Paul Livingston	Gretchen Barron, Chair	Joe Walker	Chakisse Newton
District 3	District 4	District 7	District 6	District 11

Committee Members Present: Gretchen Barron, Chair; Yvonne McBride, Paul Livingston, Joe Walker and Chakisse Newton

Others Present: Bill Malinowski, Cheryl English, Anette Kirylo Michelle Onley, Angela Weathersby, Kyle Holsclaw, Justin Landy, Tamar Black, Leonardo Brown, Patrick Wright, Lori Thomas, Aric Jensen, John Thompson, Beverly Harris, Randy Pruitt. Steven Gaither, Tina Robinette, Bill Davis, Brittney Terry, Shane Kitchen, Dwight Hanna and Betty Etheredge.

1. **Call to Order** – Ms. Barron called the meeting to order at approximately 2:00 PM.
2. **Approval of Minutes: November 16, 2021** – Ms. McBride moved, seconded by Mr. J. Walker, to approve the minutes as distributed.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, J. Walker, Barron, and Newton

The motion in favor was unanimous.

3. **Adoption of Agenda** – Ms. McBride moved, seconded by Mr. J. Walker, to approve the agenda as published.

Ms. Newton requested to include an update on the planning process for the American Rescue Plan Act Fund expenditures.

Mr. Livingston stated there is funding from State and Federal sources. He would like to discuss having someone lobby for this funding on Richland County’s behalf.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, J Walker, Barron, J. Walker and Barron

The vote in favor was unanimous to adopt the agenda.

Mr. Malinowski inquired if items were added to the agenda.

Ms. Barron responded, it was her understanding, the items noted by Ms. Newton and Mr. Livingston would be addressed under “Other Topics”.

4. **Incentive Extension** – Ms. Barron stated she wanted an update on the pilot program, and then to discuss if we would like to extend the incentive program or if there are additional programs we would like to implement.

Mr. Brown stated he previously provided a breakdown of all the incentive activities the County has participated in. He noted there are a few remaining gift cards. When the committee last took this item up, Council took action to potentially continuing this program. The Chair wanted to be clear the committee, and Council, would have an opportunity to weigh in on Council's intent once the initial gift card allocation was depleted.

Ms. McBride inquired if the pilot program funds were depleted.

Mr. Brown responded there are 38 gift cards remaining, which total \$3,800.

Ms. McBride inquired if Coronavirus and ERAP funds are a part of the strategic plan.

Ms. Barron responded they are not.

Ms. McBride stated she thought we were going to have a strategic plan on how we were going to expend those funds.

Mr. Brown responded Ms. McBride's question is similar to what Ms. Newton inquired about, in terms of an overview of the plan on how the County will expend the American Rescue Fund dollars. He noted it would be something the County will discuss, but it is not a part of the strategic planning process.

Ms. McBride inquired if Ms. Barron wanted ARP funds to be separate from the overall planning process.

Ms. Barron responded the piece she wants to address is whether the incentive program we had was effective, and if we would like to continue it, or if we would like to do something else.

Ms. Newton stated, for clarification, the gift cards remaining could be used by any Council member that was doing an event without coming back to Council for a motion.

Ms. Barron responded in the affirmative.

Ms. Newton recommended to not take action at this time, but come back after the strategic conversation.

5. **Non-Profit Application Process** - Ms. Barron noted, in previous meetings, we discussed allocating a particular amount of funds to non-profit organizations. There have been discussions about creating an equitable process, so that anyone applying would have an opportunity.

- **Priority Projects** – Mr. Brown noted, as a part of the process, we have worked to develop an application to address the equity of the process. Based on the priorities established by Council, a rubric will be utilized to measure the non-profits eligibility. He noted they are concerned about putting out an application before final guidance has been given, in the event we have someone apply for something that is not allowed in the ARP utilization.

Ms. Thomas stated she worked with Grant Thornton, and they wanted to ensure any application released to the public meet the guidance of ARP. They have a specific arm that is working with individuals to vet the projects to ensure it is compliant with the Federal grant. Once the County determines the groups they want to categorize, Grant Thornton will be able to

give us a rubric that will provide us a scoring mechanism the committee will utilize to independently score the organizations. Research and analysis would come back to Council in the form of a motion. Council would ultimately decide how those dollars would be awarded. If we had numerous agencies funding one source, the committee could decide it was more appropriate to fund a specific group over another. They anticipate final guidance from Washington by the end of the year.

Ms. McBride stated she recently spoke with Federal employees regarding ARP funding, and even though there is not final guidance, if they approve our application, they would accept whatever we have done until final guidance is given.

Ms. Thomas noted her concern is if they move down the road with vetting community groups, the guidance could come out during the evaluation process.

Ms. Newton stated, once we have an application process, she wants to ensure the proposal fits within the overall plans for how we want to expend funds. She understands we want to create a process, but for her, the overall criteria for what we want to do comes first, and the applications second.

Ms. Thomas noted that is what the consultant recommended. If we chose certain groups, or categories of complaint activities, we could earmark a specific amount of money for each. From that point, you could give staff the ability to review those applications. Those that do not fall within those criteria could be notified they did not meet the qualifications, and others could be vetted.

Ms. Newton noted she is not prepared to earmark anything since the County has not decided their overall priorities.

Ms. Barron stated that is why it is important to have this list.

Ms. McBride noted the Blue Ribbon Committee was created to help establish priorities based on input from the community and to review the grants once the criteria is established.

Mr. Brown noted, based off the percentages received from the community, the list of priorities is as follows:

1. Services for abused and Neglected Children (66%)
2. Street improvement (65%)
3. Mental Health (64.39%)
4. Support Service (63.93%)
5. Transitional Housing (63.15%)
6. Emergency Shelters (61.85%)
7. Permanent Housing (60.99%)
8. Broadband Infrastructure (60.78%)
9. Services for Victims of Domestic Violence (60.52%)
10. Veterans (57.44%)

Mr. Brown noted other items that were noteworthy included:

- Special Housing for Elderly (54%)
- Safety for your neighborhood (54%)

- Youth Services (52%)
- Day Car Services (52%)
- Special Needs Services (51%)
- Rental Assistance (51%)
- Substance Abuse Services (50%)
- Flood/Drainage improvements (50%)

Mr. Brown noted there are two items his staff will need to move forward, in terms of how we process requests, how we receive requests, and what should be included. We will need the criteria, based on community input, or any other relationship you want funds to be utilized. We discussed another committee of individuals, but we have never said we want to establish a committee in which we bring in citizens to participate and be the medium for the process. While the committee and Council expressed the desire to utilize ARP funding to provide support to other agencies to assist the community. We could also utilize the funds internally to provide support services to areas that could also benefit the community. He is requesting feedback rather than saying here is the direct we need to move in with the utilization of ARP funds. He has already given direction, and some of that is leaning heavily toward gaps we have internally, but he knows the committee would like to spend funds outside County provided services.

Ms. McBride inquired if we need to include some of the Administrator's priorities or at least consider them.

Mr. Brown responded you have already considered some them. All of his recommendations are about items that impact the County's ability to provide services to the community. There are a lot more items we could do the same thing with, but he understands we have discussed having a balance between items unique to County services and unique to the community receiving services.

Ms. McBride stated, for clarification, in addition those approved, the Administrator feels there are other items that need to be included, as we establish priorities.

Ms. Brown responded in the affirmative.

Ms. McBride noted we need to include the priorities from Administration, as well as the priorities from the community, including the business sector.

Ms. Barron stated we need to move forward and establish the committee members.

Ms. Livingston stated Council had staff send invites to people who wanted to participate, then Council made selections from those individuals.

Ms. Barron inquired where the list of participants came from that were interested in serving on the committee.

Ms. McBride stated it included Council members, citizens and community leaders.

Ms. McBride moved, seconded by Mr. Livingston, to forward to Council with a recommendation to establish a Coronavirus Blue Ribbon Committee to assist with all ARP and Coronavirus related funding.

Ms. Newton noted we would need to create a charter for the committee, in order to understand the role we want them to provide and how we are going to interact with them.

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Ms. McBride added the following language to her original motion: “will operate similar to the Blue Ribbon Flood Committee”.

Ms. Newton requested, before the motion goes to Council, to be provided with supplemental information about how the committee worked, how the individuals were recommended/applied and were selected.

Mr. Brown stated, to his knowledge, the list was largely developed by Council, with minimal input from staff.

Ms. Barron stated we want to mirror the Blue Ribbon Flood Committee, but do we want to solely take recommendations for this committee, or do we want community input.

Mr. Malinowski stated he believes the Chair appointed Council member to the Blue Ribbon Committee. Individuals that were adversely affected by the flood also requested to serve on the committee. He is not sure if the specific number was limited. He recommended staff contact former Councilmember Greg Pearce, who served as the Chair of the committee.

Ms. Barron stated the more structure we set the better off we will be.

Ms. McBride inquired if we need to make a decision, since we will be coming back to establish the criteria based on the information.

Ms. Barron responded in the affirmative.

Ms. Newton inquired if we want to hold this item in committee until we receive additional information so we can send something more comprehensive to Council.

Ms. Barron stated initially she wanted to forward the recommendation to Council and gather information as a part of the recommendation. She noted Administration will be able to provide information as a supporting document.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, J. Walker, Barron and Newton

The vote in favor was unanimous to forward a recommendation to Council to establish a Coronavirus Blue Ribbon Committee to assist with all ARP and Coronavirus related funding. The committee will operate similar to the Blue Ribbon Flood Committee.

6. **ERAP Community Resources** – Mr. Brown stated the County requested additional funds from the US Treasury, as well as met with SC Housing to request assistance by participating in a voluntary reallocation of funds. The SC Housing thought it would be beneficial to share their desire with the US Treasury to allocate funds from the US Treasury to Richland County rather than some type of interagency, in order to keep everything separate. SC Housing is willing to give a portion of their funds to Richland County. As we wait on that, anyone who contacts Richland County for resources, we will communicate to them other community resources they may have access to. He noted we are reliant on others to provide funding in order for us to continue with the Emergency Rental Assistance Program.

Ms. Barron inquired about the resources listed on the County’s website.

Mr. Brown outlined the different resources listed under the Emergency Rental Assistance Program on the County’s website.

Ms. Newton inquired if there is a timeframe for when we expect to hear back from SC Housing.

Mr. Brown responded the US Treasury generally does not give timelines.

Ms. Barron inquired if we are maintaining a database of individuals who contact the County regarding funding, so if we receive additional funds we are able to respond to those individuals.

Mr. Brown responded he is not aware if we are doing that. He noted the County received over 14,000 applications and by the time we ran out of funds, we had not gone through the original 14,000 applications. If we get additional funds, the applications in process will continue to be processed before we open up any additional applications. The average allocation is approximately \$5,000 for rental and utility assistance.

**Other Topics** – Mr. Brown noted his expenditure report for ARP funds will not include the DSS potential project.

- Lump Sum distribution - \$1.148 million
- Employee Stipends - \$7.8 million
- Alvin S. Glenn projects - \$3.3 million
- Mental Health Program for the sheriff's officers- \$81,000
- Utilities bad debt from lost revenues - \$1 million
- Grant Thorton Consulting - \$100,00
- Vaccination gift cards - \$25,000
- HVAC - \$5.2 million

He noted the total allocated funding was approximately \$18.7 M. The remaining funding is a little less than \$62M.

Ms. Newton noted her questions are more about the overall planning process on how we are going to establish priorities, but her concerns were somewhat addressed earlier.

Ms. Barron stated, at the next meeting, we should flesh out more directives for the Blue Ribbon Committee, and schedule a work session to discuss the priorities and plans for the funding.

**Lobbyist** – Mr. Livingston stated he was concerned the County is not taking advantage of those funds, other than the funds we received directly. There is a tremendous amount of State and Federal funding ARP and COVID. At this point, we do not have anybody to advocate on the County's behalf. Some counties have commitments from the Legislation. He suggested we get someone to advocate on our behalf, as soon as possible. He noted we are still under emergency procedures, and the Administrator will be able to use the Procurement Office to get something done.

Ms. McBride stated she agreed with Mr. Livingston. In addition, she suggested looking into a grants writer.

Mr. Brown stated, when a lobbyist was previously discussed with Council, it was either voted down or deferred. If it was deferred, there is room for quicker movement, but he would see what he could do under his emergency authority.

Mr. Livingston stated, the previous discussion was for a general lobbyist, but we need someone for a short period to specifically deal with COVID.

Ms. Newton stated someone lobbying on our behalf would need to have some directives on what they are going to lobby for and where our priorities lie.

Ms. McBride stated we cannot give directives until we have a lobbyist. The lobbyist would be the one looking at the different programs and funding available.

8. **Adjournment** – The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:57PM.