

**MINUTES
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND HUMAN SERVICES**

**October 13, 2015
5:00 P.M.
CONFERENCE ROOM D - COUNTY SQUARE**

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting date, time, place and agenda was posted on the bulletin board at the entrance of the Council Office and mailed to the newspapers, radio stations and television stations.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman Liz Seman
Vice Chairman Joe Baldwin
Councilor Lynn Ballard
Councilor Lottie Gibson
Councilor Willis Meadows

COMMITTEE MEMBER(S) ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT:

Jeffrey D. Wile, Assistant County Attorney
John Vandermosten, Interim Assistant County Administrator
Debbie Templeton, Administrative Assistant
Helen E. Wood, Clerk to Public Safety Committee

OTHERS PRESENT:

Parks Evans, Coroner

CALL TO ORDER:

Liz Seman
Chairman

INVOCATION:

Lottie Gibson
Councilor

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

ACTION: Councilor Lynn Ballard moved to approve the minutes of the Committee on Public Safety and Human Services' meeting of September 8, 2015. Motion carried unanimously by all Council members present.

CORONER'S OFFICE OVERVIEW

An overview of the Coroner's Office was presented by Coroner, Parks Evans. Mr. Evans has been with the Coroner's office since 1987. Greenville County has the only active office in the state with a Medical Examiner System. The county began working the dual Coroner/Medical Examiner System in 1975 when the population reached 250,000+. Within this program, the Coroner's office has a chief Medical Examiner and an assistant Medical Examiner. Both of these positions are Forensic Pathologists. The Coroner's primary duty is to determine manner of death: homicide, suicide, natural, accidental and undetermined. The Medical Examiner's specific duty is to determine the medical cause of death by conducting autopsies. Currently, there are only 5 agencies that may request an autopsy without the family's permission: Coroner's Office, Medical Examiner's Office, Solicitor's Office, and 2 departments within SLED (Dept. of Vulnerable Adults and Dept. of Child Fatalities.) The Medical Examiner's medical expertise is extremely valuable to the Coroner's office, especially on occasions when there is a hospital death during surgery when a determination of physician error is of the utmost importance.

The Coroner's office is notified about every death that occurs within Greenville County without a doctor present. They also respond to the scene of all violent deaths to investigate alongside the law enforcement agencies. The office has seven assistant coroners in the field that handle about 80 deaths in a month. Greenville County Pathologists also assist Pickens, Laurens, and Spartanburg Counties with autopsies.

A binder which includes statistics and a snap shot of the activity for the Coroner's Office for the last couple of years was distributed to each council member. These statistics demonstrate how Greenville County is a large area with big problems. This keeps the Coroner's office exceptionally busy.

Councilor Gibson inquired into the process for applying for funeral assistance. Coroner Evans explained that the family may call the office and explain their circumstances and need. After reviewing and approving the need, Greenville County will offer cremation only, at no charge.

Councilor Ballard asked if the Coroner's office worked with other counties. Coroner Evans confirmed that Greenville County does assist other counties when there is a need or when there is a need for specific expertise. Most upstate counties that do not have their own Coroner's office or who choose not to contract with Greenville County, use Newberry County for their coroner needs. Counties in the lower part of the state utilize Charleston County.

Councilor Meadows inquired as to any needs the Coroner's office may have at this time. Coroner Evans explained the biggest need is for a compensated Chief Deputy Coroner with the implementation of a Supervisory table. The office also needs additional staffing for shift work.

Vice Chairman Baldwin asked how many pauper burials are done each year. Coroner Evans responded that Greenville County paid for the cremation of about 70 in the past year. He went on to say that there are currently about 200 unclaimed cremains in the morgue. Eventually, these cremains will have to be moved due to the volume and lack of space.

Vice Chairman Baldwin asked how many bodies go unidentified each year. Coroner Evans said presently there are 3 bodies in the morgue that are unidentified.

Councilor Ballard confirmed with Coroner Evans that EMS is the only agency that may call the Coroner's office after a determination of death.

Councilor Ballard also verified with Coroner Evans that Greenville County contracts with a private outside agency that comes to the scene of a death for removal and transport of the body. If no autopsy is needed, the family is tasked with calling the funeral home of their choice. The funeral home is then responsible for removal of the body.

Vice Chairman Baldwin asked how quickly the Coroner's office is on scene after notification of a death. Coroner Evans stated his requirement is 45 minutes.

Councilor Gibson asked about burial law and restrictions. Coroner Evans said he is unfamiliar with the laws and restrictions of burial. He went on to explain that burial on private property is allowed in the state of South Carolina without involvement of a funeral home. The family would only need a Burial, Removal and Transport permit.

The Public Safety Committee thanked Coroner Park Evans for his overview of the Coroner's office and questions answered.

Chairman Liz Seman brought to the committee's attention the handout for the scheduled dates of the 2016 Public Safety meetings.

Before adjournment, Councilor Ballard suggested to the committee to look into providing spouses of First Responders killed in the line of duty property tax relief. Councilor Ballard was encouraged to move forward with his suggestion.

ADJOURNMENT

ACTION: Chairman Liz Seman moved to adjourn the meeting of the Committee on Public Safety and Human Services. Without objection, the meeting adjourned at 5:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Templeton, Administrative Assistant