



# GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes  
Committee of the Whole  
June 18, 2019  
5:00 p.m.

County Square – Conference Room D  
301 University Ridge  
Greenville, South Carolina 29601

## **Council Members**

Mr. Butch Kirven, Chairman  
Mr. Willis Meadows, Vice Chairman  
Mrs. Xanthene Norris, Chairman Pro Tem  
Mr. Joe Dill  
Mr. Mike Barnes  
Mr. Sid Cates  
Mr. Rick Roberts  
Mr. Bob Taylor  
Mrs. Liz Seman  
Mr. Ennis Fant, Sr.  
Mr. Lynn Ballard  
Mr. Dan Tripp

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Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting date, time, place and agenda was posted on the bulletin board at the County Square and made available to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned Citizens.

## **Council Members Absent**

**Dan Tripp**, *District 28*

## **Staff Present**

**Joe Kernell**, *County Administrator*  
**Mark Tollison**, *County Attorney*  
**Kim Wunder**, *Assistant County Attorney*  
**John Hansley**, *Deputy County Administrator*  
**Regina McCaskill**, *Clerk to Council*  
**Jessica Stone**, *Deputy Clerk to Council*  
**Paula Gucker**, *Assistant County Administrator, Public Works*  
**Shannon Herman**, *Assistant County Administrator*  
**Nicole Wood**, *Assistant to the County Administrator*  
**Bob Mihalic**, *Governmental Relations Officer*

## **Others Present**

None

## **Call to Order**

Chairman Kirven

## **Invocation**

Councilor Liz Seman

**Item (3) Approval of Minutes**

**Action:** Vice-Chairman Meadows moved to approve the minutes of the May 21, 2019, Regular Committee of the Whole Meeting.

Motion carried unanimously.

**Item (4) Greenville Homeless Alliance Update**

Presented by: Susan McLarty, Coordinator  
Greenville Homeless Alliance

Ms. McLarty stated the update was a chance for the Greenville Homeless Alliance (GHA) to be proactive; last year's presentation was more reactive to the closure of the Economy Inn and the work that went into the Motel Displacement Response Plan.

The purpose of the update was threefold:

- Provide an overview of homelessness in Greenville County
- Hear Council's feedback on priorities as set forth by the GHA Steering Committee
- Request for sustainable government support

Ms. McLarty stated the information was shared with the Greenville City Council the previous evening. The Greenville Homeless Alliance was seeking a way to be supported by both governments (City of Greenville and Greenville County) in a very sustainable effort focused on homelessness.

Ms. McLarty stated "Tent City" started the conversation on homelessness in 2014 and 2015; it prompted the first collective approach for the City of Greenville, Greenville County and service providers to come together and work on homelessness. Ms. McLarty added that no one agency or no one person could solve homelessness.

The "housing continuum" consists of the following: emergency shelter, transitional housing and then permanent housing. Ms. McLarty thanked Councilor Ennis Fant for his work with the *Mediation Work in the Homeless Triangle Area* which was located close to most of the area's shelter. A changing economy and employment situation were at the root of the recent changes in Greenville. Ms. McLarty stated the area's emergency shelters were now considered transitional housing. The result was that the emergency shelters, motels and housings were so strained that the system was relatively shut down.

When "Tent City" was discovered, it went from a very small and peaceful encampment to a very hurtful situation. Well-meaning citizens took items to the residents which only created violence; some of the residents actually ended up hospitalized. A different approach to homelessness was needed.

Ms. McLarty stated there were funds left over from the generosity of the public in its response to "Tent City"; the funds were managed by a very diverse group of people. The group had solved some of the hardest, most difficult cases of homelessness with a very collective approach and used the funds in a very "stingy" way in order to stretch them as far as possible. Ms. McLarty stated that funds had almost been diminished.

Ms. McLarty stated there were a number of dedicated people in the community who worked with the homeless; because of those people and supportive efforts from the philanthropic sector, progress had been seen in all five of the original priorities.

Ms. McLarty recognized Brandon Cook with New Horizon Family Health Service who was in attendance. She stated that New Horizon had partnered with Miracle Hill Ministries and opened up medical respite beds to treat individuals too sick to return to the streets but well enough to leave the hospital. Ms. McLarty stated the program was saving significant taxpayer dollars and was a first in the state.

In 2014, the coalition was loosely formed in response to “Tent City” and the Leadership Taskforce developed the Homelessness White Paper in 2015. The next year, the coalition began conducting a more thorough data scan to establish benchmarks and goals. In 2017, United Ministries was chosen as the host organization; Ms. McLarty and Heather Gatchell were actual employees of United Ministries which made it possible to launch the program at a very low cost. Ms. McLarty was hired as the first coordinator in 2018.

Ms. McLarty stated the Greenville Homeless Alliance was a public/private partnership committed to making homelessness brief and rare in Greenville. Its mission was to strengthen partnerships and broaden support in order to ensure safe, affordable homes for all. The coalition was charged with looking for sustainable solutions to homelessness and worked to educate, advocate, collaborate and innovate with policymakers and the community. She emphasized one reason that this was so challenging was the fact that the federal definition of homelessness was very narrow. In order for an individual to be eligible for funds, they must be living in a shelter or literally living on the street.

Initially, there were 18 significant partners involved in the leadership taskforce; there were now more than 300. Approximately 75 of those were organizations and the remaining were individuals who had come forward to help. The Greenville Housing Authority had put aside 50 vouchers for homeless families and individuals who would have never been able to access vouchers in traditional ways; all of the vouchers had been utilized. Rents continued to rise and wages were stagnant, especially for service jobs; more and more families were rent burdened which meant they were paying more than 30% of their income for housing. This created significant instability and increased homelessness. HUD established the “area median income” as a measure to provide subsidies for the community; the “area median income” for Greenville County rose \$13,700 from 2015 to the present time. Currently, the “area median income” for Greenville County was \$71,700; more people were qualifying for housing subsidy but the subsidy had not been increased.

Ms. McLarty stated when the annual “point in time” count was held in 2018, there were 572 individuals counted as “homeless” according to the federal definition. She stated money allocated by HUD for homelessness for the region was sent to Greenville County and 12 additional counties, even though Greenville County’s homeless population accounted for 50% of the region’s homeless population.

There were over 350 year round shelter beds available in Greenville County; however, the shelter have become transitional housing as people were staying in the shelters longer and paying approximately \$220 per month for room and board. In Greenville County, 1089 students from 84 different schools experienced homelessness and the number was growing.

Ms. McLarty described homelessness barriers as housing, transportation, mental health, criminal records and childcare; the housing market was where everyone felt the impact of the economic changes affecting homelessness. There was increased cost and strain on law enforcement, hospitals and employers. Ms. McLarty encouraged Council to focus on priorities and policies that would not create more barriers to people exiting homelessness. In 2018, the Greenville Chamber formed the Workforce Data Collaborative which revealed transportation, housing childcare and criminal records as key workforce barriers. Households earning less than \$25,000 were struggling to remain in Greenville County; a minimum of \$30,000 was necessary to afford some type of housing in the area.

The City of Greenville allocated \$425,000 per year for 34 years to Greenlink funding for more Proterra electric buses and increased funding to \$2.8 million additional funding in FY 2019 and \$1.7 million in FY 2020. Greenville County proposed an additional \$4.5 million for Greenlink funding (\$2 million in FY 2020 and \$2.5 million on FY 2021). The increased funding would improve the livability of people experiencing homelessness as well as all of the citizens of Greenville County.

The “housing wage” for Greenville County was approximately \$30,000 annually; a job paying the minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour totaled \$15,080 per year. Greenville had the 16<sup>th</sup> fastest rate of growth in apartment rent in the country; a two bedroom apartment rented for approximately \$883.00 per month.

There was currently a deficit of 12,000 homes in Greenville County and the number continued to grow. Ms. McLarty stated GCRA was doing a tremendous job leveraging dollars for affordable housing; for every \$1.00, GCRA was generating \$24.00. Most of the families experiencing homelessness in Greenville County would not qualify for federal monies; however, there was not enough money to assist all those that would qualify. Other incentives, such as land, would also help.

The emergency shelters were no longer able to assist in emergency situations. There were also serious health implications associated with homelessness. A hospital emergency room was set up to provide emergency medical care; emergency shelters were set up to assist those individuals and family who were experiencing homelessness as help them move out of homelessness. Ms. McLarty stated without the available of transitional and affordable housing, shelters have become permanent housing and decreasing the opportunity to help more people.

Ms. McLarty stated over 100 people have participated with 50 different organizations assisting in the process of moving from shelter to permanent housing; gaps, weaknesses and priorities were studied and housing was the major gap and the major weakness.

Ms. McLarty stated it was important to determine other ways to alleviate pressure on the shelters. The “big ideas emerging” included housing starting at \$200 per month, transportation connected to housing and coordinated infrastructure with shared support by the city and the county focused on homelessness.

Ending homelessness did not mean that a person or family would never experience it again; but, rather the community had a comprehensive response that ensured homelessness became brief and rare. With the current state of the area’s shelter, it was impossible to do so. With willing city and county partners, it was hoped there would be a decreased need for shelters and increased housing that was affordable and connected to Greenlink along a sustained, stable continuum.

Chairman Kirven stated he heard that 26 efficiency apartments had been proposed for the Poinsett district through United Housing Connections. He asked Ms. McLarty to give additional information.

Ms. McLarty stated the 36 units were permanent, supportive housing to be built especially for people who experienced chronic homelessness along with some sort of disability and addiction.

Chairman Kirven inquired when the units would be ready for move in.

Ms. McLarty stated they would be ready in 2021.

Councilor Taylor asked about monies distributed to the residents of “Tent City.”

Ms. McLarty stated the money was used for “some of the hardest cases”.

Councilor Taylor asked about a “dollar figure” attached to the money and if an individual would have a set amount of money available for their use.

Lauren with the Salvation Army stated the original amount was funded for the Tent City Initiative. The money has been used on a case by case basis and varied from \$150 to a couple of thousand depending on the need and the services provided.

Councilor Taylor asked how much money was needed to sustain the effort.

Lauren stated the money was almost depleted and approximately \$75,000 was needed. The original amount was sustained for almost 5 years in a very frugal way.

Councilor Ballard asked which shelters were considered “emergency shelters.”

Ms. McLarty stated Salvation Army and Miracle Hill Ministries were the two largest emergency shelters; there were family shelters through United Ministries and Interfaith Hospitality Network as well as shelters for victims of domestic violence and veterans.

Councilor Ballard stated there were a significant number of people living in run-down hotels. He asked if those individuals were included in the data presented.

Ms. McLarty stated the numbers did include those individuals.

Councilor Fant commended Ms. McLarty and her counterparts for all of their hard work. Mr. Fant asked if most of the homeless were employed and simply not able to afford a place to live due to poor wages. In District 25, there were a large number of people paying 50 – 70% of their total income for housing and utilities; as rents continued to rise, those individuals would soon be homeless. Mr. Fant stated paying too much for housing left people with no access to quality food which led to future health issues. He asked if there had been any consideration to people living “on the edge of the city” who were currently paying \$600 – 650 per month rent but were now faced with rents climbing to \$1100 – 1200 per month.

Ms. McLarty stated a majority of the individuals living in emergency shelters were currently employed; another significant percentage had secured disability income. She added that a majority of the parents of the children identified as homeless in Greenville County were also working, making \$9 – 12 per hour. Ms. McLarty stated they were aware of a large number of households paying 50 -70% of their total household income towards housing. The best partnership would be to look at the Housing Authority and find ways to provide additional housing subsidies. She added that the Housing Authority also suffered with landlords who raised rents and were reluctant to accept housing vouchers. The Housing Authority was ready to build more affordable housing and had emerged as a key partner in moving forward; they have applied to become a “moving to work” agency. If approved, the Housing Authority would be able to move more people off of vouchers and upward thereby opening up more vouchers.

Councilor Barnes asked about those individuals receiving disability and budget training.

Ms. McLarty stated a nurse and a retired social worker at St. Anthony’s Church were helping people “navigate the system.” Homeless individuals receiving disability checks were referred for payee services to ensure rent and utilities were paid first. Many property owners were willing to accept someone who had a payee. In some cases, other supportive services such as transportation were also supplied by the payee.

Chairman Kirven stated the Human Relations Commission was working on a federal grant with Financial Empowerment to have centers set up around the county to assist people with financial issues.

Ms. McLarty stated the Interfaith Hospitality Network provided wrap around supportive services for families to include a financial coach.

Chairman Kirven stated he felt it was necessary to continue the conversation regarding homelessness and get more information and knowledge on ways to help. He added Council really appreciated all the hard work that had been put into the effort.

Councilor Taylor inquired if an affordable housing fund had been created by the City of Greenville or any other entity and, if so, how much money did it contain.

Ms. McLarty stated the City of Greenville put \$3.5 million in an affordable housing fund with a proposed additional \$5 million over the next five years. Land banking, gap financing and preservation of existing homes were the main priorities.

Councilor Ballard stated he sat on the board that oversaw the fund. They were trying not to grant money but to provide upfront infrastructure and recouping money upon completion of the buildings.

Councilor Norris when she had been faced with trying to help someone with homelessness, she turned to area churches for assistance. Ms. Norris added that homelessness was a problem and everyone could help; there was a lot of help in the community and she offered to assist.

**Item (5)     Adjournment**

**Action:**     Councilor Norris moved to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 5:41 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

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Regina G. McCaskill  
Clerk to Council