



GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes
Committee of the Whole
October 15, 2019
5:06 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

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

Joe Dill, *District 17*

Staff Present

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

Others Present

None

Call to Order

Chairman Kirven

Invocation

Vice-Chairman Meadows

Item (3) Approval of Minutes

Action: Councilor Seman moved to approve the minutes of the October 1, 2019, Regular Committee of the Whole Meeting.

Motion carried unanimously.

Item (4) Resolution of Support for the Development of the South Carolina Art and Cultural Center / Downtown Convention and Event Center

Chairman Kirven stated the item was originally presented at the October 1, Committee of the Whole meeting; Council voted to hold the item. Mr. Kirven stated Council now had the opportunity to review the item and request any information they might need in order to proceed to a vote.

Vice-Chairman Meadows asked if a member on the prevailing side of the vote needed to move for reconsideration if the item.

Chairman Kirven stated it was his understanding that a motion to reconsider was needed if the item was approved or denied. He requested clarification from Mark Tollison.

Mr. Tollison stated the item was not approved or defeated; a motion to reconsider was not needed.

Action: Councilor Fant stated based on the discussions Chairman Kirven had with the City of Greenville and the commitments that had been made, he moved to approve the resolution.

Mr. Fant stated there was concern about the City Planning Commission meeting which was scheduled for October 17; there had been some discussion about holding the item until after the meeting. Mr. Fant stated that he had spoken with Councilor Tripp; they agreed the “higher road” would be for Council to move forward and approve the resolution. Doing so would show leadership and honor; approving the resolution prior to the Planning Commission meeting would demonstrate the County’s commitment to partner with the City. Mr. Fant stated if the City of Greenville reneged on what had been agreed upon between Chairman Kirven and Mayor White, Council would have the right to rescind its approval. If Council approved the resolution and the City subsequently reneged, he hoped that Council would collectively send a message to the City indicating that was not the way Council conducted business in Greenville County.

Vice-Chairman Meadows stated the resolution indicated the County would give \$26 million for the center; it was “odd” for the County to pledge money and have no idea where the money was coming from. Mr. Meadows asked if the money would be taken from the Reserve Fund; if so, it would deplete the fund to barely above the amount needed to maintain the AAA credit rating. He stated \$2 million had also been committed this past week and Council was not aware of the commitment until after the fact; Council had not voted on it. Mr. Meadows stated he had received an email earlier in the day which contained a *Facebook* post that indicated the County was committed to running the convention center along with the City of Greenville. He added the “side deals” had to stop; Council had to be involved and it had to be more than a “one-man show” or a “two-man show.” Mr. Meadows stated he had

been prepared to ask to hold the item until additional information could be obtained. He spoke with Bo Aughtry about his concerns and he was willing to agree to Mr. Fant's motion but he wanted to add a caveat to the motion. He felt it was necessary to hold the item until after October 17. Council could come back and vote on the item; its decision would depend on the City's decision. He stated this approach would send a message to the City. Council had to stop conducting business the way it was currently done; otherwise, there was no need for a County Council.

Chairman Kirven stated the County had been working on getting the City's approval for the University Ridge Project for about 1 ½ years; there had been a lot of back and forth between the County and the City regarding the guidelines. In order to break the dynamic, Mr. Kirven and Mayor White met to discuss the situation along with some other people. By doing so, they pushed the issue as far as they could go; but, to get it "over the goal line" would require the efforts of both the City and County Council. Mr. Kirven stated neither he nor Mayor White had committed to do anything; they had simply set it up in a position for the respective councils to make the decision to actually get it done.

Vice-Chairman Meadows stated he appreciated Chairman Kirven's thoughts; but, that was not what was indicated in his letter. Mr. Meadows stated the letter indicated Council was committed to providing the money; that was not true. Including affordable housing in the project had not been discussed; there needed to be some debate whether it was the County's responsibility to do so. Mr. Meadows stated it was a "bone of contention" and had been for some time. It should have come before Council; his colleagues were aware of what he was saying. Some of his colleagues thought the same way, but he was one to say it.

Chairman Kirven stated he agreed with Mr. Meadows. He added that he and Mayor White had simply set things up for Council to make a decision; nothing could move forward until they did so.

Councilor Roberts stated he saw Council having multiple conversations about multiple issues which may or may not be connected. In regards to the item at hand, Mr. Roberts stated he felt it should not have been held the first time it was presented. The project would be beneficial to all of the citizens of Greenville County; money would be brought in by the State, private investors, the City of Greenville and Greenville County. Co-mingling the project with the University Ridge Project gave the County bargaining power. Mr. Roberts stated if Council thought the convention center was a good project, they should move forward and approve the resolution. He stated many of his colleagues were in agreement with Vice-Chairman Meadows regarding decisions being made with no input from Council. He felt the Chairman should not continue to make decisions on his own without all of Council being involved.

Chairman Kirven stated that everything he did was subject to Council approval.

Councilor Roberts stated there was a list of decisions Chairman Kirven had made without input from Council.

Chairman Kirven stated there were a number of contingencies included in the resolution; the timing was critical. There was a State session coming up in January; the individuals working on the funding for the convention center wanted to start working on things now.

Councilor Roberts stated he agreed and supported moving forward with the resolution.

Councilor Seman stated she would love to have a conversation on the connection between the proposed downtown convention center and the future of the current convention center as well as the County's involvement. Ms. Seman stated the information was relevant to the conversation. She added she was hopeful for the outcome of Thursday's meeting; she thanked staff for the number of meetings they had attended regarding the rezoning efforts. The County was different from the municipalities; there were no neighborhood connections like the City of Greenville had. Ms. Seman stated the project was a first for the County in terms of a city-centered project; it was big, it was different and it was going to be amazing. Councilor Seman stated the County wanted the highest and best use for the site as it would maximize revenues; the project could be completed without raising taxes and tax revenues for the school district, the City and the County would be maximized. Ms. Seman stated she understood the angst on the part of the citizens; it was a big project. Just as the County had no control over its Planning Commission, neither did the City. There was a long history of working with the City of Greenville on a lot of projects; she agreed it would be nice to take the "high road" and hope for the best. Council had to deal with the best interest of the County; if things did not go well on Thursday, Council needed to discuss its next steps.

Vice-Chairman Meadows stated it was not known what commitments and "side deals" had been made. They surfaced when it was appropriate in order to get Council to move quickly; it was always a matter of urgency. Council never did anything deliberately.

Chairman Kirven stated that was a hyperbole.

Vice-Chairman Meadows asked where was the County going to get the \$26 million for the convention center.

Mr. Kernell stated there were opportunities to utilize TIF funds scheduled to expire within the next couple of years. There were currently three and they would generate somewhere in the \$4 – 5 million range per year. The County would need to determine how to generate the remainder of the money; it could be financed or the County could opt to PAYGO (Pay As You GO).

Councilor Tripp stated he had made the original motion to hold the item as he was concerned about some of the language used in the resolution when talking about a partnership. He felt what Mayor White had done was not representative of a partnership. He applauded the efforts of Chairman Kirven and Mayor White; he was hopeful the County could partner with the City of Greenville. Mr. Tripp stated he was excited about the proposed convention center and the great things it could bring to Greenville. He added he was ready to reconsider a favorable vote if the City of Greenville did not live up to its end of the partnership.

Councilor Roberts stated the City of Greenville needed Council to approve the resolution in order to negotiate with the State regarding funding. He asked if Council could agree to the resolution but include a caveat that would give the County the ability to pull it back if the City of Greenville did not live up to its end of the partnership.

Chairman Kirven stated the private partners involved in the project had already taken a lead in securing funds from the State the Legislative Delegation. Mr. Kirven felt the County had plenty of flexibility to react to the situation based on the City's actions.

Councilor Tripp stated the Governor was putting the budget together for next year. A show of support from the City and the County was needed; it was a worthy effort and Council should do its part in supporting the project.

Vice-Chairman Meadows stated it was a good project and he hoped the vote went well. Mr. Meadows asked Chairman Kirven if he would be committed to call a special meeting if the City of Greenville Planning Commission voted contrary to what Council expected.

Chairman Kirven stated he would if the situation dictated the need for a special meeting.

Vice-Chairman Meadows stated he needed something definite from the Chairman.

Councilor Tripp stated the Planning Commission vote was not what was important; the vote of the City Council was more important.

Vice-Chairman Meadows agreed.

Councilor Tripp stated if the Planning Commission voted against Council's expectations, he was prepared to continue to "be a diplomat" for a couple of days. If the City Council subsequently voted against Council's expectations, he would request a special meeting be held to discuss the situation.

Chairman Kirven agreed.

Vice-Chairman Meadows stated he also agreed with Councilor Tripp. He would agree to vote for the resolution with the caveat even though he had been prepared to vote against it. Mr. Meadows stated he did not want to see the project "killed."

Councilor Fant stated the Planning Commission did not have the final say; what Mayor White and the City Council did was what was important.

Chairman Kirven stated it appeared that Council agreed they needed leverage and the ability to retain leverage.

Motion as presented carried by roll call vote of eleven (Barnes, Meadows, Cates, Roberts, Taylor, Norris, Seman, Fant, Ballard, Kirven and Tripp) in favor and one absent (Dill).

Item (5) **Adjournment**

Action: Vice-Chairman Meadows moved to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Regina G. McCaskill
Clerk to Council