



GREENVILLE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes
Special Called Meeting
July 26, 2022
5:02 p.m.

County Square - Council Chambers

Council Members

Mr. Willis Meadows, *Chairman, District 19*
Mr. Dan Tripp, *Vice-Chairman, District 28*
Mrs. Xanthene Norris, *Chairman Pro Tem, District 23*
Mr. Joe Dill, *District 17*
Mr. Mike Barnes, *District 18*
Mr. Stephen Shaw, *District 20*
Mr. Chris Harrison, *District 21*
Mr. Stan Tzouvelekas, *District 22*
Mrs. Liz Seman, *District 24*
Mr. Ennis Fant, Sr., *District 25*
Mr. Lynn Ballard, *District 26*
Mr. Butch Kirven, *District 27*

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

Council Members Absent

None

Staff Present

Joe Kernell, *County Administrator*
Mark Tollison, *County Attorney*
Chris Antley, *Assistant County Attorney*
John Hansley, *Deputy County Administrator*
Regina McCaskill, *Clerk to Council*
Jessica Stone, *Deputy Clerk to Council*
Pam Gilliam, *Administrative Assistant*

Terrence Galloway, *Information Systems*
Shannon Herman, *Assistant County Administrator*
John Vandermosten, *Assistant County Administrator, Public Safety*
Bob Mihalic, *Governmental Affairs Officer*
Hesha Gamble, *Assistant County Administrator*

Others Present

Sheriff Hobart Lewis
Chief Deputy Marcus Davenport

Call to Order

Chairman Willis Meadows

Invocation

Councilor Butch Kirven

Pledge of Allegiance

Item (3)

Employee Compensation – Cost of Living Adjustment

Chairman Meadows stated the purpose of the meeting was to discuss a cost of living adjustment for employees. Recently, he was made aware that the premium pay approved for some employees was scheduled for next month. He spoke with Joe Kernell and John Hansley about the situation and was advised that all County employees would see a cost of living increases in their July 31 pay. Mr. Meadows asked Sheriff Lewis to speak on the issue.

Sheriff Lewis stated recruiting and retention was the biggest hurdle for the Sheriff's Office. On Saturday, July 23, he received an email indicating that eligible employees would only receive a 2.5% cost of living increase, as opposed to a 6% cost of living increase as well as a step increase. Once the County's finances closed, staff would take another look at the situation and see if additional monies were available. Sheriff Lewis stated that information certainly raised some alarms, as Council was not scheduled to meet again until August. He stated the proposed 6% cost of living increase would be for all County employees, not just employees of the Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff Lewis stated everyone was facing very difficult times. The price of food, housing, gas, etc., had increased drastically. The employees of Greenville County deserved to know how much their pay would increase in order to plan for their families. He stated that the Sheriff's Office was losing employees at a tremendous rate; in the past 60 days, 12 employees have relocated to different agencies. The starting salaries for officers with the South Carolina State Highway Patrol and SLED were \$6000 more than Greenville County. Sheriff Lewis stated the starting salary with the Greenville City Police Department was \$4000 more. County Council stepped up and gave law enforcement offices a significant pay increase approximately four (4) years ago; however, additional increases were needed to recruit and retain great quality employees.

Chairman Meadows asked if the proposed 6% cost of living raise would make Greenville County competitive with other agencies.

Sheriff Lewis stated it would keep the County in line with other agencies; but, the other municipalities would increase their starting pay to be competitive with Greenville County. Many agencies also provided hiring bonuses. He had spoken to John Vandermosten and was advised that SCDC employees had received a 13% raise. The Detention Center could not afford to lose any employees; it was already short-handed. Sheriff Lewis stated in addition to the 12 deputies who had resigned within the past 60 days, six (6) more had applied with other agencies.

Joe Kernell stated the proposed 6% cost of living raise would apply to all County employees. The Sheriff's Office was not alone in its struggle to recruit and retain good employees. Many County departments were short-handed. Administration was in the process of developing strategies to recruit and retain employees. Employees eligible for the premium pay were scheduled to receive a check on Wednesday, August 3, 2022. Surrounding municipalities were providing pay raises for employees. Spartanburg County approved a 5% pay increase for its employees and the City of Greenville approved a 4% pay increase with an additional increase of 3% scheduled for the end of 2022. Mr. Kernell stated Pickens County approved a 5% increase; and surrounding private sector entities were approving increases ranging from 4% to 10%. The proposed increase would put the starting salary for deputies at approximately \$48,000. That amount was very competitive with other agencies. The starting pay for detention officers would be around \$43,000 and the starting pay for paramedics would be approximately \$48,000. The total cost for the proposed increase was approximately \$6 million. That figure was based on 100% employment; the County was not at 100% employment so the figure would be a bit less. Mr. Kernell stated the County's revenues were very good for FY2022 and were anticipated to remain good for FY2023.

Chairman Meadows asked Mr. Kernell to address the County's "step plan."

Mr. Kernell stated employees with Emergency Medical Services (EMS), the Detention Center and the Sheriff's Office were affected by the plan. The plan had been in effect for approximately three (3) years. With the plan, an individual would begin employment at a certain level. After the first year of employment, that individual would receive a "step" increase in pay, which would set their salary higher than the starting pay for their particular position. Mr. Kernell stated the plan eliminated compaction and was working well.

Councilor Kirven stated he felt his colleagues would agree that if the County wanted its employees to set the standard for other entities, there would have to be more foresight regarding compensation. It was concerning to make changes in the middle of the budget cycle. Mr. Kirven stated the County's current budget indicated \$201 million for salaries; that amount included compensation and benefits. The proposed \$6 million was a small percentage of that number. He asked how the County planned to cover that cost. Mr. Kirven asked Mr. Kernell to comment on how the County had handled cost of living increases in past years. County Council had recognized the financial impact of the economy on individual families and adjustments had been made over the years to keep pace with the economy. Under the current economic impact, those steps had fallen short; corrective action was needed. Greenville County wanted to be a leader in regards to compensation and benefits, not continuously trying to catch up with the market and forcing its employees to seek employment elsewhere.

Mr. Kernell stated the County had a lot of vacant positions, which had resulted in quite a bit of overtime. Once those positions were filled, the amount paid for overtime would decrease. The vacant positions also allowed the County to save money, those funds would be used to offset some of the cost of the proposed increase. In regards to cost of living adjustments and the inflation the country was experiencing, it was imperative to "stay ahead of it", if possible. The two-year budget cycle worked great, except when situations like the current economic status occurred. Mr. Kernell stated Council had been reactive in the past when the market dictated it; they had responded appropriately, especially in terms of public safety.

Councilor Tripp requested verification that the proposed 6% cost of living adjustment would apply to all County employees.

Mr. Kernell confirmed it would as there were issues with recruiting and retention.

Councilor Tzouvelekas asked when eligible employees would receive the premium pay.

Mr. Kernell stated those funds would be directly deposited on Wednesday, August 3, 2022.

Councilor Seman inquired about the salary survey that was completed a few years ago. She also inquired about the percentage of Greenville County employees sitting at the midpoint of their respective pay band and if there were any long-term plans to move those individuals up. Ms. Seman asked about the County's current employee count and if the proposed 6% increase included County Council. She added that she felt Council Members should not be included.

Mr. Kernell stated the current plan put all positions at a certain level, relative to each position within the organization. He did not have the information at hand regarding the percentage of employees sitting at the mid-point of their respective pay band. Those figures would be affected by the cost of living adjustment. Mr. Kernell stated salary surveys were initially very good; however, the current market provided many challenges. It was Council's prerogative to remove itself from the 6% increase; it would more than likely involve amending an ordinance regarding Council salaries.

Councilor Ballard stated the County's employee base was currently not at 100%. Sheriff Lewis had indicated he had 20 vacancies with the Sheriff's Office and the Detention Center was down a number of employees. Mr. Ballard inquired about the County's employee base.

Mr. Kernell stated that figure was a “moving number.” Currently, the Sheriff’s Office had approximately 20 -30 vacancies, EMS had in excess of 30, the Detention Center had approximately 70, Animal Care had 14 and Public Works had approximately 18-20. Other County departments were experiencing vacancies as well. Mr. Kernell stated some departments were aggressively recruiting new employees. Internal movement among departments was also occurring. The County employed approximately 2600 employees, including some permanent part-time positions. Greenville County was a large employer and was one of the top 10 employers in the Upstate. The County’s actions in regards to employment influenced the job market in the area, to a degree.

Action: Councilor Barnes moved to authorize an additional cost of living adjustment increase of 3.5% in addition to the scheduled 2.5% for all County employees effective July 27, 2022. The proposed increase would mean a total cost of living adjustment increase of 6% for County employees.

Councilor Seman stated she would like to exempt Council Members from receiving the increase.

Vice-Chairman Tripp asked Mr. Tollison if there was some statutory limitation prohibiting Council from voting to give themselves a pay raise.

Mr. Tollison stated he was not aware of any such limitation. The current system addressed Council pay raises

Action: Councilor Seman moved to remove County Council Members from receiving the proposed 6% cost of living adjustment.

Motion to amend carried by a unanimous roll call vote.

Councilor Dill asked how much would the total cost be if Council approved a 7% increase.

Mr. Kernell stated a 7% increase would raise the total cost by \$1.6 million.

Action: Councilor Dill moved to amend the motion to raise the additional cost of living adjustment to a total of 7% for all County employees as opposed to 6%.

Vice-Chairman Tripp stated he was opposed to raising the total to 7%. Council had to draw the line somewhere. Other entities would follow suit.

Councilor Kirven stated he agreed with Mr. Tripp. Greenville County was fortunate to be in a position to help employees, but needed to keep things in perspective.

Chairman Meadows stated he had spoken to Sheriff Lewis and they agreed that the 6% increase would put the County in good shape to compete with other agencies, counties, etc.

Councilor Tzouvelekas suggested an annual review of first responders salaries to ensure there was no need to play catch up.

Mr. Kernell stated salaries were always addressed during budget review. There was no way to predict inflation. The County was always attempting to identify trends before they occurred; it was an ongoing process. Mr. Kernell stated inflation impacted much more than salaries.

Chairman Meadows stated a few years ago, Council had discussed starting the budget process in October. Council should pass the proposed item and be prepared start the budget process in October for upcoming years.

Councilor Fant stated Council had to be fiscally responsible. He could not support the proposed 7% increase.

Councilor Dill stated the intent of his amendment was to give a “reality check” and for Council discuss the situation. None of the surrounding counties were in a two-year budget cycle. Inflation was affecting the citizens of Greenville County.

Councilor Dill withdrew his amendment.

Councilor Shaw asked if the premium pay was taxable. He asked if Council was expected to vote on a step plan for employees.

Mr. Kernell stated the premium pay would be taxed, by law. The step plan was already in place for eligible employees (Sheriff’s Office, Detention Center and Emergency Medical Services). Mr. Kernell stated the 6% cost of living adjustment would be reflected on employees July 29 check.

Motion as amended carried by a unanimous roll call vote.

Item (4) Adjournment

Action: Councilor Seman moved to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Regina G. McCaskill
Clerk to Council