

Aiken City Council MinutesWORK SESSION

February 11, 2019

Present: Mayor Osbon, Councilmembers Dewar, Diggs, Girardeau, Price, and Woltz.

Absent: Councilmember Gregory

Others Present: Stuart Bedenbaugh, Gary Smith, Sara Ridout, Kim Abney, Mike Przybylowicz, John Poole, Ryan Bland, Jessica Campbell, Lex Kirkland, Tim Coakley, Charles Barranco, Kymberley Wheat, Joy Lester, Tim O'Briant, Colin Demarest, of the Aiken Standard, and 3 citizens.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Osbon called the work session of February 11, 2019, to order at 4:05 P.M. Mayor Osbon stated for Council discussion is setting of the agenda and goals for FY 2019-20.

DOWNTOWN INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTUpdate

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated before going to the agenda setting portion of the work session, Councilman Dewar asked if he would give a brief update about the downtown infrastructure project, Phase 1B. He said Phase 1B is part of the downtown infrastructure improvements. He said Phase 1A was begun over a year ago. The first phase of the project was on Newberry Street from The Alley to Park Avenue. The first part of Phase 1B started at the corner of Park and Newberry. We wanted to do work on Park down to Laurens while Betsy's construction was ongoing so there would not be interference of taking up parts of the road twice. The next part of the project for which he would give some detail is Newberry from The Alley to Richland as well as Hayne Avenue from Pendleton to Laurens. That project has tested all of our patience. He said the City engaged the services of a contractor to do the work as well as a third party firm to do the construction and project management for us. Our staff has been working with the contractor and the project manager. He noted that Mike Przybylowicz and John Poole from Engineering have borne the brunt of this. The project has not gone to our level of expectation, especially on the area of Hayne from Pendleton to Laurens. That project has taken a lot of time. The project was initially scheduled to be completed by the end of November, 2018. We granted them an extension to the end of December. However, it is now the middle of February and the project, while substantially complete is not fully completed. The contractor is not on the job any more at our request. Our staff has gone in and has been "picking up the pieces." This project was funded both with city funds and also a grant from the Rural Infrastructure Agency (RIA) for \$500,000. It is a reimbursable grant. We have confirmed with RIA that the City will be able to get the \$500,000. However, there is work left to do. It has posed quite a bit of inconvenience to the businesses in the area as well as the patrons of those businesses and the citizens traveling through downtown. It has been a tremendous force of frustration. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he had been working with staff and the City Attorney to pursue all available options at this point. He noted that the project included water, sanitary sewer and storm water. It was a major project. He pointed out that the infrastructure in the downtown is old, but the timeline for the project has not been acceptable, and we are working to try to rectify that. It was pointed out that there was an engineering inspector which had been contracted through a third party firm. He pointed out that staff had had a lot of frustration on that level as well as with construction.

There was a question as to how many times Hayne had been dug up. Mr. Przybylowicz stated the digging up of the infrastructure had been four times and the curbing had been five times. He said some of the problem was that they had allowed the contractor to work evenings. While they worked evenings they were only supposed to do specific tasks on the job. However, in the morning when staff got there that job or task was covered up. Staff needed to inspect what they covered up. Some of what they had to do was to

remove some of the work that they did the night before so staff could see the installation and verify the work. Some of the issue was unforeseen and unknown infrastructure that was done in the 20's that was not picked up with ground penetration radar or some of the electronics used for pipe location because they were under layers of concrete.

There was a question as to how much work is left to do and how long it will take to finish. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the project is substantially complete. Mr. Przybylowicz stated on Hayne Avenue, there will probably be another week of work before the street will be paved. When the valves are installed they will turn off the old system and the new system will be turned on. Once that is done staff can verify leaks and pressure tests. Then we will pave the street. He said he felt they are at the point where they will not have to dig up any more. He complimented the city employees for going in and starting work on the project. Mr. Przybylowicz stated the Newberry Street project should be completed this week. They will be installing pavers all the way to The Alley and then marking the parking spaces.

There was a question as to what the cost overrun may be for the project. Mr. Przybylowicz stated at this point the project is not in overrun. The City is withholding money from the contractor on the project while looking at all options as to how to address the issues.

Council then discussed the projects and the issues. There was a question regarding whether background information had been checked in selecting the contractors for the project. Mr. Przybylowicz stated they had investigated past performance of the contractor and had received favorable response. He pointed out there were only two contractors that bid on the project. One bidder did not comply with all the requirements.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated that staff will be looking at our contract template document which has been in place for a number of years. Staff may also be asking Council for approval of some modifications to our procurement process.

There was a question as to whether the city had an engineer on the job every day. Mr. Przybylowicz stated staff was relying on the third party contractor for compaction testing and inspections which was a weekly report. Between that, staff from the Engineering and Utilities Department was stopping by and checking periodically due to the amount of work going on with other projects.

Council then discussed and expressed concern regarding the impact and inconvenience expressed by citizens and small businesses in the area of the projects and the length of time taking for the projects. Councilwoman Price stated she would rather get a team that we may have to pay more than to impact and inconvenience the volume of customer service for a long time to complete the project. It was pointed out that the work did impact a number of small businesses in the project area. The businesses were kept informed, but neither the work nor the schedule met their expectations.

Mr. Przybylowicz pointed out that the project will give us new water lines, and it will loop the system so if there is an issue and a need to turn service off, we will be able to limit the amount of businesses or residences that will be affected. There are new lines, new valves and new services so there should be fewer problems with water quality, with the sewer lines and the stormwater lines as a result of the projects.

Councilwoman Price also pointed out that if the Engineering Department needed additional staff support and resources to do their work to be sure we get the jobs done right the first time, that they need to let Council know.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated this can be discussed during the budget process. He pointed out that some years ago, we had that capacity on staff, but over the years we have gone more to contracting out to third parties. He said that is something for Council's consideration in the budget process as to whether the money we have allocated for the professional services would be better to be spent in-house or contract out depending on the specialty. He said there are advantages to having more staff in house.

Councilman Dewar asked if we are through with the projects downtown. Mr. Przybylowicz stated we are not through. He said there is a project they hoped to start soon which is a water valve maintenance project. The project would be cleaning the valves, operating them, maintaining them, and doing things to ensure that they work properly. The project would be 14 to 17 days to do the 399 valves downtown. It is a less invasive project as they would not be digging up sections of the road. It would be updating our GIS system so we have the proper location of the valves. He noted even though the water valve project is not an invasive project, if a valve is broken there would be an emergency project to get the valve repaired.

Council continued to discuss the projects and expressed concern that March is a time when we have a lot of guests coming for the horse races. There is the Masters in April. They hoped that the projects would not interfere with guests visiting our area. Mr. Przybylowicz stated the water valve project needs to be done, but if needed the project could be pushed back.

Councilman Girardeau pointed out that the response is no different than what we experienced down Park Avenue when all the parkways and the pavement were dug up for the porous asphalt. He noted that people will be inconvenienced, and it will go on for some time. He pointed out that it won't be easy. It was also pointed out that we need to start the transportation projects with University Parkway, Hitchcock Parkway and others.

It was pointed out that there will need to be a lot of communication with businesses and citizens to keep them informed of what is happening.

#### GOALS FY 2019-20

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the purpose of the meeting is an agenda setting meeting. He said he wanted to devote the entire work session to Council goal setting. He said he would like Council to begin looking ahead to FY 2019-20. He said staff has begun preparing their budgets for the next year, and we had a day-long staff retreat in early-December to discuss departmental goals and needs. He said we will begin having budget work sessions with Council in about a month and will have as many work sessions as Council needs to get passage of a budget by July 1.

As things stand now in the City organization, we are almost fully staffed with permanent directors in upper management. We still have to fill the Engineering and Utilities Director and once the future of Solid Waste is determined after the results of our RFP are issued, we will resolve the interim director status of that department.

The purpose of this work session is to share with Council a number of issues that staff has identified and get a sense of Council where to prioritize them. Council feedback will be invaluable input as departments prepare a draft budget to submit to the City Manager's Office at the end of February. We will begin budget work sessions in mid-March and continue them into April and May as we seek to pass a FY 2019-20 budget that maintains, and improves where needed, our service levels while keeping costs as low as possible. The budget will also serve as a blueprint for us as we begin thinking about where we want to be in the next 5, 10, 15 years and beyond.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated in addition to this meeting, he had considered bringing in a facilitator. He noted that there are multiple departments with their own unique missions. They have a number of issues to address and then cohesively as a city we need to try to make it a seamless package of where we want to go moving forward. He pointed out there will be things that will come up that we will have to address at the moment, but we want to try to stay focused on a core number of things and move forward with those items.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the purpose of this meeting is to talk about issues that have come up in discussion with individual Councilmembers, staff and citizens. It will help staff for Council to look at some of these issues and discuss them and give some direction as to how Council wants to proceed with the issues.

**Annexation Policy.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff has been working on the annexation policy. He noted that the water and sewer policy had been amended about 2 1/2 years ago and that had helped with the annexations. He noted a number of properties have been annexed over the last 2 1/2 years with that policy. Working with the realtors regarding the annexation policy has helped with new property owners being informed of the annexation policy. He pointed out there are a number of donut holes or enclaves in the city. He asked if Council wanted to address a policy to entice annexations. He asked if we need to look at other things such as the Zoning Ordinance for things that might encourage enclaves or donut holes, especially businesses, to annex. He noted that the water and sewer policy primarily affects residential components. He pointed out one of the things that hinders annexation from being more of an attractive option for property owners is the availability of sanitary sewer which is an expensive service.

He pointed out that in the 1990's we annexed an area in Aiken Estates with the promise that we would provide sanitary sewer to the area. However, at this time those residences do not have sewer service. He said that is one of the issues that staff is looking at to address.

Councilman Dewar noted that we are looking at 6,000 units. He said if it is a priority, we need to change something. He pointed out the water and sewer policy will get us a few annexations. He wondered if the city wanted to insist that the residents cannot use a well for water. Do we want to annex even if we can't give sanitary sewer service, but promise to give sewer service eventually. He wondered if Council wants to have some incentives for annexation. He said he understood years ago there was an incentive to pay two years of city property tax for the property to annex. He wondered if we want to have elections for annexation. He pointed out there is a group in Aiken Estates that want to annex, but some can't because they are not contiguous to the city. If there is an election, annexation of an area can be done with a certain percentage of the properties in the area. He pointed out the Municipal Association has a very good handbook on annexations with the rules for annexation. He noted that Council needs to decide how far they want to go to encourage annexation. He pointed out that donut holes must be a problem for Public Safety and for the garbage and yard debris pickup. He said he would like to encourage elections for annexations.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated that in the past for properties in our service area, but not in the city, we have not required them to sign annexation agreements. He felt from a staff perspective if we want to grow and if we have large areas of property or significant tracts wanting city services as they are being developed, it would be in our interest to require that the property annex once the property is contiguous.

It was discussed that with the annexation agreements that we have, we may be able to have an election to bring in certain areas of the city with the 75% rule for annexation of an area. It was pointed out that if there was a goal to annex 500 properties a year, the goal could be reached in about 12 years.

It was discussed that you have to entice people to come into the city with incentives. It was pointed out that for businesses there are requirements in the city, such as sign requirements, that would discourage a business from annexing to the city as well as having to get a business license, building code restrictions, etc. It would be to the city's advantage to give incentives to annex as in the long run the city will get property taxes from the area. It was noted that if there is a good plan, that does not cost them anything, and the city will provide benefits and there are incentives, probably a lot of people would annex. Presently the city is not doing anything to encourage annexation. It was felt that there needs to be incentives to encourage annexation.

It was suggested that there be a sub-committee consisting of city and county residents to suggest incentives to encourage annexations to the city.

**Economic Development.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated we do have an incentive ordinance that was passed by Council. He noted that staff is doing some information tweaking before we bring back our first incentive request. He noted the city has received another incentive application from the business that is opening at the corner of Park and

Newberry. He pointed out that the Chamber of Commerce brings this up in terms of our livability and amenities. He said this is a group thing both with what we do in terms of marketing the city, and with what Tim O'Briant is working on in terms of business development. In answer to a question as to how the city's business incentive program works, Mr. Bedenbaugh stated we have a process. It is advertised on the city's home page of the website and is the first thing you see on our website. It was publicized when the ordinance was first passed by Council. He pointed out putting the information in the newsletter that goes with the water bill should probably be done several times a year. Businesses reach out to Mr. O'Briant. He pointed out that we have more information on how enterprise zones work with regulations. Some people have contacted us about the enterprise zones. Mr. Bedenbaugh noted that the city has about \$150,000 in the Economic Development budget.

Mr. O'Briant pointed out that the city's incentives are insignificant. They are a tool that we can use, but they are the smallest part of what he has been able to do, specifically with Betsy's. He said he got her a very good incentive from the State of South Carolina on income tax. She had a choice of working with us on our local ordinance for our incentives. He said he had also showed her what the state would do which was much more lucrative. He said in a sense the City of Aiken was an agent to help that business. The incentives that the City of Aiken passed are some reductions and rebates. With our incentives Betsy's would probably net about \$10,000 over five years. He noted that the new application will not be requiring new water and sewer lines. They will have inspection fees and business license so the fees will not be much that we charge. He said, however, there is a wide array of things, including the Opportunity Zones. There are state direct grants. There are income tax job credits, etc. that we are working on to help businesses. He said he had met with attorneys from Pope Flynn and is discussing other things we can do incentivize businesses. He said he wants to find all manner of ways for incentives, including the city's small incentives to help businesses. He said a lot involves putting people together with other opportunities.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated as opportunities are presented with the enterprise zones and other available property, Council will be faced with requests for incentives and a potential Tax Increment Finance District. He felt that will be inevitable as people look to do infill projects. He pointed out the old hospital property and the future of that property is in the hands of Aiken County at this time as to whom they want to sell the property. He said as the old hospital and other development opportunities present themselves, he felt staff and Council will be faced with potential multi-county business park options or a Tax Increment Financing District which involves other levels of government beside the city.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff will be budgeting money for economic development, and that will be discussed in the budget work session.

Mr. Woltz noted that economic development is probably the most important thing facing the city now. It is not to be lightly looked at. He said we need to budget sufficient funds. He pointed out that the things Mr. O'Briant mentioned and is doing is something that we need to grow. He said anyone needs to be able to come to the City Manager's Office and get this information. He felt we also need someone out marketing this. He felt this is probably the most important thing on our calendar.

Councilwoman Price stated she shared the same sentiments as Councilman Woltz. She pointed out marketing is key. She pointed out there is a guy at Fort Gordon at the Cyber Center who is trying to bring people here. She wondered if the city has a package to give to those people who are recruiting people to try to draw people to our area.

Mr. O'Briant stated if we had something like the multi-county park options we can take a portion of the proceeds and we can fund future development. He said we are building that into our planning, and when we get some of these things off the ground that will provide some level of funding. It was pointed out that we have to work together to encourage new development.

Mr. Bedenbaugh pointed out that an example is what the city did at the corner of Rutland Drive and SC 19, at Krispy Kreme on Whiskey Road, and also where Panera is located.

We did development agreements in those cases of about \$100,000 each. We worked with the developer where they paid some of the cost and the city paid some cost. He said that is something we can continue to do. He felt that is important on a small scale whether it is for a turn lane, extending the stormwater or a sewer line. It brings in revenue and business. He pointed out what the city did with Discount Tire, Harbor Freight, and Krispy Kreme. He said those projects probably would not have taken place at the time, if the City had not invested \$100,000 to run sewer and stormwater lines through the area.

Councilwoman Price stated she agreed with Mr. Bedenbaugh in terms of the City investing to grow business. She said that is how other communities are growing. If Aiken will not invest something, then the businesses will go to a community that will invest.

Councilman Girardeau stated we have been talking about incentives for commercial business, but it is more than that. It includes the residential aspect. He pointed out presently there are very few residential subdivisions being built within the city. He pointed out in the 1980's and 1990's we had residential development. Then some things were put into place in the 2000 era that put the brakes on subdivisions because of the general idea that we were growing too fast, unbridled growth, and sprawl kept being brought up. Residential development was stopped, and it has not come back. He said we did things that were incentives to the developers to build residential subdivisions and those incentives were taken away. It was noted that the city used to pay for a portion for curb and gutter in residential developments.

Councilman Dewar pointed out that the Aiken Standard publishes a newspaper for Fort Gordon. Advertising in the newspaper, sending articles on our school system, articles on the advantages of our community, etc. should be in the newspaper.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the city is partnering with the Chamber of Commerce in the Geo Fencing Project. Essentially if you are in the metro DC area, north of Virginia, District of Columbia, and portions of Maryland, and one types in cyber, Augusta, or certain key words, the City of Aiken comes up on the first page of the search. The mindset is that most people will not cycle through pages and pages, but will look at page 1 or 2 in terms of what the search engine terms populate. By working with the company that is doing the Geo Fencing, we are hoping to attract people to come to Aiken as a livability standpoint. He pointed out that early on cyber will be concentrated at Fort Gordon and where the State of Georgia has invested \$100 million along Reynolds Street and Augusta University complex. At some point, cyber could migrate how it did in Silicon Valley which started small and now includes a large area. Potentially that could happen in Aiken. Presently, Aiken is a residence because to get to downtown Augusta from Aiken is 20 to 25 minutes. To get to Fort Gordon is 35 minutes. If you live in parts of Columbia County it is the same distance. That is the mindset behind the Geo Fencing.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff could go back and look at the incentives the city had some years ago to spur residential development.

**Organization Improvement.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the goal for staff is to recruit very good staff, retain the ones we want to keep, and weed out the ones that don't meet our expectations through the probationary process. Once we get the staff, we need to train them in customer service and improved systems and practices. He noted that for about a year the city has been working with Aiken Tech on a supervisors' training component that is geared specifically to the City of Aiken. Department heads went through an abbreviated session of the training. A second class of potential supervisors is going on now. He pointed out that having good succession planning in place has been a goal. He pointed out that some long term employees in supervisory positions will be retiring over the next few years so we want to make sure we can adequately replace them. He noted one thing which has helped with staff retention has been Council's direction of maintaining the Compensation and Merit Plan which has been in effect for the second fiscal year. He pointed out the plan had more clearly defined the path forward for our sworn officers. He said we also developed a similar plan for other city employees besides Public Safety. He said there had been some concern about retention of our Public

Safety Officers. He said the plan had helped moral. He said that is a key component of our organization overall improvement.

**Defining Regions of Community.** Mr. Bedenbaugh said this goes back to what was discussed earlier as part of development and making Aiken an attractive place to do business and build is appropriate zoning. Another component is extending the Downtown Business District where appropriate. He noted that Mr. Bland, Planning Director, will be having some meetings about that in the coming months.

**Congestion and Infrastructure.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated another issue to address is to reduce congestion and address infrastructure along the Whiskey Road Corridor. A lot of this is tied to the Capital Projects Sales Tax. He said there have already been some matters before Council to try to address some of these issues. He said he understands the Infrastructure Bank will be opening up applications again with a due date of December 31, 2019. He said staff is working on an application to submit to the Infrastructure Bank for the Whiskey Road Congestion Relief Project in concert with Aiken County for their addressing stormwater. Between the two agencies we have devoted \$15 to \$16 million to address the stormwater and road issues. He said the Powderhouse Connector, Phase 1, which is extending Centennial as well as the lower end of Powderhouse from the Cracker Barrel to where Centennial would terminate is a goal of Council. He said we have draft MOU's with a number of property owners in the area. At some point Council will have to discuss the potential of money having to be expended to purchase some of the property.

Our Engineering staff has been working on increasing the sewer capacity at the Banks Mill lift station. We have a sense of the cost for the project and potential funding. Expanding the capacity of the lift station will enable development in the area as sewer service will be available. Property in the area for potential development is not inside the city, but we would want these properties inside the city when being developed. We will need to discuss with Council about developing appropriate fees as we look for help with construction of the road.

**Aiken Mall Redevelopment.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he felt the City had done what we can at this point for the redevelopment of the Aiken Mall. He said redevelopment of the Aiken Mall will be a key matter. He said he and the Mayor had recently discussed the Aiken Mall with the developer. They are working on several avenues. As more time goes by more and more citizens are asking questions about the development of the Mall. The developers are pursuing several options; it is a matter of getting one of the big box entities to agree to come on board. Then they believe they will see a lot of smaller developments come. It was pointed out that citizens are anxious to see something take place at the Mall. It was noted that the developers want to go forward as they have invested \$3 million in the Mall. Mr. Bedenbaugh pointed out that the city had given the developer the money as part of the multi-county business park as agreed upon.

**Downtown.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated we are trying to improve our walkability and appearance of the downtown. SCDOT does have a giveback program where if a community would like to get state roads back, they will provide funding for 20 years of maintenance to the roads. The City of Aiken submitted a request to DOT for the City to take back Park Avenue from Williamsburg Street to Laurens Street to do some streetscaping and improvements similar to Newberry Street between Richland and Park Avenue. We envision some sort of beautification along Park Avenue with the potential giveback money as well as our Road Maintenance Fee. He said staff had checked with DOT to get a status. He said he understands they have had about 90 requests around the state for street givebacks, and so they are going through how they are going to proceed. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the city is collecting approximately \$500,000 a year from the Road Maintenance Fee. We have used that money to purchase a piece of equipment that will help us with pavement preservation. The equipment should be delivered soon. This equipment will enable us to do some improvements on existing city-maintained streets. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the way the Road Maintenance ordinance is written, the funds can be used for maintenance of existing city-maintained roads and construction of new city roads. He said that gives us a source of funds as we look to make some modest street improvements around the city. The funding could be combined with future Capital

Projects Sales Tax receipts for some of the road projects that we have been contemplating.

In response to a question regarding contracts for the next phase of the parkways, Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the contract had not been let yet. He noted that Council had dedicated \$800,000 to that. A meeting has been set for this week with the consultant and city stormwater staff. We have the approval from DHEC for the reduction of the swales. For the parkways that were part of the green infrastructure project down Park Avenue to the Railroad Depot, we received permission from DHEC to reduce the impact of the swales and the money that we borrowed from CPST will be used to do that work so it will have a similar effect as to what we see in the park in front of the Municipal Building. As part of the improvements there will be additional lights.

Councilwoman Price asked about marketing Richland Avenue from downtown to the bypass as far as beautification. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he has had comments from Councilmembers and from taxpayers about an appearance similar to what North Augusta has along Highway 1. He said our quote for the work was stark. He said they were working to get the cost more manageable.

**Historic Markers.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated one of the things that the Parkway Task Force and others have been working on are points of interest or historic markers in the downtown sidewalks. He said this kind of goes back to what Council heard about a year ago where a business wanted to pay to have some foxes put in the downtown. He said the Parkway Task Force has been looking at this. The Design Review Board will ultimately get the request. The Mayor has mentioned that he would be interested in seeing historic markers commemorating people and places that are significant to Aiken's past. Mr. Bedenbaugh noted that the small parkway in the middle of Laurens Street between The Alley and the Administration and Finance Building will be upgraded with new benches and redoing the brick work. We will be maintaining the first gas lights. Those are the first gas lights that were put in the city. He pointed out the brick work in the parkway came from some of the first paved streets in the city that were paved with brick back in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. We will be reusing those items in that parkway. He noted that was well received by both the Historic Aiken Foundation and the Design Review Board. Mayor Osborn asked if that work could be done before the Masters. There was a question regarding the fountain at Park and Laurens. It was noted that it has not been working for some time. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff would check on the fountain. There was also a question about the fountain on Newberry Street. Councilman Woltz pointed out that when the fountain was installed there was a magnolia in the middle. The magnolia cracked. It was to be repaired, but it has not made it back. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he would get a status report on that. Mr. Coakley stated a subcommittee looked at the fountain. He said the cost came back as prohibitive.

**Gyles Park Lease.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he thought the agreement with Aiken Railway for lease of Gyles Park is close to being completed. He said the last thing we need is an additional level of liability insurance above what the city requires. We are trying to get an agreement with the railway on an appropriate policy within the city scope as well as meet their requirements. He said the city has been going back and forth with Aiken Railway and Norfolk Southern regarding a lease for Gyles Park for some time.

**Consolidation of City Facilities.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he thought we will be addressing the possible consolidation of city facilities. We have money in the Capital Projects Sales Tax for the project. We have several downtown assets and whether we consolidate into an existing city owned building or elsewhere is to be determined after discussion with Council, staff and others. There is a sense from Council that we should consolidate staff in one building. He said presently the city has four facilities downtown that could be part of some sort of consolidation whether that property is sold to help fund consolidation or we consolidate into existing city property. He pointed out that we have the Public Safety Building at 251 Laurens Street NW, a portion of that could be re-platted and potentially sold off. He felt the sense of Council is that we should keep some fire apparatus downtown and staffing there. He said he and Chief Barranco had been discussing the matter as they move to the new facility on Beaufort Street. He thought there would be some money through the end of the fiscal year to maintain staffing and



equipment on Laurens Street. He said he thought the sense of Council was to budget for that in the upcoming fiscal year. Whether the sub-station ultimately stays on Laurens Street or relocates elsewhere is to be determined as Capital Projects Sales Tax receipts come in and we have additional discussion about the future of that building.

There was a question that if the city did not keep a fire unit at the Laurens Street building, would the city lose our Class 2 rating. Chief Barranco stated he did not know that we would lose our rating if the sub-station was not on Laurens Street, but it would help improve our rating to have a sub-station at the Laurens Street building or downtown. He said the sub-station downtown could help improve the rating towards a Class 1 rating.

Councilman Dewar stated he thought the plan was to sell the Public Safety Building on Laurens Street and use the money to help with the cost to consolidate the rest of the downtown buildings.

**Richland Avenue West Overlay.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated we had talked a little bit about getting the Richland Avenue West overlay moving forward. The goal is to approve the appearance of it and have some control over the appearance of the buildings as businesses come and go. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff had been approached by some folks about some potential improvements or art work for Council to contemplate along the cement wall that the city cleaned across from the Kalmia Plaza. Some creative ideas were discussed with staff, and he would like for Council to see the ideas at a work session presentation. The goal is to regulate the color of the buildings on Richland Avenue. The proposed overlay would run from the bypass back to the downtown grid. The focus is on the corridor from Kalmia Plaza back to the downtown grid. He said that seems to be where the concern from the residents and Council is from.

**Generations Park Path Forward.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated we have talked about a number of things with Generations Park. He said we can talk about the phases and the next steps, but one thing we don't have is funding for a phase identified. We know that it will take substantial funding for a substantive phase. He noted that when he goes out to the park he sees people there in the middle of the day walking around. He pointed out that we have only developed about 40% of the property. We own about 115 acres, and we have developed about 40 acres. We have opportunities potentially on the front northern side of the property as well as in the rear for a number of things, such as additional recreational opportunities to other options such as residential or some sort of commercial use. He felt Council should discuss the options available. He noted last summer there was discussion about putting together a task force. He said at this point we could put together a task force as he has some names from some Councilmembers, but not all. He said he was waiting on some direction on how Council would like to proceed with Generations Park. As far as the budgeting process, he said he did not see any budgeting we could do to begin a substantial second phase at this point with available funds. He noted we know that it is an amenity upon which we want to build.

Mr. Bedenbaugh pointed out that one thing we want to do is to try to annex the property into the city. One way was tried, but that did not work. It is felt there could be another way in working with W. R. Grace. There is a possibility there that we could potentially budget for as we move into the budget work sessions and discuss some of the options that we could pursue. He pointed out that the W. R. Grace parcel is the one parcel that separates the city from being able to annex Generations Park through the railroad track side of the park.

Mayor Osbon stated he feels it is important to get Generations Park annexed to the city. He said he wanted to see the amenities and programming there, but we don't have a source of funding. He said that residential development was a point of conversation for some of the property. He said on 40 acres we could do some programming that would be an amenity to housing if we considered that. Housing would help support the amenities as well. He pointed out there is 11 acres on the front that might be a nice spot for commercial use. He said roof tops are what will drive development. He said he would like for Council to at least consider the residential and commercial possibilities. He said some development could be a possibility of moving other development towards I-20. It was pointed out that the sewer line is at the rear of Generations Park and runs parallel to

the railroad track. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated if Council would like to consider development of a portion of the property, it makes sense to do it in the rear because it would be less expensive to get sewer service to any development. Councilman Girardeau stated that would open up possibilities beyond measure to the expansion of the city and the tax base to get it all the way to US 1. It may cost a lot, but it would be worth it.

Councilwoman Price stated she did not understand, and this had puzzled her several decades, as to why we are reluctant to invest in the infrastructure from the city to the Interstate. It would give us the greatest yield. She knew that it would cost, but would be worth it to encourage development on the northside.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he had a meeting last week with Gary Pope of Pope Flynn and one of the things he had asked them to put together is an analysis as to how we could pay for some of the ambitious projects that we have, such as sewer access out US 1 to the Interstate 20, sewer access out to US 78 and East Pine Log Road Corridor, Powderhouse Connector, the multi-family park potential at the old hospital and other development including Hahn Village, and the enterprise zone area. They will tell us what our funding options are. We would like to come to Council with some of the opportunities in terms of funding, but we would want prioritization. He said he wants to bring this to Council with some ideas to get Council's input as he knows that Council is interested in growing the community in an intelligent way and one way is to provide the infrastructure. He said he felt that the Highway 1 and the East Pine Log Road-US 78 corridors could be very important to encourage growth.

Councilman Girardeau stated the amphitheater, soccer, commercial and residential could all be done and be a great impetus to Highway 1 development.

It was pointed out that some people are using Generations Park, but the park is not a big draw at this time. It was also noted that signage needs to be put up that dogs must be on a leash in the park.

There was a question as to when staff could come back with some ideas for funding. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he would be meeting with Pope Flynn in early March. Council could then have a discussion as part of the budget work session or as a standalone item before a Council meeting by the end of March. He pointed out this would require Council to make a decision as we will have to borrow money for the projects.

**Economic and Community Development Master Plan.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he felt we need a master plan. Some of this goes back to the property behind Cracker Barrel and where the Powderhouse extension would go. One of the things he wanted to do was have a facilitator help us think big, not to create a new strategic plan, but help us focus on a few things that we want to accomplish. He pointed out that we know where we want to go, but it is getting the items in a coherent, cohesive manner.

Councilwoman Price asked if we had a master plan visioning for what is considered the Central Business District in the downtown area. Mr. Bland responded that the closest thing is the Old Aiken Plan. She felt we need to bring someone in to do a CBD master plan. It was noted that was mentioned at the Joint meeting with the Planning Commission. Councilman Woltz noted that we need a plan for all of these matters. They need to be tied together as one picture, one vision to show all the items.

**Stormwater Policy.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated there had been some discussions about our stormwater policy. We have modified our variance procedure to make it less cumbersome. He said some of Council want to take a look at our existing stormwater plan and modify it so it is not so restrictive. To make it less restrictive will be an intensive process, and we may need to budget for that to come up with an ordinance that will be less restrictive as it will be an involved process. He said we will have to work with DHEC on a plan that meets their expectations. It was pointed out that the City of Aiken's stormwater policy is the most restrictive in the state other than Beaufort and it was felt that needs to be changed.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated we could budget for this in terms of how we can make our ordinance better. He also pointed out that with stormwater we need to look at moving ahead with some of the recommendations of the consultant we had. He asked the sense of Council in looking at how we calculate yard use. He noted that at the last meeting Council asked staff to look at the 800+ properties not being billed for stormwater service and how we can start collecting that. He pointed out that it will not require a Council ordinance, but the change can be implemented administratively. He said staff is putting together a policy that he will share with Council as we move into the budget process. We will bill those properties not currently being billed for stormwater service on the water bill twice a year. The bill will look like a water bill, but it will be for 6 months' worth of stormwater fees based on the type of property. It will be the minimum Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU) charge which is currently \$5.42 a month depending on the amount of pervious pavement. The bill could be more, but not less than \$5.42 a month. They will be twice a year. If they don't pay the bill, then we can put the unpaid balance on the tax bill. Then it will be treated similar to how we address the properties we have to clean up under the involuntary lot cleanup program. He said he will give Council, for their information, how staff will be billing those properties. He said that can be implemented soon per Council's directive at the last work session.

**Traffic and Safety Improvements.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated we want to look at the Hitchcock Parkway traffic and safety improvements. He said that matter will be before Council at the regular meeting for approval of a SCDOT resolution regarding utilities that may be in the right of way. Upon approval of the resolutions, SCDOT will be ready to move the project forward and construction will start in 2020. The work will be intersection and safety improvements.

Also, with University Parkway, Rick Toole, Engineer, was given approval to move forward on University Parkway. Mr. Toole stated they had been working diligently to move the project forward. By the end of March, the plans are to submit right of way plans to SCDOT for review. As soon as DOT reviews the plan, he will move forward with final plans.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the Infrastructure Bank had asked for some additional information on the project. He pointed out that the city believes they have money for phase I of the project provided we don't have to do the Richland Avenue W. intersection improvements. The Infrastructure Bank asked for some additional information because initially the scope called for the project to run from Richland Avenue to where University Parkway intersects with Robert M. Bell Parkway. The city has provided all the information they requested of us in December, but have not heard anything from them in terms of where this stands. The plan is to do the phase I of University Parkway project with money on hand between Infrastructure Bank, the City and County money.

**Solid Waste Collection.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated presently we have an RFP out for proposals. At the December work session Council asked that staff prepare an RFP and release it. It was put together and released last month with a due date of Friday, February 22, 2019. He said there is one thing he wants direction from Council. An RFP is part of a normal budget process. Council approves project X, and we issue an RFP. We receive the RFPs. Staff evaluates the RFPs and selects the appropriate vendor, and we move forward. This matter is something we were not expecting and for which we did not budget. RFPs will come in. Staff can do an evaluation of the RFPs and bring it to Council. However, in terms of a path forward and a recommendation, before staff comes to Council he would like some expectations of what Council is looking for from staff. He said as busy as Council is, we don't want to delegate the task to Council. He said staff can put together matrices showing what the proposals indicate. The ones that don't meet the minimum qualifications we can throw out and not review. He asked if that was the expectation of Council for receiving the RFPs and begin evaluation of them. Councilmembers indicated that is their expectation.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff will put together what all the vendors submit and the components of it. He said Council had been very clear that they wanted an apples to apples RFP bid on what existing city services are. Council asked that all RFPs be given to Council even those that don't meet the requirements. Councilmembers felt they

wanted to see all RFPs, even those not meeting requirements, just as information for them. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated in March staff will be coming to Council with the results of the RFPs. He said on February 22, 2019, he would let Council know how many RFPs were received. Councilman Woltz stated he hoped staff was also looking internally to see where we could cut costs.

Councilman Girardeau stated it is not so much cost. He pointed out that garbage is on time. It is the yard debris that becomes an issue that we keep having problems with. He said we need a solution. How to get yard debris pickup so everyone is on time most of the time. He said he understands there will be extenuating circumstances, but we have to get to a point where everybody is on time. There has to be a way.

**Infrastructure Work.** Mr. Bedenbaugh stated infrastructure work had been discussed earlier, and the planning for the next project. We talked a little bit about downtown, but as you know infrastructure city-wide is a constant process which we will never complete. He said staff will be planning for and will be bring to Council as part of the Major Capital what the projects are. We would welcome Council's direction in terms of where we need to focus and prioritize.

There was a question that if we don't want to do the water valve project downtown during the Masters would there be another place to work so we get something done. Mr. Przybylowicz stated the project would take 15 to 17 days, and they were hoping to start the first week in March. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the contractor knows there is a dead period that we have to leave for the Triple Crown through the Masters. That is part of their contract. Councilman Dewar stated he was asking if staff could identify another part of town that the contractor could work on the valve project that does not affect the downtown. Mr. Przybylowicz stated they would look at that. It was pointed out that they will not be here during the Masters if they are out of town contractors as there won't be a place to stay.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he appreciated the comments and direction from Council for things to work towards. He said he would keep these items in mind in working on a budget for Council. He said staff is working under the assumption that there will be 62 mills in the General Fund to work with for revenue. He pointed out that last year when Council discussed the water and sewer rates, Council went ahead and raised the sewer rates to cover several years of potential rates. He said he was happy to report that in terms of the revenue standpoint, the revenue from the increased sewer rates is coming in good. This is due to the 11% rate increase that Council did last year. He felt at this point that the sewer rate looks like a strong rate. He pointed out that Council had discussed doing several small rates so a potential 3% rate could be part of the discussion with Council. He said depending on where the Solid Waste process goes; those rates will be examined whether the service is through a third party or with the city. He also pointed out that the stormwater rates will need to be reviewed. He said staff will budget based on the same present rates. However, for example, the stormwater projects are based on what money is coming in. We could do additional stormwater projects with additional money. There is a backlog of stormwater projects. CPST is a good start, but the needs outweigh the revenues from CPST as well. He said he would expect to have work sessions starting in March and April. The goal is to have first reading of the budget at the May 13, 2019, meeting and second reading of the budget on June 10, 2019.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he had had a number of discussions with the Fixed Based Operator regarding the airport lease. He felt they are at the point that they are both comfortable with the draft airport lease. He said if the FBO is okay with the draft lease, he will send it to the State Aeronautics for review. After the Aeronautics review; it will be reviewed by the General Aviation Commission for a recommendation to Council. The FBO agreed to raise the fuel flow fee 2 cents effective January 1, 2019, and the rent for the T-hangars increased as well. That means the City will see some extra revenue from the fuel flow fee and from rental of the T-hangars.

Mayor Osbon stated he was interested in working with the FBO so we can have expansion at the airport. He said the airport is very important for economic development for the City and the County.

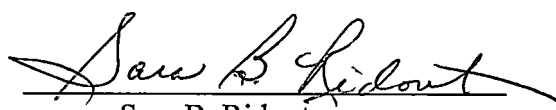
Mayor Osbon pointed out that for Building Inspections Council had added 1 1/2 positions for Code Enforcement. He said in the budget he would like to know where we are as far as how many more cases are coming in, and the results of the actions taken by Council regarding property code maintenance.

Mr. Bedenbaugh noted that the last page in the Work Session Agenda was a summary of the number of positions requested for the 2019-20 budget. He said the list shows, as the city grows and roles and responsibilities change, increase and shift, where some of the needs are from a staffing perspective. He said not all of the requested positions will be included in the proposed budget. The list shows Council the needs in staffing.

Councilman Dewar noted that tree management had not been discussed. He pointed out that the package that Council got from the consultant laid out a figure of about \$1 million a year if we wanted to properly provide tree management to the city. If we didn't, we would be in bad shape in a few years. It did identify trees that need to be removed and trees that need to be maintained. He wondered how much we can afford in the budget to provide tree management.

Mr. Coakley stated Council had funded a fully staffed tree crew that runs 40 hours a week. He said we have something that most cities don't have. He said we also have a 60 foot aerial truck to work with the trees, a highly qualified tree crew, and we have an arborist on staff. He said staff is constantly working on the tree list. He said the crew does not dedicate all 40 hours to the project, as they have other parkway work to do. The crew has a priority list that came out of the Bartlett survey, and they are working in that order. He said the crews communicate with Bartlett regularly. It was pointed out that historically the city plants two trees for each tree removed. It was noted that replacement is not fast enough according to Bartlett. They recommended to replace 8 trees for each tree removed. It was noted that we are on schedule for the treatment of the trees on South Boundary. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated that with the money we get from a donor we can pay about 40% of the estimated cost which is \$500,000. The donor said the Land Conservancy could pay the difference. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the undergrounding of utility lines on South Boundary is proceeding.

There being no further business, the work session ended at 6:25 p.m.

  
Sara B. Ridout  
City Clerk