

Aiken City Council Minutes

February 24, 2020

WORK SESSION

Present: Mayor Osbon, Councilmembers Brohl, Diggs, Girardeau, Gregory, and Woltz.

Absent: Councilmember Price

Others Present: Stuart Bedenbaugh, Gary Smith, Sara Ridout, Kim Abney, Tim O'Briant, Ryan Bland, Kym Wheat, Lex Kirkland, Brian Mills, Brian Key, Mike Przybylowicz, Jessica Campbell, Joy Lester, Angela Hales, Tracy Lott, Barbara Nelson, and Shiann Sivell of the Aiken Standard.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Osbon called the work session of February 24, 2020, to order at 4:35 P.M. He stated there were three items on the agenda for the work session – SPCA suggested ordinance changes, budget priorities and goals, and discussion of agenda items.

SPCA

Mayor Osbon stated the first item is a presentation by the SPCA for possible ordinance changes for consideration for the FY 2020-21 budget.

City Manager Stuart Bedenbaugh stated Barbara Nelson, of the SPCA, was present to bring forward several ordinance changes and items for consideration for the FY 2020-21 budget. He noted that Ms. Nelson had met with him and Chief Barranco a few weeks ago. Ms. Nelson suggested some changes in the current ordinance and agreement with the SPCA regarding animals. He pointed out that we will soon be working on our budget, and it was felt the suggestions and requests of Ms. Nelson should be presented to Council for their direction and information. He noted the items are the three items listed on the information provided by Ms. Nelson for the agenda packet.

Ms. Nelson stated in the suggested items she was trying to reduce the city cost and reduce the number of animals in the shelter. She pointed out that in 2005 the City became one of the first cities in South Carolina to institute the fertile dog fee. At that time there was a citizen committee, and they met with City Council. There was a lot of talk. At that time a lifetime fee was put into effect for fertile dogs. What it did was that if someone owned a fertile dog that was non-microchipped, then that person would pay for that animal contributing to the homeless population that would end up at the shelter. She pointed out that the SPCA and the City had contracted for 30 years. The strategy worked very well. There were 667 dogs that were entering the shelter in 2005. About ten years later there were only about 300 dogs and in 2018 there were 252 dogs entering the shelter. In 2005 the City was paying the SPCA \$80,000. Thirteen years later the City was paying the SPCA \$89,000 per year even though the city has grown. The number of dogs entering the SPCA which is the largest contributor to the cost of care for animals was cut by two-thirds. The strategy of requiring that people pay for a fertile animal has paid off. However, in 2019 the number went up to 355 dogs. She said what she would like to do is preempt the number of dogs that she sees rising by taking the lifetime registration fee and making it an annual fee for owing a fertile dog. That would create more of an incentive for them to spay or neuter their dogs. The cost to the City for dogs at the SPCA in 2019 jumped up to \$95,000. She pointed out the SPCA cost for medical care, labor, etc. is increasing. She said she was suggesting that the daily fee for care of animals go from the current \$12 per day to eventually \$20 per day over a two to three year period. She said she was trying to offset the increase in budget cost by reducing the admissions to the Shelter. She said she was asking that Council consider the fee increase in the budget for care of animals by the SPCA and an annual fee for fertile dogs.

Ms. Nelson stated the second item is consideration of a commercial breeder's business license. She pointed out that Aiken County is not attacking this problem. They are trying

to work with the high volume commercial breeders that are housing these animals in neglected conditions—non-vaccinated, non-dewormed—bad conditions. They are making a tradeoff between shutting down these commercial breeders and having to not euthanize healthy animals. She said she wished they would enact a commercial breeder's license, but they have not. She said what she sees happening is some of the commercial breeders will be moving into the City of Aiken, and she knows of at least one. She said she did not want to see the City of Aiken end up in a situation like the County. She did not want the City to have to call the SPCA and say they have 25 Pitbulls or 30 Chihuahuas somewhere and the SPCA have to take them to a facility that cannot handle that and it would mean that the SPCA would have to euthanize healthy animals. She said she was not suggesting that Council pass a commercial breeders license, but she was trying to avoid going to Council and having people yelling and screaming at Council that they don't want a commercial breeder's license.

She pointed out that historically what has happened is that when a place has tried to put a commercial breeder's license in place, the people who are selling the animals will show up and state they don't want to pay the fee and they can't afford it. She pointed out that the truth is that at times they are selling these animals for thousands of dollars. Those may be the good breeders who will not cause a problem; however, there are a lot of others selling animals at \$200 to \$400 and getting away with it. It would be good if we knew who they are ahead of time and be able to inspect the kennels. The strategy talked about is since the City already has a business license to include in the current business license wording that says if a person is commercially selling animals, then they are subject to the business license fee and inspection.

Council then discussed the suggestions made by Ms. Nelson. It was pointed out no breeding licenses were sold as the city does not require a commercial breeders license. It was also pointed out that the SPCA took in about 300 cats last year. Ms. Nelson pointed out that the number of cats and dogs taken in are about the same number. It was noted that it costs about \$150 per animal taken to the SPCA.

Ms. Nelson pointed out that about 60% to 70% of the population of dogs at the SPCA is either Pitbulls or Pitbull mixes. They are animals that are very hard to get people to adopt. She pointed out there is state legislation out there that she would like to see pass. It is that anyone who owns a fertile Pitbull pay \$500.

Ms. Nelson stated she has to recoup the medical and labor costs for the SPCA and will have to ask that the daily fee go up from \$12 to \$20 over a period of years. She pointed out that she would like to get the number of animals taken in from the City of Aiken reduced. She pointed out that of the animals on the adoption floor 60% of them came from the City of Aiken. It has been 30% to 40%, but the numbers have gone up. She said she was trying to suggest things to help the SPCA and the City of Aiken.

Councilwoman Brohl stated she felt having a commercial breeder's license fee would be a good thing as there should be a standard for breeders.

Councilman Woltz asked who would monitor and inspect the commercial breeders program. Ms. Nelson stated if the commercial breeders program is under the present business license, the inspection would come from the Animal Control Officer. She said we could create standards of care. She said she could work with whoever Council designates to work on the standard care for a kennel. She pointed out that the City already has a license for a kennel which is when a person owns six or more of any animals, and they have to pay \$25 for a kennel license and that is inspected. She noted somewhere there are some standards for inspections. Councilman Woltz asked how many kennel licenses the city had sold last year. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he could get that number.

There was a question as to whether anyone who is a breeder had gotten a license from the city. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated that no one had purchased a breeder's license. He stated there may be some breeders in the city, but we don't know who they are and no licenses have been purchased. It was noted that the County has no requirements or regulations for

breeders. Ms. Nelson stated she went to the County in 2006 and asked them to do a registration of fertile dogs and they rejected it.

Councilman Woltz stated he felt it would be helpful before Council considers any changes to the laws or present contract, for Council to see what the contract is. He said he would not want to amend something he has never seen.

Councilwoman Brohl stated she could understand that it would be better to have an annual license for the fertile animals. She asked how the City would go about enforcing the annual license for a fertile animal. Ms. Nelson stated that question came up in 2005 and there was a lot of resistance and questions about how it would be enforced. At that time it was stated that enforcement would be complaint driven, and it works. She pointed out that in 2005 to 2009 the City did a lot of marketing. There were pet fairs; we did microchipping, etc. We could go back and do some of those things again. She noted that the City has greater media resources now, as does the SPCA, so she would suggest that there be a marketing campaign and reemphasize to people that they do need to register their pet and the reasons why. Councilman Woltz expressed concern about some people not being able to afford a \$100 annual fee for their dog.

Ms. Nelson pointed out that people who have a spayed, neutered, and microchipped dog is free, and they don't pay an annual license. She said the concern is to get those people who are allowing their animals to be fertile to pay an annual fee. She pointed out also that a breeder should pay a fee. She pointed out that the reason for the \$100 fee for a fertile animal in 2005 was that the fee had to be more than the cost to spay and neuter so people would have the incentive to have the animal spayed or neutered for a lesser fee. She also pointed out that the City has a voucher system so if a person is low income; it only costs then \$15 to have their animal spayed or neutered.

Mayor Osbon stated Councilmembers probably have some questions regarding a business license, the number of breeders, etc. that they would like answered and would ask staff to provide answers. He said in reviewing the budget, Council would address the matters.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated a time could be set to provide answers to Council's questions, and he would let Ms. Nelson know when that time is set. He said he wanted Ms. Nelson to come to this work session to start the conversation regarding the issues.

BUDGET PRIORITIES AND GOALS

FY 2020-21

Mayor Osbon stated the next item on the work session agenda is discussion of the FY 2020-21 budget.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated now that we are in February, the departmental budget preparation for FY 2020-21 is well underway. Staff is at work drafting their departmental budgets which we will begin reviewing in the City Manager's Office later this week. He said as a budget draft is prepared for Council to discuss beginning in late-March, he would like to have a concentrated discussion on Council's expectations as we move through this important process. He pointed out that last year there were eight budget work sessions. He said he wanted to get an understanding from Council as to how often Council wants to meet. He said based on feedback and some issues last year, we will begin with our first budget work session with a review of the status of the revenue. There will also be an idea of how the expenditures versus revenues are looking for this year. He said our goal is to spend less money than we take in with revenues exceeding expenditures. He said staff will go into whatever level of detail that Council desires on the operations for the General Fund and on the enterprise funds. He said he wanted to give Council an initial look at where staff is in terms of where we have identified needs. Some of them are on an everyday basis, some one time expenditures, and some expenditures or items that we need some detailed discussion on.

He stated last Fall he met with staff and scheduled a one day retreat to discuss each department and where they believe some of their expenditures in the proposed budget

should be directed in fiscal budget 2021. He stated staff is in attendance at this work session for any questions City Council may have.

He stated we are operating under the assumption that there will not be a millage increase. The millage is 62 mills. This is not a year for reassessment. The next reassessment is due in 2021. They are performed every five years by the County.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated each department was asked to look at their needs within their department, including potential needs for employment, with the understanding that they cannot fund everything. He discussed the submissions from the departments at length. For Public Safety, he discussed replacement and update of toughbooks, accreditation, Next Gen 911, upgrade of service weapons, the downtown camera system which is in the process now, weapon vaults for utility vehicles to provide room for needed equipment which can be stored securely, and the SCETV radio tower. He pointed out that we are transitioning away from sedans for Public Safety vehicles and going to the Explorer type utility vehicle with a weapons vault. He stated regarding personnel this year, Council funded a new School Resource Officer and Crime Analyst after the 2019-20 budget passed. We will be looking to memorialize the two Public Safety Officers that will come off the traffic grant. The grant expires early next fiscal year. Having those officers has been a benefit so the City will absorb those costs. Public Safety will be wanting to fill some other jobs as well, such as three part time Driver Operators, Dispatcher, Investigator, and a part time Environmental Control Officer.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated Public Safety will have the items mentioned in their budget and Council can discuss as we bring forward a draft budget for Council's consideration.

Councilwoman Kay Brohl stated Public Safety always comes first. When looking at the budget, if the citizens and police force are not safe, then it doesn't matter what else there is. She stated if Public Safety needs something she is for it. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated that past councils have felt that way.

Councilwoman Gail Diggs asked how many vehicles would be replaced. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he would get that information for Council.

Councilwoman Andrea Gregory asked for the projected time frame for the SCETV tower to be moved. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated it will be in its new location by December, 2020. A lot of the cost will be borne by Aiken County. We have funds in this year's budget to pipe the stormwater ditch which currently separates the Public Safety Building from the triangular piece of property we purchased. That will enable a service road to be constructed to the antenna. The County is proceeding with getting the antenna moved even though they don't have a buyer identified for the Old Hospital property. The rationale is that whatever use is proposed for the Old Hospital property, having the antenna on the property is an impediment for any proposed use. What is proposed is to disassemble the present antenna on Richland Avenue and construct a self-supporting antenna that will be slightly smaller than the present antenna and will not have guy wires.

Councilman Woltz stated the budgets are straight forward and state what they need and how much money they need. He stated he would like to know what is needed, but also what can be saved. He stated he wants to know what can be saved because just adding to it will get expensive. He stated everyone should have a save side to their budget. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he asks staff to budget as if there is a reduction in their operations of 5%. He stated there can be more detailed discussions to show what is saved.

Councilman Woltz stated there is technology that can be used to help some of the departments. Councilwoman Gregory agreed that while the City transitions to new equipment or procedures, it would be good to show the savings. She stated that based on what she is seeing, there are already three different areas that if the City transitions to new technology or new approach, there are already savings that will be occurring.

Ms. Angela Hales pointed out some savings are intangible, that are not identified as money. She felt some of the savings would be intangible.

Mayor Osbon stated it would be good to see a list of positions that have been open for longer than a year and how the departments operate without the position or if it is a position we need or not. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff can take a look at that. He stated one thing he is seeing as far as personnel is that with a healthy economy we are no different than other public and private employers, the lower paying jobs are harder to fill. He stated he can describe those and potentially identify some savings. Councilwoman Diggs asked if he would eliminate those positions that have been open for a while. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated they could look at that. There are some where that might be possible. There are others, such as Engineering and Utilities, where they have difficulty filling some of the utility worker positions that are entry level. Those are the ones that fix the water leaks. There are employees to do it, but it may take longer to address a water leak. He stated Parks, Recreation and Tourism and Public Services have the same problem.

Councilwoman Brohl stated then you go over budget paying overtime and have to weigh out what is best. Councilman Woltz stated it was not just about personnel. There are a lot of other things that technology now replaces. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated as you automate you need less personnel. He stated we can present a list of things where savings can be identified, both personnel and non-personnel.

Engineering and Utilities are key components for economic development which is something Council is very keen on. Engineering and Utilities is a department that helps drive economic development because having infrastructure, new or upgraded, is critical. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he felt Mr. Przybylowicz had done a good job coming up with potential budget priorities that address some of what Council has expressed interest in. Mr. Bedenbaugh discussed the east side sanitary sewer improvements for expansion in the Deodar and East Pine Log Road area, exit 22 and Industrial Park Highway 1 north sewer extension for possible growth, exit 22 and Industrial park Highway 1 parallel line improvements, Banks Mill lift station which will dramatically increase the capacity for the area behind the Cracker Barrel for future development, programming and technology using GIS to locate infrastructure, the stormwater ordinance and fee needs to be reviewed, Shaw's Creek water plant upgrades and financing of the project, and elevated water tanks. Engineering and Utilities Director Mike Przybylowicz went into detail regarding the elevated water tanks. He pointed out that with opening up areas for development on the east side elevated water tanks may be needed in some areas to be able to provide water for future development. Councilwoman Gregory asked the water capacity of the area. Mr. Przybylowicz stated they are good for about 400 units, depending on what it is. If they keep it residential, we can probably go a little more, but if it is mixed-use or commercial, we could go to 500 and still be okay. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the kind of development being proposed in that area will be done in phases over many years. The City has the ability to service the first several phases. Councilwoman Gregory asked in doing that, what the capacity would go to. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated they could match the sewer capacity.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the goals for Engineering and Utilities is to increase personnel on the streets, sewer, and water crews. He noted that the Utilities is an enterprise fund driven by revenue from the water and sewer rates. They have done a very good job getting the dirt roads reestablished.

Councilwoman Gregory asked regarding the water and sewer rates, if the City hit the mark on the rates or missed it. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the water rate study that was done several years ago recommended a rate increase. Council moved ahead, for example, on the sewer rates. The County will be sending a memo for the Public Service Authority asking for a rate increase for the sewer. Council has been very clear in the past that they do not want the City to absorb those rates. We need to pass them on. Once we receive the letter, we will share it with Council during the budget discussions. Councilwoman Gregory stated we definitely need to pass the increase on and notify the residents the reason why the rates increased.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated when the City pursues the water plant improvements, that will necessitate a rate increase. One suggestion we had talked about internally is to have a separate line item on the water bill to show that the fee is to pay for borrowing funds for the water plant improvements or it could be rolled into the line item on the water rate.

The increase could be between \$1.50 to \$3.00 per month. Councilwoman Gregory stated the increases are based on absorption for County increases and potential projects. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the sewer is. Councilwoman Gregory asked if the rate increase that was approved was spot on or short. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated they are spot on to date, but we need to continue the rate increases recommended over several years. The reason they recommended doing the rate increase over multiple years is that for many years the City forwent implementing a rate increase. As inflation and the cost of operations increase, we need to make up for the lack of rate increases in the past. Council, three years ago, listened to the water rate study, and have been implementing the rate increases. That has helped in putting money in system depreciation, and the average residential user has not seen a major increase in their water rate.

Councilman Woltz stated he has had several people come to him in the past couple of months telling him they would love to annex into the City, but they do not want to pay the hookup fee for the sewer tap when the sewer line is already there. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated there was an annexation program in the mid-1990s. He stated staff can look at some incentives to encourage people to annex. He stated that would be a good baseline to start, and we could look at what other jurisdictions have done and maybe incentivize people coming in. Councilman Woltz stated annexation would clean up some of the donut holes and would help the rates.

Mr. Bedenbaugh moved on to Parks, Recreation and Tourism. He stated we made a presentation today to the Municipal Association for the Municipal Achievement Award. We selected the construction and programming we do at the Price Senior and Youth Center. The criteria for the MASC Award is a project that is easily replicable. We felt that it was because we used a variety of funds that are readily available to any jurisdiction that has the will to push for some of the funds--applying for grants, 1% capital projects sales tax and allocating General Fund money. The programming cuts across multi-generational lines—programming for seniors and programming for young people. We had a senior and a young person to give a presentation for the award. He said we should hear in a few days whether or not we received the award.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated a lot of the Parks, Recreation & Tourism CPST IV projects are on-going and on schedule, or will be put on schedule over the next few years. He stated with the Hospitality Tax and Accommodations Tax, PRT has several additional sources of funds they have access to which help with some of the capital projects and depreciation money. He stated Council had been very clear that the City needs to fund depreciation as much as we can while keeping the overall expenditures low within the confines of the 62 mills. Councilwoman Gregory stated that goes for everything. We should really focus on depreciation. She stated with IT it is an ever changing replacement approach and depreciation should be coming out for all things. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated we depreciate large servers in IT, but stopped depreciating desk top and lap top computers about ten years ago. Councilwoman Gregory asked why that was stopped ten years ago when we know for a fact that technology is an ever revolving door of replacement. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated back then we were in the great recession. Assistant City Manager Kim Abney stated the capitalization threshold is \$5,000. A desk top would not meet that criteria. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated PRT has also worked on a lot of grant opportunities. PRT Director Jessica Campbell explained some of the grants for City Council.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated that PRT does a lot that adds to the quality of life for the community. Some of the facilities we talked about last time are a combination of age, but the City needs to be vigilant about upkeep and maintenance of those facilities. Councilwoman Gregory stated she sees continued preventative maintenance on equipment, but cleanliness is a key. We need to have the staff to maintain the facilities that are in use day in and day out. That is something that needs to be in the budget for our current facilities. There is no reason why anyone should walk into a City facility, and it be a disgusting experience. She pointed out the facilities are being used a lot with all the programs going on. There was a question as to how often the bathrooms are checked. Ms. Campbell, Director of PRT, stated all the bathrooms are cleaned with the same standards at all of the facilities. She pointed out that we don't have maintenance around the clock. Councilman Woltz asked how many people PRT has on staff as compared to

three years ago. Ms. Campbell stated staff did increase across the board with the new facility. She stated they have 17 Maintenance Workers. Councilman Woltz stated his point is we have added a lot on PRT, but have not added equipment and staff. Employees are being stretched a lot further, and that is a problem that needs to be addressed. Ms. Campbell stated they have vacancies that are currently being subsidized with temp workers. Human Resources Manager Tracy Lott stated they currently have three openings. Councilman Woltz stated he knows that PRT has not been given the personnel to do the job. We are complaining about the job not being done, but we don't have the personnel to do it, and we can't hire workers. Councilman Woltz stated it is a two sided problem, and it needs to be fixed. Councilwoman Gregory stated that is why she was bringing the problem up for budget, because if budget is an issue Council needs to know. She stated if people are just not applying for the job, that's one problem. If it is because there is no funding for people to do the job, that is another problem. Council needs to know what the problem is. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the problem is a combination. The workers are entry level, and make a wage of about \$11.33 per hour for starters. Those are the positions that we find hard to fill. He said as part of the budget, staff plans to find some solutions to bring to Council to try to help. Councilman Woltz stated it may be better to hire one person at a higher rate to get the job done than to hire two people at \$11.33 per hour. Councilwoman Gregory stated she already has a concern about Smith-Hazel, and we have not opened the doors yet. Her concern is that the Weeks Center will go days without cleaning the bathroom, so she feels the same will happen to Smith-Hazel. She said she had been to the Weeks Center on consecutive days and the bathroom had not been cleaned. Council discussed the concerns of cleaning and upkeep of the present facilities at length. Councilwoman Gregory stated we have to do something about the situation. There was a question as to how many people are assigned to clean the facilities at the Weeks Center and at Smith-Hazel. Ms. Campbell stated that Smith-Hazel Center does not have a full time Maintenance Worker on site. A crew has to be sent there. The Price Center does have a full time Maintenance Worker on site. At the Weeks Center there is a crew of 5, but they do the Tennis Center, the grounds, and Carolina Bay. They do not have someone checking the bathrooms every 30 minutes. Councilwoman Gregory stated she had mentioned this because we need to address this problem of cleanliness of the buildings. She asked if the problem is a budget issue or a personnel issue.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated that PRT is looking to become accredited through the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies. Ms. Campbell is working on this project which will require an update of the Master Plan. Funding will be requested in the budget for updating the Master Plan. The project will be about a two year project.

Mr. Bedenbaugh discussed the Public Service Department. He discussed solid waste, roll carts, yard trash, building and grounds, Hopelands hydrology, and encouraging pride.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the new roll cart deliveries had been ongoing. They started the week of February 17. Mr. Kirkland stated they were over half way done with the delivery of the carts.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the yard trash ordinance had been adopted by Council. This was a goal of the Public Services Department. The department will be implementing the ordinance and educating the citizens of the yard trash regulations.

Buildings and Grounds has been working on clearing and cleaning up of parkways along Richland Avenue on the eastern side. That has been very well received. York Street was cleaned up from Richland to Hampton last year. They also did work on Hampton from York heading west. We also did some work along Richland Avenue.

Mayor Osbon asked for an update on the lights for the parks on Park Avenue. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he spoke with Scott Neely, with Dominion, and he said the lights have been delivered to Dominion and weather permitting, should be installed next month.

Buildings and Grounds works closely with the Friends of Hopelands on work at Hopelands/Rye Patch.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated speaking of employee appearance, he felt having uniforms for the Utilities employees is very important. Through some cost savings we were able to get some uniforms for our employees in the Utilities Department.

The next department was Information Technology. He mentioned several projects they are working on. These were new City Hall support, centralized access control system, Laserfiche system upgrades, NextGen 911 support, downtown camera system support, disaster recovery, fiber network upgrade, and IT staffing. He pointed out that when the work at the Regions building progresses, we will have to relocate the servers to the Regions Building.

Mr. Bedenbaugh reviewed the Finance Department next. He stated they are looking at potential fee increases in FOIA technology and NOVA fire response fees. They are looking at billing all fire fees by value on the suburban bills placed on the County tax bills. We are hoping to have the suburban fire fees placed on the County Tax bills. That way we will be able to collect more of the fees as many people presently just ignore the bills sent to them. Those people in the fire district, but not on city water are billed \$115 per year for the service. About 1,600 people are billed, and about 25% do not pay the bill. With the billing being on the County tax bill, the collection rate will increase as a person has to pay the whole bill for the County to consider the tax bill paid. Ms. Abney stated they also wanted to bill the suburban fire fees based on the value of the building rather than a flat \$115 fee per year. It was noted that the fee was set by ordinance, and the ordinance would have to be amended to change the fee. Councilmembers were in favor of the ordinance being amended to base the fire fee on the value of the building rather than a flat fee. Mr. Bedenbaugh is to bring a proposed ordinance to Council to amend the fire fee in the suburban area.

Councilman Girardeau asked about paying fees online. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff is looking into a plan where the City can absorb some of the convenience fee when a customer goes on line and uses a credit or debit card to pay a bill. Councilman Girardeau stated we want to encourage people to pay online. It is more efficient. It gets the money into our account sooner. We don't have to have people collecting the money if we have it automated. He felt we can save money by going that route. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff will bring some numbers to Council and Council can direct them on whether to leave the fee the same, absorb it, or modify the rates to help ameliorate some of those fees.

The next department discussed was Planning. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated a list had been provided with their projects. He stated from a budget standpoint, there is a level of service review. Also, in 2014, when the economy was not doing well, there was a vacant Planner position that was eliminated. Now the workflow is such that we need to discuss bringing the position back or allocate money in professional services for a consultant on special initiatives as they come up.

Councilman Woltz stated one of the items on the list was continue to pursue annexation. He stated he hopes Planning will work with Mr. O'Briant to come up with something to incentivize people to annex.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated as far as the Building Inspections Division, last Fall there was a Demo 200 discussion and a task force should be wrapping up some recommendations to bring back to Council probably in April for some modifications to the Demo 200 program.

The next department was the Economic Development Department. He stated they are working on a number of things. He stated we are getting members appointed to the commission. The development plan will be moving forward very soon. We are also coordinating with existing partners such as the Aiken Corporation. He said Council should be considering soon the annexation of the Steeplechase tract. He stated that Mr. O'Briant will be traveling to some regional meetings to look at attracting businesses to the area.

Councilwoman Gregory asked about the Economic Development Department, pointing out that the Municipal Development Commission is one thing as opposed to the

Economic Department. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the Economic Development Department will have a separate budget. They will have two full-time employees. One of the things to discuss with Council is going forward trying to get a baseline on how much money we would like to set aside for economic development for next budget year. At present, there is \$1 million that Council directed to set aside for this particular fiscal year. We have used some of that money on some infrastructure expansion work and the study for the Economic Development Plan. Councilman Woltz asked where money would come from for this department. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he envisioned several places. First, through the budgeting process, but that is more to be a seed to transition forward. Council mentioned the purpose of the Economic Development Commission is to try to raise money for these projects as they come forward. There will be some access to monies at the State and Federal levels. He said we have used some money for our infrastructure projects already. He said it depends on the type project we are looking at. He said the City's role is primarily providing appropriate water, sewer and road infrastructure. He stated Council will be looking at other funding options as well. Councilwoman Gregory stated she feels that we are meshing the internal component of an Economic Development Department with a Commission, and they are two separate scenarios. The department works with the commission to accomplish initiatives, but it still needs to be structured to have a department within the City that is geared to working with the commission. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated this year we have had some small businesses come in and did not need much direction, but would like to be guided through the City process. Others need tremendous handholding. It can be a balancing act from a staff standpoint. Depending on the level of involvement, Mr. O'Briant could stay busy with an individual project.

Mr. O'Briant stated regarding the Municipal Development Commission, it is similar to how Mr. Bland has responsibility and duties with the Planning Commission and the way that is set up.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the last item is the Municipal Building. He stated we expect renovations of the Regions Bank building to begin by next fiscal year. He said we still have a few items to come back to Council in terms of layout. He said we still need to schedule the time for those of Council who wish to tour the building. Another item is to determine if Council wants a parking garage in the surface parking lot behind the playhouse and Regions Building. If Council decides we want to pursue a parking garage, Council will need to decide if we want to do it concurrently with the Regions renovations or after the Regions work is completed. Mr. Bedenbaugh reviewed some information on the parking garage and stated when he receives a written report, he will share it with Council for discussion. From the verbal information, he said Southeastern is looking at constructing a parking garage with 200+/- spaces which is a multi-floor garage with a brick skin around it. At this time it looks to be about \$23,000 a space. That means the cost would be about \$4.5 million. He thinks that number will come down. He said based on the terms of the MOU Council does need to determine whether we want a garage built concurrent with the renovation of the Regions building or not. Councilman Woltz asked when Council would be taken for a tour of the Regions Building before construction takes place. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated they are working on getting the plans together but he plans on having a walk through at the end of next month. Councilman Woltz stated his question is why are we drawing plans until everybody has given their ideas. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated we have to have a layout based on the space needs of the department now as well as over the next 30 to 40 years. We worked with them on this project to get them off to a start. Councilwoman Gregory pointed out that the space needs was done with staff with each department head having input on what their space needs are and their anticipated growth. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the space needs was done almost two years ago. He said the plans will come back to Council before they begin the work. Presently they are abating the asbestos, and they will be doing some interior demolition. It was pointed out that staff has worked on the plans several times and the Project Manager, Mark Chostner, has been over the plans with staff. He said Council will have a say before the actual renovations begin.

Mayor Osborn pointed out that it makes sense to do the parking garage concurrent with renovations of the building. However, he stated he would like another price for construction of a parking garage. He noted that they have always heard that the cost of a

parking garage would be about \$15,000 to \$20,000. He pointed out wrapping it with brick may increase the cost. It is proposed to match the garage with the brick of other buildings in the area.

Councilman Girardeau asked how much money the City has earmarked for a garage. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the City has about \$2 million in the Hospitality Tax for a parking garage.

Mr. Bedenbaugh asked Council their thoughts on having work sessions for the budget as well as regular meetings scheduled in April, May and June. It was the consensus of Council to have the budget work sessions with the regularly scheduled meetings, but do not overload the work sessions with other items, but focus on the budget. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he would dedicate work sessions beginning in April through the first meeting in June to budget discussions.

DISCUSSION OF AGENDA ITEMS

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the next item on the work session agenda is discussion of agenda items. He asked if Council had any questions regarding items on the agenda. Council had no questions.

The work session ended at 6:40 p.m.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mayor Osbon stated Council needs to go into executive session pursuant to Section 30-4-70(a)(2) to discuss negotiations incident to a proposed contractual arrangement and proposed sale or purchase of property.

Specifically, City Council will discuss the following in executive session:

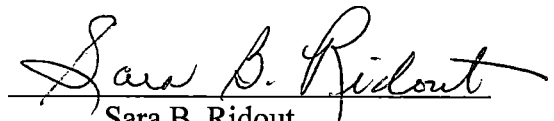
1. Three separate proposed contractual arrangements with the owners of real estate regarding the possible purchase of land by the City of Aiken.
2. One proposed contract regarding the possible sale of land owned by the City of Aiken.

Councilman Girardeau moved, seconded by Councilwoman Brohl, that Council go into executive session to discuss the items noted by Mayor Osbon. The motion was unanimously approved.

Council went into executive session at 6:43 p.m.

After discussion Councilman Girardeau moved, seconded by Councilwoman Diggs, that Council come out of executive session. The motion was unanimously approved.

The Executive Session ended at 7:00 p.m.


Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk