

Aiken City Council Minutes

January 6, 1997

Special Meeting

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Anaclerio, Clyburn, Papouchado, Perry, Price, and Radford.

Others Present: Steve Thompson, Frances Thomas, Gary Smith, Roger LeDuc, Anita Lilly, Sara Ridout, Carl Langley of the Aiken Standard, Chandra McLean, of the Augusta Chronicle, and about 80 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the special meeting to order at 6 P.M. Mayor Cavanaugh led in prayer which was followed by the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

COMMERCE BUSINESS PARK

Industrial Park
Business Park
Beaufort Street
Bypass
Jones Property

Mayor Cavanaugh stated the purpose of the meeting was to hold a public hearing on the proposed Commerce Business Park to be located off Beaufort Street to get input from the citizens, with Council voting on the matter on Monday, January 13, 1997. He said the meeting was not to discuss the proposed bypass.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated Wade Brodie, Chairman of the Aiken Corporation, would speak first on the proposed park and then any others in favor of the park. Then those opposed to the park would be given the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Wade Brodie, Chairman of the Aiken Corporation, stated he was concerned about the slowness of the process for the proposed park and the creation of jobs for the area. He said, however, the Corporation wanted to be thorough in the consideration process. He said the Corporation attempted to involve the private sector without success, and the Corporation had several studies done and has reviewed those thoroughly. Also, potential sites were reviewed, and a feasibility and market study was done. Then the Corporation started negotiating on the property for the proposed Commerce Park and Council authorized an option on the Jones property located off Beaufort Street. He said he felt the Aiken Corporation had made good decisions in the matter. He pointed out financing for the proposed park was discussed at the December 16, 1996, meeting of Council. Mr. Brodie then reviewed a chronological history of the industrial park development starting in the late 1980's, a copy of which had been given to Council. After review of the history, Mr. Brodie asked that Council join the Aiken Corporation in moving forward with construction of Commerce Park by requesting the concurrence of the Aiken-Edgefield Economic Development Partnership and requesting funding from Aiken 20/20 for the first phase of the park. Mr. Brodie stated the park is proposed to be done in phases. Phase I would be done with Aiken 20/20 money. A TIF district would be created to fund future development of the park.

Ms. Pat Jones, an owner of the property proposed to be used for the proposed park, stated the Jones family did support the project. She pointed out it takes a long time to bring about growth and takes people with insight and vision to plan for growth. She pointed out the south side of Aiken had grown and that the north side could grow with the opportunity to buy property that could be a great asset to the city. She pointed out Aiken had preserved its downtown area whereas many downtowns had died. She pointed out she felt the city should be foresighted enough and take advantage of the opportunity to extend its borders in a way that could be advantageous to the city in the future. She pointed out the Corporation had been working on the project for some time and felt they had probably done their homework.

Mr. Timothy Brighthart, 570 Beaufort Street, stated he felt the park would be a good idea to bring industry to the north side of town and to provide jobs for the community.

County Councilman Willar Hightower, Edrie Street, spoke in favor of Commerce Park. He pointed out that Council has a tough job making decisions for the

city, and that they will never please everyone. He stated he lived in the northeast area, the area proposed for Commerce Park. He pointed out the city dump is adjacent to the property proposed for Commerce Park and has had a tremendous influence on the surrounding property. He felt the Aiken Corporation had done a good in selecting the proposed site, and he felt the development would raise the property values in the area. He also pointed out Aiken will need something to replace jobs that are being lost at the Savannah River Site. He felt something needed to be done to encourage industry to locate in Aiken. He pointed out the proposed area would be controlled by the city and would have city zoning whereas presently almost anything could locate on the property.

Mr. Charles Jones, a landowner of the property proposed for the park, spoke in favor of the proposed park. He stated presently there are no restrictions on the property, and eventually his family will sell the property. He pointed out the adjacent landfill had been a negative point for development of the area. He said his family wants something nice to go in the area, and they felt this was a good opportunity for something nice to be in the area.

Mayor Cavanaugh then asked those opposed to the proposed park to speak.

Mr. Harvey Lishka, 149 Day Road, stated he was concerned about increased traffic in the area, the effect the park would have on the value of the property in the area, and increased taxes on property in the area. He stated he did not feel another industrial park was needed and pointed out all the industrial parks presently in the Aiken area. He also pointed out the risk in developing the proposed industrial park.

Ms. Nancy Wilds, 110 New Bridge Road, stated she lived about one mile from the proposed park and she was opposed to the park. She stated presently she can see the lights from Owens-Corning Fiberglas. She pointed out the project would affect the character of the land and the homes of all the people in the area. She stated she lived outside the city and did not have representation, but the proposed project would affect her and other people outside the city. She pointed out government wants to spend money all the time, own everything and control everything. She felt the proposed park would compete with the County's Sage Mill Park. She pointed out development of the park is gambling and would be gambling with taxpayers money.

Ms. Wilds also read a letter from Mr. and Mrs. Arsenio Maldonado, of 227 Wrights Mill Road, who were opposed to the proposed park.

Mr. John Eden, 328 Willow Run Road, stated he had moved to the northside of town from the southside to get away from the traffic and to get into the country. He said he was opposed to the proposed park. He said the city should have gotten input from citizens in the area before a lot of money was spent on the project. He stated he did not feel that development of the park would be in the best interest of the northside of town.

Mr. Martin Buckley, 1141 Two Notch Road, stated he did not feel the city should become a developer; the purpose of the city is to provide services. He felt that if the project was a good project private developers would be interested in the project. He felt the project was a very risky project for the city. He pointed out the proposed bypass affects the proposed project, and possibly the bypass needs to be relocated. He pointed out the proposed bypass is very questionable at this point. Mr. Buckley stated the County does have some zoning, and there would be some control over the property in the county.

Mr. Wallace Chapman, 231 Saddlejump Place, pointed out there are several industrial parks in Aiken County that are not full, and he felt those parks should be developed before starting another park. He felt an industrial park would bring traffic into the residential area, and he was opposed to the park. He felt residents in the area had not been considered in locating the park.

Mr. Robin Ellis, 357 Chesterfield Street S, stated he questioned whether another industrial park was needed with the space available in other industrial parks. He pointed out there were other projects proposed through the Strategic Plan which he felt would help Aiken grow, and he suggested that the projects be reevaluated to consider other uses for the city's resources. He pointed out the proposed industrial park is a large risk for the city.

Mr. Richard Alvanos, 2704 Banks Mill Road, stated he commended Council for their efforts in trying to move forward in a positive direction for the City of Aiken. He said, however, he did have some questions about the project. He said the proposed park is risky and if it is not successful, then the money pledged for the venture will be money lost and the city needs to make sure the money is spent in the best possible way to create jobs for the area. He asked about the cost of the property and the number of jobs proposed to be created by the park. He stated the park is proposed for high tech jobs, and many people in the area of the park may not be qualified for jobs in the park so it may not create jobs for people in the neighborhood. He felt other sites may be better suited for a park than the site chosen. Mr. Alvanos did point out that the proposed park had been in the works for some time and had been publicized. He stated people had become complacent and had waited until the eleventh hour to express opposition to a project. He said people should be more aware of what is going on in the community. Mr. Alvanos stated he was sure there were people who opposed Owens-Corning Fiberglas when it was built, but if it had not been built many people in Aiken would not have had a job. He said Aiken does have to provide jobs to be able to continue to grow and to provide jobs for people in the area.

Mr. Rod Grandy, 261 Magnolia Lake Road, stated he was very concerned about the proposed project, and his interest was as a taxpayer and citizen of Aiken. He said he owns two businesses in Aiken and is interested in creating jobs in Aiken. He stated he had served on Aiken 20/20, is a member of the Aiken Corporation, and a member of the Downtown Development Corporation. He said he commends the city for its efforts in the Strategic Plan and feels that many fine things have come from the plan. He said, however, there are several industrial parks around the city which are not full. He said things have changed and he feels the question of the viability of Commerce Park to be located in the City of Aiken needs to be reassessed. He said he had read the Edens & Avant report and read some comments from the report to Council stating the proposed park had a lot of competition and the park must find a way to stand out to offer a slight edge over the competition to be considered by businesses considering new sites. He felt the report said there was a slight chance for the park if a lot of energy is put into the effort, but he felt that was very risky. He also read a portion of a report from Lehman Associates and pointed out there was a very narrow market for industries for the park. He said he felt the reports would not cause him to invest his money in the project. He questioned the city putting money in such a risky project. He said he strongly supports efforts to create jobs in Aiken, but he felt the proposed park was very risky at this time.

Dr. Nat Frazer, 170 Aberdeen Drive, stated he was employed as Associate Director of the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, but was not representing any organization and was speaking as a concerned resident of Aiken. He said he has considerable training in ecology and public policy. He said he was concerned about no mention of assessment of the potential environmental impact of the Commerce Park proposal. He said he felt the proposed area is in the water shed of Shaws Creek and a tributary of the South Edisto River. The Edisto River Basin was the subject of a most comprehensive ecosystem management study undertaken in the state. He said it would be unfortunate if the City of Aiken inadvertently did something to interfere with the important river basin without first considering the consequences of its action. He pointed out Phase II of the project considers use of HUD funds, but if federal funds are to be used the Natural Environmental Policy Act would require an environmental impact statement to be done. He said his understanding is that NEPA legislation prohibits projects from being implemented in a piecemeal fashion. He stated he was concerned about several industrial parks in the area not being completely occupied and considering another park. He suggested making the parks already in the area more competitive to attract industry needed to drive the economic development in the 21st century.

Ms. Annie Fields, 309 Willow Run, stated she had moved from the southside to the northside to get away from traffic, and felt the proposed park would destroy the beauty of her property.

Mr. Ronnie Peterson, 660 Bunch Terrace, spoke in opposition to the proposed park. He felt that a business park was not needed in the area, and that other places would be better for an industrial park.

Mr. David Stinson, 434 Berrie Road, stated he was a realtor and benefits from growth and development. He said many comments had been made about why Commerce Park was not a good idea for Aiken. He said development is needed,

but he felt the development would affect the surrounding residential area with increased traffic, etc. He said there are always negatives with development and he was not sure the area would receive an equal amount of benefit from the development. He was not sure all the other possibilities had been explored for Aiken such as the equine industry, retirement industry, downtown retail, college and technical schools, tourism, etc. He felt some other things might fit in that area rather than compact light industry.

Mr. David Snipes, 212 Wrights Mill Road, stated he was opposed to the site for an industrial park. He pointed out there is a problem with storm drainage in the area. He suggested the city develop a residential area on the property. He felt an industrial park should be near the interstate.

Mr. Robert Brooks also spoke in opposition to the proposed Commerce Park. He said he was concerned about the comments expressed by the citizens present. He felt the meeting had served to bring out the thoughts and sentiments that exist in the community. He felt there should be more discussion to work out the matter for the best of the citizens.

Ms. Francine Merkle, 245 Saddlejump Place, stated she had chosen to live on the northside. She was concerned about the proposed bypass and about development of an industrial park in the area as well as traffic in the area. She stated she was opposed to the proposed industrial park.

Councilwoman Clyburn pointed out the Aiken Corporation had presented plans for the proposed park to Council in November, 1996. After the meeting in November she asked members of the Corporation to talk to residents in the affected area. She stated two meetings were held in the area with city residents who would be directly affected by the park. She pointed out that at the two meetings the citizens were told that Council would consider the matter on December 16. At the December 16 meeting one person spoke for the industrial park. She said Council wanted more input and that was the purpose of this meeting. She said this was the second public hearing on the matter with both public hearings being advertised. She stated she was concerned about how the proposed park may affect residents of the area and she appreciated their expressions of concern, but she stated some people who spoke have hidden agendas.

A resident spoke opposing the project and pointed out to Council that a majority of the people who are present are opposed to the project, but Council seems to be wanting to push it through. He felt the majority who oppose should rule.

Mr. Larry Morelli, Banks Mill Road, stated he had made the statement previously that he wondered if the people are citizens or subjects. He said if the people are citizens then Council should be asking what they can do for the citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh answered Mr. Morelli with the statement that of course the people are citizens and not subjects and that was the reason for public hearings to get input from the citizens. He said Councilmembers are open to the public at all times.

Mr. Ronnie Peterson stated if Council had only received the proposal for Commerce Park in November he felt Council had a short time to consider the matter.

It was pointed out that the plans for the exact area were presented to Council in November, but prior to that time, as early as 1993, Council was aware of a proposed outline for Commerce Park at the end of Barnwell Avenue.

Mr. Thompson pointed out Council had involved a group of residents to study the matter. He said the Aiken Corporation had spent the last two years evaluating not only the proposed site, but several sites. The Corporation also advertised for private sites. He said the proposal had been in the study committee for some time.

Mr. Ronnie West, 804 Tennessee Avenue, spoke in favor of the park. He felt the proposed park is a good plan. He was concerned about providing jobs in the area. He said he would like to see something developed on the northside of Aiken. He felt if the park is developed that the value of property in that area will increase.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated Mr. Alvanos had asked several questions, and he would like for Mr. Brodie to answer those questions. The questions included: how much had been spent on the project, how many jobs were expected to be produced, what makes the proposed site so great as opposed to others.

Mr. Wade Brodie addressed the questions which had been asked. He stated industrial development is very speculative, but it has been estimated that the proposed park is projected to create 1,500 to 2,000 jobs. In addition to jobs created in the park there is a multiplier used to project spinoffs for other businesses which create jobs as a result of jobs created in the industrial park.

Mr. Thompson pointed out the figures used in the study of 3,000 jobs is based on square footage by the consultants. He said more information would not be available until a master plan is prepared. He said the range is between the amount of square footage that the consultants estimate that can be brought in and the city's experience in Verenes Park. Experience has been more like 1,500 to 2,000 jobs for the proposed area.

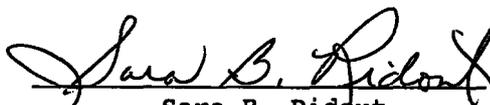
Mr. Brodie stated approximately \$50,000 had been spent so far for studies and options on the property. He said the property would cost about \$5,000 per acre to purchase.

Mr. Brodie stated this site was chosen for several reasons, including the feeling that growth was needed on the east and north sides of town. Another factor was land availability and whether the land was open land. If the property already had houses on it, then that makes the land much more expensive to develop. Another reason was the topography of the land and the location of the bypass on the east side of town.

Mr. Thompson answered Mr. Alvanos' question regarding the TIF district and whether the amount for the district could be shifted to another area if the industrial park was not successful. Mr. Thompson stated under the proposal that the Aiken Corporation has given City Council there would be no expense out of the TIF district until investment was starting to incur to get revenues. If City Council created a TIF district, and it did not produce City Council could dissolve the TIF district and move forward.

Mayor Cavanaugh thanked the citizens for their attention and input into the matter. He stated Council had held two public hearings on the proposed park. He said Council's next meeting will be Monday, January 13, 1997, and at that time Council will make a determination as to what the majority of Council wishes to do on the project.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:20 P.M.


Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk