

Aiken City Council Minutes

September 8, 2003

WORK SESSION

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Clyburn, Cuning, Price, Smith, Sprawls and Vaughters.

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Bill Huggins, Glenn Parker, Ed Evans, Sara Ridout, Philip Lord of the Aiken Standard, and about 30 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 6:20 P.M. He stated Council had three items that they would like to discuss in the work session.

PLAYHOUSECommunity PlayhousePrice AvenueTwo Notch RoadLeasePurchase

Mr. LeDuc stated that at the City's last Horizons meeting, Council discussed the purchase of the old Playhouse at Price Avenue and Two Notch Road. A senior Clemson architectural student presented several ideas as to what could be done with this building. This included leveling out the floor for meeting space, with a stage that could be utilized for audiences outside and inside the building. The front of the building could be used for storage by the City and equipment used by schools in conjunction with the Carolina Bay. Short term use of the building could include storage in the front, leveling the floor and possible space for the ceramic program. The City has set aside money in special holding funds to pay \$125,000 for the purchase of this building. Status of the loans, which Council approved in the spring of 2002 to both the Playhouse and City for the completion of the current theatre on Newberry Street, was given to Council for information. With the \$125,000 payment to the Community Playhouse, their \$935,000 loan, at the end of this fiscal year, will be approximately \$300,000. The Playhouse hopes to make one or more additional payments before the end of the year. The City's portion of the loan has now been paid off, and we expect the Playhouse to pay off their loan within the next couple of years. We have already had requests from groups to use the old Playhouse building, including the need for practice space by organizations that yearly present musicals as fund raisers.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out the Recreation Department is making a cost analysis of the ceramics program to determine if the Department is going to continue the program.

Mr. Phil Porter, President of the Community Playhouse, stated collection of the pledges to the Playhouse for the building fund had been at about 98% of the pledged amount. He said they probably have about \$50,000 to \$60,000 more to collect in pledges, and the Playhouse is still getting new pledges.

Mr. LeDuc stated about 15 months ago the City was struggling with how to take care of the additional cost for the land and the architectural fees for the Playhouse. He said a loan of \$707,000 was set up for the City for the Playhouse. He said the plans were to pay the loan back in three to five years. He said the 1 cent sales tax money came in sooner than anticipated, so this money was used on the loan. Also, \$140,691 from the General Fund surplus from last year was used on the loan, and \$78,900 from the Local Accommodations Tax was paid on the loan, so the loan has been paid off. He said it is also felt that in two to three years the Playhouse will have their loan paid off.

OPEN SPACE PLANGreen SpacePalmetto Conservation FoundationGreenways

Mr. LeDuc stated that for the past several months, the Palmetto Conservation Foundation has been working on a feasibility plan for more greenways and open space in the Aiken Community. They have met with both City and County staff during this time to develop a conceptual plan for the City to follow over the next 20 years. If Council accepts this plan, we will begin developing a preliminary plan to implement the linkages and nodes discussed in this plan. We will also begin to review possible changes to our Subdivision Regulations, which will allow Council to receive donated property from residential and commercial development within the City. He pointed out the plan does not detail what land should be purchased and how the city should enact every pathway and open space area, but the plan gives a broad picture of what Aiken could be like 20 years from now. Mr. Kenneth Driggers from the Palmetto Conservation Foundation is present to give an overview of the plan and to answer any questions Council may have.

Mr. Driggers stated the Palmetto Conservation Foundation had been working on the plan for about a year with the involvement of the staff. Mr. Driggers reviewed the goals of the plan. He pointed out that downtown Aiken is pretty much built out, and it is difficult to find green space to connect areas downtown. He said Aiken is going through a growth spurt, and he hoped it would continue. He said open space preservation is a way to balance the growth and soften the impact of growth. He said the proposed plan is developed around three components. Those include hubs, which anchor the system and provide destinations for people to congregate and links, which tie the hubs together. Also, there are sites which are smaller points of particular interest such as ecological, scenic or historical. Mr. Driggers then reviewed the process of building the hub system and identified the existing hubs: Hitchcock Woods, downtown and historic Aiken, Virginia Acres/Carolina Bay, Whiskey Road shopping area, Citizens Park, and USCA/Hospital area. A potential hub is the Shaws Creek watershed. He said the plan recommends that the city focus on the Shaws Creek watershed, which is the city's water supply. He said the city has a large investment in the area and needs to protect the water supply. He said the plan recommends that the city look to protect about 1,000 acres in the Shaws Creek Watershed. He said the second stage is providing linkages between the hubs, and he reviewed possible linkages. He said there are also opportunities for recreational greenways. He stated stage 3 is protecting the key sites such as the Wise Hollow Creek watershed and the Henderson Heritage Preserve.

Mr. Driggers stated he wanted to mention Aiken conservation patterns. He said there are very large areas of land that are slated for development on the edges of town. He said it appears there is a great opportunity to encourage development patterns that are greenway, open space and conservation oriented. He said there is the ability to use the development community, using private investment to further the goals of the city and the open space plan. He said there are several positive examples of this in South Carolina, with one example being near Fort Mill.

Mr. Driggers then briefly discussed three issues of taking the Open Space Program forward. He said funding is an issue. There are a number of ways to fund the program, one of which is using hospitality tax funds or a sales tax. He said another issue is greenway management. He said when property is acquired someone has to manage the property. The third issue is operating the program. How will the city make decisions on what pieces of property to acquire?

Council then briefly discussed the plan and how to go about implementing such a plan. Council felt they needed to study the plan further. The plan presents the concept and Council will need to decide how to implement the plan. Mr. LeDuc stated the staff will be making some recommendations to Council as funding and opportunities become available. Mr. Driggers stated monies in the foundation world are moving towards active living and how to improve active living to increase health and life style. He said if the

city can tilt the plan towards health there are more funding packages available. Mr. LeDuc stated now that the city has a plan they can apply for some grants for funding.

TOURISM

Mr. LeDuc stated with the City now responsible for tourism for Aiken rather than the Chamber of Commerce, he would like for Council to set a time to discuss the expectations of City Council regarding tourism in detail. We would like to discuss this subject over a one to two hour period, since this is so vitally important to the future of our community. After discussion, Council set Tuesday, September 16, 2003, at 7:30 A.M. to discuss how the City will handle tourism and what Council is expecting for tourism. Some Council members were concerned that the Chamber was not interested in tourism in the future. They pointed out that in most places they are familiar with the Chamber handles tourism. It was pointed out that the new director has a different focus and wants to focus on growing the Chamber's membership. After discussion, Council set Tuesday, September 16, 2003, at 7:30 a.m. to meet regarding tourism. Council members asked for a list of projects or promotions that the Chamber had been doing for tourism and the expenses involved.

WATER SERVICE

New Ellenton Commission of Public Works

Public Works

Hotel

Whiskey Road

Patel, Bonsi

Agreement

Mr. LeDuc stated a letter had been received from the New Ellenton Commission of Public Works asking the city to amend the contract with New Ellenton regarding water service to allow an extension for providing water service to the proposed hotel on Whiskey Road from December 31, 2003, to July 31, 2004.

After discussion Council asked that the request be placed on the agenda for September 22, 2003, for action by Council.

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REGULAR MEETING

September 8, 2003

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Clyburn, Cuning, Price, Smith, Sprawls and Vaughters.

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Ed Evans, Larry Morris, Anita Lilly, Pete Frommer, Glenn Parker, Richard Pearce, Sara Ridout, Philip Lord of the Aiken Standard, and about 60 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 7:35 P.M. Mr. LeDuc led in prayer, which was followed by the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Cavanaugh stated Council needed to approve the agenda. He asked that an item be added for a special presentation award. Mayor Cavanaugh moved, seconded by Councilwoman Price and unanimously approved, that the agenda be approved with the addition of a special presentation.