

Aiken City Council Minutes

June 18, 2002

WORKSESSION

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

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Bill Huggins, Larry Morris, Leasa Segura, Sandra Korbelik, Glenn Parker, Sara Ridout, Richard Pearce, Wade Brodie, Mike Anaclerio, Bill McGhee, Doug Evans, Karen Daily of the Aiken Standard and Josh Gelinas of the Augusta Chronicle.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 7 A.M.

Mr. LeDuc stated there were several items he wanted to discuss with Council and to get some direction.

COMMERCIAL GARBAGE

Mr. LeDuc stated in the past the city had tried to make commercial garbage collection self-sufficient. Otherwise the general taxpayers have to make up the difference. He said just recently Aiken County was notified by Three Rivers, where the city takes the garbage, that the landfill charges will be increased from \$28 per ton to \$31 per ton beginning July 1, 2002. He said the city staff is recommending that the City raise the commercial customers' rate from \$1.93 per cubic yard to \$2 per cubic yard, or the city would have a \$26,000 budget shortfall. Mr. LeDuc stated a large portion of the fee is for collection and for transportation from Aiken to Three Rivers, which is near the SRS Site. Council agreed for the item to be placed on the next Council agenda for Council's action.

AMERICAN FLAGS

Mr. LeDuc stated after the 911 incident the city put up a number of American flags at the intersections in the downtown area. He said the flags are becoming tattered and worn. He said before the City replaces the flags he wanted to be sure Council wanted to continue to display the flags and, if so, if all the flags should be replaced, or if the city should remove some and only display the flags in a few intersections. After discussion by Council it was decided to continue to display flags at the intersections of York and Richland, Laurens and Richland, Park and Chesterfield, Park and South Boundary and Hampton and Laurens.

HISTORIC MARKER DOWNTOWN

Mr. LeDuc stated Allen Riddick of the Aiken County Historical Society appeared before Council in May regarding placing a two-sided marker in the downtown area giving Aiken's history. Council asked the Aiken Downtown Development Association to recommend a location for the marker. The ADDA suggested three locations: corner of The Alley and Laurens Street just outside of the Lionel Smith business, Park Avenue and Laurens Street by the Curiosity Shop, or in front of City Hall. Their number one preference was at the corner of The Alley and Laurens Street. Council agreed that the corner of The Alley and Laurens Street would be the best location and the request is to be placed on the next Council agenda.

BARNWELL AVENUE

Houses

Barnwell Avenue NE 210

Mr. LeDuc stated recently Council received a letter from Bill and Beatrice McGhee concerning the two-story white house at 210 Barnwell Avenue. This house was recently purchased by the city, along with the yellow two-story house at 204 Barnwell Avenue NE and a vacant lot on Fairfield Street. The City paid approximately \$40,000 for all three

properties, and we had suggested a sales price of \$15,000 to the McGhees for this house, leaving a value of \$20,000 for the yellow house and \$5,000 for the vacant property. Steve Smith, the architect the city hired to evaluate these houses, recommends that the white house be torn down. This is based on the fact that it will cost two to three times more to properly fix up this house than the yellow house due to structural damage in the building. He also noted that the duplex was moved from a location somewhere on Union Street. According to Mr. Smith it does not have the same historical value as the yellow house, and due to the high cost for repair, he is recommending the house be removed. The McGhees would like to purchase the house for \$5,000 and renovate it as a duplex. Mr. McGhee currently owns, or is in the process of fixing up, several other houses in Aiken, and he would like an unlimited timeframe to fix this house. The McGhees have also established a foundation which is called the Northside Heritage Preservation Foundation, and he is asking the city to contribute funds to this Foundation or give them a low interest loan to help fix up this property. Mr. LeDuc stated he had told the McGhees that it is the city's preference that the property be converted to single family homeownership to help stabilize this neighborhood, although the current zoning would allow multi-family. He said he also stated that since the city is fixing up the yellow house for single family homeownership, the City wanted to have this house repaired within the next year so it does not further devalue this area. If the house is removed, the city's intention is to build a 1930's bungalow style house similar to the other houses within the area. The city has asked Mr. Smith to develop design plans that could be used at this location or in other Old Aiken areas. He asked for direction from Council on whether or not to allow the McGhees to either purchase this property or for the City to give it to them, and if so under what conditions. If Council decides to have the house removed, then the city would proceed with the development of plans to build a quality house based on the design standards given by Mr. Smith.

Council discussed the request at length. They were concerned about the future residents of the yellow house and their feelings about a duplex being next door to the house proposed to be renovated.

Councilman Cunning stated he felt the lot would be worth \$5,000. With the house next door to be renovated, he felt the white house should either be single family residential or removed, and another single family house built on the lot.

Mr. McGhee stated he felt it would be difficult to keep the white house as a single family residence, since it is a large house, so he was proposing to keep it a duplex. He felt it would be difficult to get the rent needed for a return on the house as a single family residence. He pointed out most of the housing in the area is rental property.

Councilwoman Vaughters pointed out the city had invested money in this property, and the city was interested in the property being developed in the right way and was asking for certain restrictions on the property. She pointed out the architect, Steve Smith, had indicated that it would cost a lot to renovate the white house, since the house is in such poor condition and the person probably would never be able to recover the investment.

Councilwoman Price stated she understood that there were other people interested in buying the white house at a price higher than \$5,000. She pointed out the city needed to place a "for sale" sign on the house and she felt other bids would be received for the white house.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated he felt Council should keep in mind the original goal when the city purchased the property. He said the city purchased the property in order to try to make the area nice single family residential. Councilman Smith agreed with the Mayor's comments.

The consensus of Council was that the city try to sell the white house as a single family owner occupied residence to be renovated within a short time frame according to architect plans suggested by Steve Smith, architect. It was felt the white house and lot are worth more than \$5,000.

WILLOW RUN BUSINESS PARKBeaufort Street

Mr. LeDuc stated several years ago the city had looked at the area on Beaufort Street adjacent to the city's landfill for a proposed light industrial, business type park. He said at that time the city was looking at developing the park, buying the property, and putting in the infrastructure. He said there were mixed emotions on it, and it was decided to try to get a private investor to build a business park somewhere in the city. As a result, Summit Business Park was constructed. Summit Park only has two vacant lots left, so another area is needed. He said the Aiken Corporation went back to the original property the city was going to develop and now, instead of the city investing money, the Aiken Corporation plans to develop a business park.

Mr. LeDuc stated in January City Council accepted two grants from SCANA Corporation to be used at Willow Run Park. This included \$100,000 for infrastructure at the new Park and \$107,161 for a new spec building. Over the last several months Aiken Corporation has been involved in the purchase of the properties necessary for this new business park. They are now ready to move forward and would like to discuss with City Council a proposed Developers Agreement. He said the agreement mirrors the one used at Summit Business Park except for a couple of changes. With the grant funds, the City would need to provide expertise to help with some of the infrastructure development. The infrastructure material and most of the labor will be done by outside forces. The \$100,000 should be sufficient to provide the necessary infrastructure for the development of the property where the spec building is planned. This building will be approximately 25,000 square feet and will be paid for from Aiken Corporation funds plus the \$107,161 granted from SCANA. The remaining infrastructure cost will be approximately \$150,000 and will be completed as other parcels are sold for development. In the proposed agreement, the City will provide up to \$1,000 per job as an incentive for this park. The Summit agreement used the \$1,000 incentive to install the Park's water and sewer, with the job credits used to help offset this cost. Prior to receiving water and sewer the property would need to annex to the city. Also the city would donate the Hampton Avenue right of way east of Beaufort Street as part of this approval process.

Mr. Wade Brodie, Chairman of the Aiken Corporation, was present to answer any questions. He pointed out there are very few residences in this area, and he felt there would be no objections to the park. It would be developed as a nice park with small businesses and the area would be landscaped.

In the discussion it was pointed out that, when the Park was discussed several years ago, the people who objected to the Park lived outside the city, and they were basically concerned about and opposed to the new by-pass which is now being constructed. Councilman Cunning stated he was opposed to the Park at that time because he did not feel that it was economically feasible for the city to develop the park at that time.

Councilwoman Price expressed concern about the Park, how it would be developed and the type businesses in the Park. She was concerned about how the Park might affect adjacent property values and residential development.

It was pointed out there is presently a concrete plant in this area which will be screened and should make the area look better. It was pointed out the area will develop eventually. The proposed Park would be a planned development.

Councilwoman Clyburn stated she would like to have a meeting with residents in this area before the matter is considered by Council to be sure residents have no objections to the Park.

Mr. LeDuc stated one reason the city would like to see the Park developed in the city is for the tax base. He said industry is taxed at a different rate than residential, and presently the city has no industries inside the city.

It was agreed that the developers agreement for Willow Run Park would be placed on the June 24, 2002, agenda for first reading.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANSouthside

Mr. LeDuc stated the Comprehensive Plan Task Force had completed their work on Tuesday, June 11, for the south side. This work was given to the Planning Commission that afternoon, and they reviewed and made several minor suggestions. Due to the fact the work was completed earlier that day by the Task Force, the Commission asked for further time to review this plan and the written changes which were proposed at the Planning Commission work session. They also wanted to see the comments by Larry and Charles Holley concerning how this would affect properties along Whiskey Road. For this reason, the Planning Commission has scheduled a meeting for Tuesday afternoon, June 18, 2002 to modify and adopt the Comprehensive Plan for the south side. Mr. LeDuc stated Council had a copy of the document the Planning Commission will be reviewing with the changes suggested at the Planning Commission work session on June 11. Mr. LeDuc stated because of the importance of the document and the amount of information he wanted Council to be reviewing the document. The document is scheduled for first reading on Monday, July 8, 2002, with second reading on July 22.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out some of the changes suggested by the Task Force. Previously the Comprehensive Land Use Plan was adopted by Council as a set of policies to guide the development. It now states that the plan is not an ordinance but should be taken seriously and followed as closely as possible, and, if not, there needs to be a clearly stated reason as to why the action is contrary to the plan. It states that any amendment to the plan should only be made after review by the Planning Commission, and the proposed change is presented at a public hearing. Another major change is that it allows mixed use development on Whiskey Road on existing undeveloped tracts of 5 acres or more, with a majority of the area being used as residential. This statement is what Council adopted when they allowed the C.P. Price property on Whiskey Road to be 51% residential and 49% commercial. It also states that tracts smaller than 5 acres may be developed without a residential component. The 5 acre component will be based on the time of adoption of the Comprehensive Plan. Another area on which there was a lot of discussion involved recommending a connector road between Powderhouse Road and Banks Mill Road and allowing all the land in this area to be developed as commercial. A secondary roadway paralleling Pine Log Road would be constructed so big box development would be restricted from this area. Another area of discussion by the Planning Commission concerns acquiring conservation easements along the new connector road between Whiskey and Silver Bluff Road. Some of the concern is whether or not this is required or just suggested, since this road will be entirely outside the city limits of Aiken, and how it will be funded. The Planning Commission stated they recognized the need for a wide enough right of way to include pedestrian, bicycling and other opportunities for transportation. However, acquiring conservation easements, specifically in this area versus other areas, would need to be a policy decision by the City or the County. The document has not been adopted by the Planning Commission, and much discussion took place at their June 11 meeting.

Council then discussed the changes pointed out by Mr. LeDuc. There was discussion on the document being a guide or a policy that must be followed and if not followed the reason stated for the action contrary to the Plan. It was pointed out in the past the Plan was not followed by the Planning Commission, and no reason was given for overriding the Plan. Councilman Smith stated the proposed wording is to make the language a little stronger and to make it a little more difficult to change the Plan. He said the way he reads that section is that the request doesn't automatically go back through the planning process, but something different from the Plan has to be justified. If that creates a change in the plan, then the planning process must be followed. He said he did not read it as holding up a project, but that a decision could be made and then the process started to change the Plan. Mayor Cavanaugh pointed out some feel that the project must be stopped and the process gone through to change the Plan before proceeding. He said there is some disagreement on the meaning of the intent.

Mr. LeDuc stated the language may need to be clarified regarding the document being a guide or a policy.

Councilwoman Vaughters expressed concern about amending the Zoning Ordinance to allow property in the city to be rezoned Planned Unit Development (PUD). She said she had no problem with annexed areas being zoned PUD, but she did not know of any areas in the city where she felt PUD zoning would be appropriate. Ms. Korbely, of the Planning Department, pointed out that there is a lot more control over development in a PUD zone.

Councilwoman Vaughters also expressed concern about the Tree Ordinance not applying to big single residential developments. She felt there should be control over saving trees in areas to be developed for single family residential.

Councilman Cuning expressed concern with Section III-4.2.2 regarding allowing mixed use development with a predominance of residential use in certain areas in the Whiskey Road corridor. He was concerned about the 49% commercial - 51% residential mix use development. He felt this could force more traffic residentially, whereas, if the use is more flexible, the development could have more green space with a commercial use. He said he felt the percentages could be different, and yet the city have more green space with more commercial use.

Councilman Cuning also expressed concern about the tone of Section III-109-6.36. He was concerned about the statement of "encroachment by Woodside Phase III creating a conflict between the naturally occurring wildlife populations and homeowners and degrading hunting opportunities."

Mr. LeDuc stated it would be helpful for Councilmembers to make a list of their concerns in the proposed document and put them in writing for all to review when Council meets on Monday to discuss the document.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated Council could go through the document page by page if Council desires.

MANAGEMENT AUDIT

Washington Group Building
Performing Arts Building

Councilman Smith thanked Richard Pearce for his efforts and the data which he had put together for the management audit for the Washington Group Building. He said he still would like to see the cash flow for the Playhouse side of the building construction and how the cash was spent that they received. He said he would also like to see the contract with McDonald Law, the architect, and the actual construction contracts for both sides of the building. He said he would like to see a complete timeline for the project, including minutes, so one could see what happened, when and why.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out that a financial audit would be done when the project is finished.

CHARACTER PROGRAM

Meekness

Mr. Doug Evans appeared before Council regarding the Character Program. He stated he was not against good character, but he felt one needed to be honest before one could have good character. He expressed concern about the character trait meekness and the meaning that was displayed on the billboard coming into the city. He said he disagreed that meekness is giving up his personal rights and expectations. He expressed his concern and then left the room.

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Mayor Cavanaugh stated he had talked to Mr. Evans and that the newspapers had had articles on Mr. Evans' comments. He said he respected Mr. Evans opinion, but he had had many people tell him that they appreciated the Character Program.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sara B. Ridout", written over a horizontal line.

Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk