

Aiken City Council Minutes

January 27, 2012

Aiken's Horizons

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Dewar, Ebner, Homoki, Price, and Wells.

Absent: Councilmember Diggs

Others Present: Richard Pearce, Ed Evans, Charles Barranco, Larry Morris, Glenn Parker, Alicia Davis, Kim Abney, Tim Coakley, Gary Smith, Sara Ridout, Joseph Nix, and Amy Banton, of the Aiken Standard.

The Aiken City Council met at Rye Patch at 100 Berrie Road SW for their annual Council retreat called Horizons 2012, beginning at 12 noon with lunch.

Mr. Pearce welcomed Council to the 26th annual Horizons Retreat for Council.

COMPREHENSIVE ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORTCAFR

Ms. Kim Abney, Finance Director, presented the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the year ended June 30, 2011, to Council for their information. She briefly pointed out the various information included in the report. She noted the Introductory Section of the Report, the Financial Section and the Statistical Section. She stated the Statistical Section gives ten years trend information for various items. She pointed out the information for taxable property, millage rates, principal property taxpayers, business licenses, number of utility customers, history of water and sewer rates. She pointed out the chart showing the history of rate changes for water, sewer, garbage and fire rates. In response to a question regarding the pension fund, Ms. Abney stated that page 58 shows the funding for the pension trust fund, and page 59 shows the funding for Other Postemployment Benefits plan (OPEB). Page 52 shows the OPEB costs for 2011.

BUDGET

Ms. Abney, Finance Director, presented some slides showing an update on the budget revenues for fiscal year 2011-2012 for the General Fund, Utilities Fund and for the Interfund Loans. She stated the real property taxes should exceed the budget. Business licenses have already exceeded the budget by \$82,700. Police fines are only at 45% of the budget. Revenues for cable franchise fees should exceed budget. Water revenue and sewer revenue are expected to meet budget by year end. Revenues related to new growth (permits and planning) are an average of 50% of budget and greater than last year.

Ms. Abney pointed out a six month comparison of revenues for 2011-12, compared to the total budget for 2011-12 and the 2010-11 fiscal year. She pointed out tax collections were good and will probably exceed the budgeted amount. Business license collections have already exceeded the budget amount. Other revenues collected are at about half the budgeted amount.

Ms. Abney pointed out the Water Revenue Analysis for 2008 to 2012, as well as a six month comparison for water and sewer revenues. It is felt that these revenues are on the six month level and the revenue should meet the budget. There was a chart showing water consumption for the last 10 years, as well as a chart for water and sewer rate comparison of 15 cities in South Carolina. It was noted that Aiken's rates are still lower than the average of cities in South Carolina. The state average is 62% higher than Aiken, and only Myrtle Beach has a lower rate than Aiken.

The Interfund Loans were discussed, including the Northside Redevelopment and Crosland Park project. The other loans included the Gem Lakes Sewer System, the Aiken Corp LED loan, and the Aiken Corp combined notes. It was noted that the Utilities Orion Project loan balance had been paid in March, 2011.

Ms. Abney pointed out the city had been increasing its number of customers receiving their utility bill by email. The City now has 811 customers who pay their bill by bank draft. This has resulted in an annual savings of \$6,090 in postage, paper and printing costs for these customers. Also, the city is making electronic payments to vendors, with 142 vendors and 180 employees receiving payments electronically.

Council discussed some issues with the Bank of America draft payments for bills being delayed. It was pointed out, however, there have been no problems with City of Aiken draft payments for customers bills.

Councilman Ebner discussed the Water Revenue Analysis chart and pointed out this was the fourth year that the revenue has been up and down. He pointed out the April 12, 2010, minutes in which water and sewer revenue was discussed and the proposed rate increases. He asked that staff prepare an updated Projected Capital Expense and Debt Service Report.

WATER SYSTEM REPAIRS

Mr. Larry Morris, Engineering and Utilities Director, made a presentation on Water Leak Analysis. He reviewed for Council the size of the Water and Sewer Division, comparing employees and infrastructure for 1992 and 2011. He stated in 1986 there were 34 full time employees in the division, compared to 36 full time in 2011. In 1992 there were 457 miles of water and sewer mains compared to 575 miles in 2011. In 1992 there were 32 pump stations, and 37 pump stations in 2011. In 1992 there were 13,767 water customers, compared to 18,649 water customers in 2011. He pointed out there had been a 6% increase in employees since 1986, a 26% increase in miles of mains since 1992, a 16% increase in pump stations since 1992 and a 36% increase in customers since 1992. Mr. Morris reviewed the organization of the division, noting the classification of the 36 employees in the division. He reviewed the responsibilities of the employees in the division, pointing out they are responsible for water and sewer issues. These include water leak repair, meter installation, turn on/turn off water, new service taps, service tap renewal, new main installation, locating mains for contractors, and fire hydrant installation. The sewer responsibilities include clearing blocked sewers, new sewer taps, cleanout installation, sewer point repair, yard repair, demo 200, and drainage projects.

Mr. Morris stated there is an average of 45 new leaks per week during the summer. During normal working hours the crews may repair 26 leaks per week. Usually about 19 leaks per week are repaired on overtime. There is a 3 week lead time before a leak can be repaired. He said they try to use city crews to repair the leaks, but when they get too far behind an outside contractor is used, but this is very expensive. He said the question is whether we add one or more employees, or do we use an outside contractor. He pointed out the budgeted amount for outside contractors had already been used up for this year. Mr. Morris stated they would like to be able to repair leaks in one week, repair yards in one week, repair concrete in two weeks, replace leaking service instead of repair, and replace 2000 services a year. He reviewed the crews and their assignments. Mr. Morris stated he needs three additional crews with two full time employees for each, for a total of six new employees. For these employees to do the work, two flat bed trucks, three crew trucks and three mini excavators with trailers are needed for the new employees to use. The cost for six new full time employees and materials needed would be about \$150,000 per year. In addition equipment, including 2 flat bed trucks, 3 crew trucks and 3 excavators are needed, at a cost of about \$350,000.

Mr. Morris stated to be able to fund these costs would require an increase in water rates. The current water rate is \$0.92/100 CF usage, with a base rate of \$5.80. He suggested an increase of \$.06/100 CF usage and an increase of \$.38 in the base rate. This would amount to a 6.62% increase in the water rates. With an increase, Aiken's rate would still be lower than other cities' rates per 100 CF usage.

Mr. Morris stated there were 380 leaks from July to December 2009. There were 912 leaks from January to December, 2010, and 668 leaks from January to September, 2011.

Mr. Morris discussed what he felt was happening and why there were so many leaks. He showed Council the type pipe presently being used. He felt the fluctuation in pressure was causing stress in the pipe and causing it to crack. He said he had done some research and checked with some other cities. He stated he was recommending going with a new type pipe which they had tested and felt it could endure the stress better. However, he pointed out there is a difference in cost from \$.39 per foot to \$1.00 per foot for the new pipe. Using the new pipe will increase budget costs. He pointed out copper pipe could not be used in our water system, plus it is very expensive. He stated the current pipe the city is using has been used prior to 1988 when he came to the city. Currently about 700 services need to be replaced and several thousand feet of pipe replaced.

Council then discussed at length what should be done to address this major problem with water leaks. It was pointed out that a new employee would cost about \$30,000 per employee including benefits. However, they have to be trained to do the work. Council discussed that possibly higher level employees could be hired to help address the problem. Council felt to be able to address this major problem, we need to hire more employees, get more equipment, and use a higher quality material to be able to fix the problem, not just repair. Council felt that water leaks have become almost an emergency, and they felt something should be done to address this issue soon. It was pointed out there had not been a rate adjustment in two years, and if the rates were adjusted as suggested, Aiken's rate would still be lower than other cities in South Carolina.

Council discussed what would need to be done to require developers to use the new pipe suggested. Staff is to look at the pipe requirements in the specifications to see if such a requirement has to be approved by Council, or whether staff can go forward with requiring the pipe suggested by Mr. Morris.

Staff was asked to take a look at the current open positions and see what can be done to go ahead and fill the positions so work can be done on the leaks. Council is to talk about the needs in the upcoming budget and consider a rate adjustment to be able to take care of the personnel and equipment needs to address the water leak problems.

Councilman Wells expressed concern about an increase in water rates, especially in this present economy, as many people are struggling and do not have jobs.

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT ORDINANCE

Mr. Ed Evans, Planning Director, stated Council had asked that staff look at the Traffic Management Ordinance and consider some changes since some issues had come up recently, especially the traffic study if property is annexed or rezoned.

Mr. Evans stated the Traffic Management Ordinance was adopted in 2004. It was amended in 2005 and 2007. In December, 2011, City Council asked for a review of issues.

Mr. Evans stated several cities had been contacted regarding their Traffic Management Ordinance. Of those contacted Columbia, Easley, Greenwood, and Summerville, SC have no traffic management ordinance. He said of those who have a traffic management ordinance, none use Level of Service as a trigger for a study. All use trip generation or scale of the project, no matter the location. About half of the cities require review by Council. None have backed off of their ordinance because of the economy.

Mr. Evans reviewed the issues that had been brought up by Council. One issue was requiring a traffic impact study for property that is to be rezoned or annexed. He said only Mt. Pleasant requires a traffic impact study for a rezone or annexation, and only if the proposed zoning is not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. All who have an ordinance require a traffic study at the site plan stage. Issue 2 was to change "net new vehicle trips" to "new vehicle trips." He said only Rock Hill uses "net new vehicle trips." Beaufort, Charleston, Hilton Head, Mt. Pleasant, Hendersonville, and Huntersville use "new trips." Issue 3 was whether to deduct trips for undeveloped land for annexation or rezoning. Only Mt. Pleasant sometimes requires a study, but there are no deductions for existing or potential trips. Issue 4 was differing Levels of Service on the same road:

require study even if the LOS at the project site does not trigger a study. Mr. Evans stated no cities use Level of Service in determining if a study is required. Issue 5 was traffic on “any road” connecting to another road with LOS of D, E, or F. None of the cities contacted use LOS for determining the need for a study. Issue 6 was voluntary limit on traffic generation (for annexation or rezoning): should a study based on lower generation be required. None of the cities contacted had a similar provision. Issue 7 was Planning Director approval of study, based on LOS at peak hour as well as overall LOS. All studies were based on overall, not peak hour. Issue 8 was requirement of City Council review if intersection (not just segment) is worse than LOS D. All other cities base their study on segment, not intersection. Issue 9 was whether the Planning Director should be allowed to waive a study. He said only Rock Hill allowed a waiver; no standards. Another issue was whether the requirement for a traffic study in Planned Commercial zone should be tied to a Traffic Management Ordinance. The other cities do not have a comparable provision.

Council discussed at length the issues with the present Traffic Management Ordinance, and the problems developers were having with the ordinance.

Councilman Wells pointed out most ordinances are not based on the Level of Service, but are based on the scope of the project. He stated he understands the need for a Traffic Management Ordinance, but he does not understand the way we go about it. Other cities’ traffic studies are based on other data. He stated the traffic studies cost from \$10,000 to \$12,000. He was concerned about what a business or developer has to pay up front to establish a business or develop some property. He was afraid that we were discouraging development and businesses rather than encouraging businesses.

Councilwoman Price pointed out the traffic that used to be on Whiskey Road when the plant employed 25,000 people. Now there are only 10,000 employed at the plant, so there has to be less traffic on Whiskey Road than in earlier years when there were so many employed at the plant.

Councilman Dewar stated he didn’t think any development had been turned down because of traffic.

There was discussion on the two projects which had been submitted to Council at the January 23, 2012, meeting—the project on Colleton Avenue and the one on Highway 19. It was pointed out how much these projects would cost, and what they would add to the community.

Councilman Wells stated he was very concerned about what the neighbors feel about what is going on in their area, but to meet their demands would remove all the profit in the project.

Councilman Dewar stated on the projects at the last Council meeting, he felt the issues came down to density for the projects being too much for the area.

Councilman Wells stated there needs to be some flexibility. He would like to see if something could be done about the \$10,000 to \$15,000 traffic study needed for small projects. He felt something needs to be done to help developers, especially in these hard economic times. He suggested Council get together with some developers and get suggestions from them and try to come up with something to help developers.

Councilman Dewar stated he had been involved with traffic matters for about 15 years and had used Level of Service for traffic studies. He said it seems that may be an antiquated way, and there may be better ways to look at it.

Mr. Pearce stated he would suggest that staff come back to Council with a draft Traffic Management Ordinance that shifts the true generation scale of progress and use the predominate practice of other cities. He said he would bring an ordinance to Council for consideration for first reading. Then the ordinance would go to the Planning Commission for study and any suggested changes. Then there would be a meeting with interested

parties to get their comments and recommendations. After that the ordinance would come to Council for second reading and public hearing.

AIKEN LANDFILL PARK

Northside

Northeast Park

Beaufort Street

Mr. Glenn Parker, Recreation Director, presented some slides showing the old Aiken Landfill which is located on Beaufort Street near the SPCA and its proposed use as a park. He said the goal is to make it safe, make it a destination and make it beautiful. They want the park to make an impact on the neighborhood.

Mr. Parker stated he had talked with Council in 2010 about the landfill, and its proposed use as a park on the northside. He said the city had been working with Schnabel Engineering on environmental issues at the landfill and had done Phase I, II and III reports to determine where garbage was on the property, what is underneath the ground, how much gas is in the area, what to do with gas, and the cost to develop the property. He said they did not seem to be making much progress on the project in working with them. When the group from Clemson finished work on the downtown green infrastructure project, we asked them to look at the landfill area and they suggested a group at Clemson to work with them on its development. The slides show some suggestions for development of the park.

Mr. Parker pointed out the location of the proposed park, which is located off Beaufort Street, adjacent to the Dog Park and the new SPCA building. He showed a slide showing an outline of the landfill. The next slide showed some clear areas. He pointed out in some areas it is felt the waste is not very deep, and we can mine the areas 5 feet thick or less and then fill the area with good soil. The lay of the land dictates that everything flow to the middle of the property, and there would be opportunities to establish positive drainage toward the new by-pass. Mr. Parker pointed out a small area adjacent to Beaufort Street that is not owned by the City of Aiken. Staff has talked to the owner about purchasing a portion of the property to have access to Beaufort Street. However, the owner is not interested in selling just a small portion of the property. He wants to sell all or nothing.

Mr. Parker stated they started coming up with a concept and what we would like to see on the property.

Councilman Ebner pointed out it would be better to do the project in phases, as it would be easier in working with DHEC. He suggested doing the mining and grassing of the area first as Phase I of the project and submit that to DHEC for permits. Then work towards other phases for the project.

Mr. Parker stated it has been recommended that there be three phases of the project. He said there would be an area for maintenance for the Engineering & Utilities Department, parking, an area for Tom Rapp to grow his plants, and most of the area would be open space for activities. He said the new mobile stage could be taken to the park and set up for a concert, etc. He showed a slide showing how drainage would be taken off the property. He said there may not be a playground in the landfill park, since there is already a playground on Orangeburg Street just across from the landfill. He showed some slides of how the grassed area would look, with a mowed area around it as a path. He showed a picture of a proposed picnic shelter, which would be more like a shelter at a state park. It is also proposed to have viewing towers on the site, which is common for large open areas. Parents could then watch their children from the towers. It was pointed out the proposal is for the area to be an open area.

Council discussed the clean up and the gas in the area. They asked questions and discussed the proposed development of the park. There were concerns about fencing and security at the proposed park. It was pointed out money is available in the Local Option Sales Tax for development of the park.

Mr. Parker reviewed the process which would be used to make the landfill safe for development of the park. He said this has been presented to Council to get their feelings on the proposal and to see if they wanted to go forward. He said a decision would need to be made as to whether to purchase some property to have access to the park from the by-pass.

Mr. Pearce stated we have identified what is there and now have presented a potential concept for development of the park. He said if Council is comfortable, then we could proceed with permitting and design for the park.

PENCILS AND PUTTERS

Municipal Achievement Award Application

Mr. Charles Barranco, Public Safety Director, stated David Turno and Phil Kestin had worked on the application for this program and submitted it to the Municipal Association of SC on behalf of the city. He stated David Turno and Phil Kestin are members of First Tee, and they were looking for some outreach programs in some neighborhoods. He said they worked with First Tee, Public Safety, Recreation, and others and came up with the Pencils and Putters Program. They incorporated some character building and tutoring in the program as well as learning about golf. Mr. Turno will talk about some of the sessions and the impact it had on the children

Mr. David Turno, of Public Safety, reviewed for Council the program which has been selected and presented to the Municipal Association for the Municipal Association Achievement Award for 2012. He said Pencils and Putters was an outreach of First Tee. Several officers at Public Safety are involved with First Tee. They wondered how they could reach more children. In looking around they felt the Smith-Hazel Center would be a good location to hold the program. There is already an after school program there. He pointed out First Tee incorporates nine character traits in every program they do. Mr. Turno stated the first thing they do in the program is help the children with their homework. Children from 8 to 18 are invited to participate in Pencils and Putters with the First Tee of Aiken starting at 4 p.m. on Mondays at the Smith-Hazel Center. The program teaches youth important life and golf skills, while having fun. Pencils and Putters promotes education, character development and life-enhancing values through homework tutoring, social activity, healthy habits and the game of golf. For the first hour from 4 to 5 pm the youth are helped with their homework in a tutoring session. Volunteers help them with their homework. Every child must participate in the homework tutoring sessions to take part in the other activities.

From 5 to 6:30 volunteers teach golf in Perry Park which is near the Smith-Hazel Center. The golf lessons are followed by a relationship-building meal from 6:30 to 7 p.m. The group has a different food sponsor for each Monday. A volunteer from a fraternity at USC-Aiken helps with tutoring and also got the sponsors for the meals for the children.

Pencils and Putters was featured in the national The First Tee Magazine fall 2011 issue. The Pencils and Putters program addresses First Tee's diversification goals to increase female, ethnic diversity, special needs, and at-risk participants. The chapter is looking to expand the program to involve parents and to reach more locations. Pencils and Putters is staffed by both First Tee of Aiken volunteers and after-duty members of the Aiken Department of Public Safety.

Mr. Turno stated the program is a continuation of Public Safety employees volunteering in the community through sports. Public Safety also sponsors Police Athletic League teams in football, baseball, track and field. Several Public Safety Officers are avid golfers and serve as coaches. Other officers help with tutoring and work on character development. He said Pencils and Putters is another way that officers are involved with youth in the community and serve as role models in the community beyond their jobs.

Mr. Turno stated this program has been very helpful to the parents, as they know their children are being helped with their homework and are being taken care of during this time and receive character building training.

He said very little cost has been involved with the program. Officers and others donated their time and most of the food was donated by sponsors of the program. He said he was excited about the program. It is a good feeling to know that you are helping youth in the community. He said there will be five people who will go to present the program to the Municipal Association, which will be about a 20 minute presentation.

Council felt this was an excellent program and was pleased to have it presented as the city's application for the Municipal Association award.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 P.M.


Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk