

Aiken City Council Minutes

SPECIAL MEETING

April 20, 2004

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

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Bill Huggins, Larry Morris, Glenn Parker, Ed Evans, Pete Frommer, Sara Ridout, Philip Lord of the Aiken Standard, Josh Gelinas of the Augusta Chronicle, and about 110 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M. Mr. LeDuc led in prayer, which was followed by the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

CAPITAL PROJECTS SALES TAX

- Sales Tax
- One Cent Sales Tax
- Projects
- Referendum
- Capital Sales Tax

Mr. LeDuc reviewed for those present the process which had occurred so far to initiate the renewal of the One Cent Capital Sales Tax.

Mr. LeDuc stated in January the County of Aiken started the process to initiate the renewal of the One Cent Capital Sales Tax. A committee has been formed which began meeting on April 1 to develop the referendum that will be placed on the November ballot. In 2000 the city allocated \$12,457,740 for capital projects in the City of Aiken. Assuming a 3% growth rate and the same formula that was used previously to arrive at the revenue for each of the communities, we should now expect to receive approximately \$28 million through 2012.

At the April 15, 2004, committee meeting they voted to use the formula based on 50% point of sale and 50% population as the basic guidelines for the amount of funds that will be allocated to each governmental agency. Once they receive all the projects, they may determine that there are projects within the cities or the county that need to be moved u, and therefore they want to have some latitude to be able to add more funding to some agencies. They indicated that any funding changes would be minor, but they want to look at the good of the entire county when selecting the projects to be on the list. They also stated that, if they decide to eliminate some of the funding, they would communicate this with the particular agency so that adjustments can be made accordingly within their funding list.

City Council discussed at meetings in October, January, February, and March the various projects for the One Cent Sales Tax Ballot. He said, based on Council's comments, he had prepared a list of projects ranging from \$23,790,000 to \$40,285,000 and had also prioritized the projects within the various categories from the highest to lowest ranking and prepared a sheet with a priority listing for all the projects as currently listed. Also indicated on the list is a minimum amount of funding needed to initiate these projects and what the cost would be if the projects were fully funded. If City Council chooses these projects, we would suggest that Council use at least the minimum funding and then decide if you want to fully fund the project or provide funding somewhere in between. We will be limited, though, to approximately \$28 million in funding. If Council desires, you could add projects or funding if additional dollars become available as the committee further analyzes all the projects. Also provided was a short explanation of each of these projects to help Council in finalizing our recommended list, along with letters from some organizations concerning their projects. Included also is an additional page which lists those projects formerly under Transportation as ARTS Projects. These projects, from now through 2012, should be funded through the ARTS Program. These are listed in the

priority in which staff feels they should be allocated by ARTS, and if Council agrees we will ask them to consider the new priority listed at their next meeting.

The committee has requested that all the projects that have been selected, along with their priorities, be sent to them by April 28, 2004. Their next meeting is on April 29, and they will start pulling together these lists to review overall what projects will be included on the referendum and in what order. They hope to have all this work completed by early June so they can report back to Aiken County with their recommended list.

At this meeting Council will have an opportunity to discuss these projects and to finalize the list that will be submitted to the County's Capital Sales Tax Committee. After Council has made their final changes, these projects should be approved through a formal vote by City Council.

Mr. LeDuc stated Council needed to review the proposed list and select the projects, the funding amount and prioritize the projects. He stated the proposed minimum list totals \$23,790,000, so Council has about \$4,200,000 that can be added to the minimum total for \$28,000,000 in projects. He said, at the minimum funding, all projects on the list could be funded, and \$4,200,000 could be added for projects on the list.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated he felt the One Cent Sales Tax was very, very important to the City and the County. He pointed out, with the current sales tax, the City has been able to accomplish projects that could not have been done for a long time, and these improvements have improved the quality of life in Aiken. He said this is Council's fifth meeting to talk about proposed projects. He said he felt the proposed list was a good list; it is a diverse list covering many projects and different areas of the community. He said Council needs to approve a list to be sent to the Committee for review for the referendum. He pointed out a lot of citizens are present and probably are present for a couple of items on the list. He suggested that Council discuss the proposed African-American Cultural Center and the Railroad Depot first. He suggested that perhaps these two projects could be funded through the Accommodations Tax rather than the One Cent Sales Tax. The Accommodations Tax is a tax on hotel and motel rooms. He pointed out this is a tax that people visiting the city pay rather than local citizens. This fund amounts to about \$260,000 per year. He said this fund had been used to fund projects to increase tourism in the city.

Council decided to discuss the African-American Culture Center and the Railroad Depot projects first, since most of the people were present regarding those two projects.

Mr. George Estes, of the South Carolina Heritage Corridor, appeared before Council and reviewed for Council how tourism is improving and increasing in South Carolina. He pointed out the African-American Cultural Center and the Railroad Depot could be another part of the tourism package, draw tourist to Aiken, keep them here longer and keep them spending money here. He talked to Council about African-American tourism and the S.C. Heritage Corridor. He encouraged Council to consider the impact that these projects could have on tourism in the community.

Mr. Wade Brodie, Chairman of the Aiken Corporation, encouraged Council's consideration of the African-American Cultural Center and the Railroad Dept. He said Aiken Corporation supports these projects.

Mr. Scott Hunter, of the African-American Cultural Center Board, appeared before Council. He said he was asked to help raise funds for the Center. He said they will try to raise between \$360,000 and \$750,000 in many ways over a period of time. He felt the Center would be a good tourism project, and that the project should be funded from companies and private individuals and not just government. It was pointed out by Councilman Smith that the Lucy Laney Center in Augusta does not support itself, but is supported by the City of Augusta. Mr. Hunter stated he felt Aiken was a different community, and that everyone would be proud of the Center when it is established.

Councilman Smith expressed concern about the Cultural Center later becoming the responsibility of the city because it could not support itself. He pointed out the Lucy

Laney Center in Augusta, which is a nice facility, is supported by city funds. He pointed out the City of Aiken had been asked for \$360,000, plus another \$260,000 for the adjacent lot which is needed for parking, and the group has asked the County for \$500,000. He was concerned about what happens if all these funds are not allocated.

Councilman Cunningham stated it had been suggested that funding come from another source, the Accommodations Tax funds, and that the funding be tied to matching funds, with funding given when a certain amount is raised. He felt this would probably help the funding raising efforts from the private sector and help with the concerns of Council that the community support the project.

Mayor Fred Cavanaugh stated one of Council's concerns is the operation of the center. He pointed out Councilmembers have expressed the feeling that the City should not take over funding for operating the center, and that Council could state that they do not plan to take over operation funding for the Center, but only to help purchase and renovate the building.

Reverend Doug Slaughter, of Second Baptist Church, stated the proposed project is not a black thing, but a community thing, and it was felt that it would be good for all of Aiken. He said that Mr. Estes of the Heritage Corridor had pointed out that one of the four major niches of the Corridor is the African-American niche, which suggests that one of the major generators of tourism in South Carolina is activities that are related to the African-American community. He stated the monies the group has asked from City Council and County Council have been for the purchase of the property and the initial development of the Center. He pointed out the proposed budget the group had developed showing income streams for the day to day operations of the Center. He said he did not feel that it was a good idea for the City to be involved in the day to day operations of the Center. He said the Committee is not desirous for the City to be a part of the ongoing operations of the Center. He said the Committee is asking the City to help develop the Center. He said he also did not have a problem with funds being matching funds from the Accommodations Tax, as he felt the Committee would do an excellent job with the fundraising. He said he felt that by the end of the summer they would have \$360,000 for the City to match with Accommodations Tax funds. He said that, if Council wishes to move the Cultural Center to Accommodations Tax he would suggest that Council consider adding the Pine Lawn Cemetery to the One Cent Sales Tax list. He stated a fence is needed for the cemetery, and it needs to be cleaned up to beautify this area along Hampton Avenue. He pointed out there are no funds to maintain the cemetery, but Second Baptist and other churches in the community have taken on the responsibility to keep the cemetery clean. He briefly reviewed the history of the cemetery, which was initially run by the city. He said he did not feel that anyone has a problem with funding for the Cultural Center from the Accommodations Tax, but they wanted the City to participate in the project and yet did not want to put a burden on the city for operations of the Center. He stated the Committee had asked for \$15,000 per year from Accommodations Tax Funds, if the Center is designated as the hub for the tourism program for the tours of Aiken. He asked that Council still consider this proposal. He felt the Cultural Center would be a good starting point for the tours.

Council continued to discuss the project at length. There was concern on City Council as to what would happen if the County did not fund the request. The response was that they felt there was enough community support for the project to see it through its fruition, even if over several years.

Ms. P. K. Hightower read a letter from Willar Hightower, who could not be present because of another meeting. He pointed out the usage and importance of the Lucy Laney Museum in Augusta and the previous criticism of the Museum by some Councilmembers. He urged Council to support the Cultural Center and to fund the project.

Mayor Cavanaugh read a letter from Kay Hodge Boynton expressing opposition to the proposed cultural museum as a divided segregated project.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated for discussion he would propose that the Cultural Center not be funded from the One Cent Sales Tax, but be funded from Accommodations Tax Funds

over a five year period at \$75,000 for four years and \$60,000 on the fifth year, for a total of \$360,000.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out the Accommodations Tax funds had been used for a variety of projects, with the two most prominent projects being the Aiken Center for the Arts and the Aiken Community Playhouse. The Aiken Center for the Arts was funded \$250,000 over a two year period. The Aiken Community Playhouse on Newberry Street was funded \$160,000 for two years. He said the City would have available approximately \$120,000 every year in Accommodations Tax money that could be used. In addition, there would be approximately \$40,000 to \$45,000 that has to be used specifically for cultural and recreational type events from the Alcohol Sales Tax which could also be used if Council desires. This was used for some improvements in Hopelands Garden and Weeks Recreation Center. Altogether, there could be \$160,000 to \$170,000 per year for the Cultural Center, the Railroad Museum, or other projects that Council may desire.

Councilwoman Clyburn discussed the time frame for funds if the Cultural Center were on the One Cent Sales Tax versus the Accommodations Tax funds. She stated it seemed that funds might be available earlier through the Accommodations Tax funds.

Mr. LeDuc stated he felt the earliest funding that would be available through the One Cent Sales tax for any project would be some time in 2006. However, through the Accommodations Tax, funds could be available starting July 1, 2004.

Councilwoman Clyburn was concerned that if the project was taken off the One Cent Sales Tax that there be a commitment that Accommodations Tax funds be used for the project. She was concerned that \$75,000 each year was stretching the project over a long period of time. She stated since the Center for the Arts was getting \$125,000 per year, why could not Council grant \$125,000 a year over a three year period. She said because Council cannot bind future Councils she would like to see the funding accomplished in the next two years, to assure that the commitment is fulfilled.

Councilman Cunning stated he felt it was important that the community match funds committed by the City.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated he would also like to have the Railroad Depot project funded under the Accommodations Tax funds at \$50,000 per year, which would amount to using \$125,000 per year of Accommodations Tax funds. He pointed out this fund is paid for by tourist and visitors, and the funds are intended for tourism projects.

Council then discussed at length the process for committing Accommodations Tax funds. Councilwoman Vaughters was concerned about committing to Accommodations Tax funds at this time, because she did not feel she had information about other projects that could possibly use these funds. Mr. LeDuc pointed out that for the Aiken Center for the Arts Council agreed to use funds for the project, and this was included in the budget process as a line item each year. He pointed out that every year Council still has to vote on the use of the funds, but Council had made an agreement.

Mr. Gary Smith, City Attorney, pointed out that Council cannot bind future Councils, so if the makeup of Council changes, there could be a possibility that future Councils may not want to fund the project.

Council also discussed the purchase of the vacant lot at Richland and York and felt this should be included in the project for the Greenway Program.

Ms. P. K. Hightower spoke again and expressed concern about the Northside Regional Park on the former landfill. She was concerned whether there may be hazardous materials in the landfill and about monitoring wells on the property.

Councilwoman Vaughters stated she sees so many worthwhile projects on the proposed list that will pertain to projects in the neighborhoods of people represented at this meeting. She said she wanted the landfill to be cleaned up as she felt this would be good for the neighborhood. She said she was a strong supporter of storm and sewer

rehabilitation which needs to be fully funded. She pointed out that funding for the one cent sales tax would not be available again until 2012. She said she wanted something done about the infrastructure as soon as possible, as there are major problems, and she did not want to see sewer rates raised to take care of the problems. She said she would rather see the work done under the One Cent Sales Tax. She felt these infrastructure projects would be supported by a great majority of citizens and not be divisive. She said she could not support the separate museum, because she felt we already have a good museum that needs money, which could not be done if we create other museums.

Councilwoman Clyburn stated the Northside Regional Park in the former landfill was a project for which she was fighting hard, and she felt the project needed to be done. She said she felt the money should be funded for the project, as it does not take away from the other projects and is something that needs to be done for the northside. She asked that this project not be talked down. She felt the Cultural Arts Center, the Railroad Depot, storm drainage, the park on the northside and the other projects could be done as they are not in competition, but enhance the neighborhood.

Councilwoman Clyburn stated she would like to add the Pinelawn Cemetery project to the list. She said the project included fencing and landscaping. She said the community would help raise money for the fencing. She said she felt all the projects were good for the community, for tourism and everyone, and money was available for the projects.

Mr. Wade Brodie stated there are two ways to finance the Cultural Center and the Railroad Depot. One is the One Cent Sales Tax, and the other the Accommodations Tax. He pointed out both have uncertainties. He said the Sales Tax might not pass, and then there would be nothing for anyone. On the Accommodations Tax, future Councils could change the funding. He said he would like a commitment from this Council that they would fund as much as possible of the \$360,000 in the next two years.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated he would be willing to support Accommodations Tax Funds for the Cultural Center and the Railroad Depot as long as he is on Council to meet the agreed upon amount. He felt both projects are tremendous projects for the community and will bring in tourism.

Councilwoman Price stated she had had people tell her that there were projects on the list that they do not support. However, since there are a few projects on the list that they do support, they are willing to vote for the One Cent Sales Tax. She said there needs to be something on the list to encourage people to support the One Cent Sales Tax. She said there had been comments that projects such as the Cultural Center divide the community. She said there are many people who are interested in the African-American Center that are non-African-American.

Council continued to discuss how to fund the projects, how much to fund and whether funding would be One Cent Sales Tax or Accommodations Tax funds. It was felt there has to be some trust that Council will do what is right if Accommodations Tax funds are committed.

Councilwoman Price moved, seconded by Councilman Cuning, that Council approve a minimum of \$75,000 per year for four years and \$60,000 the fifth year from the Accommodations Tax Funds or Alcohol Tax funds, and if additional funds are available, increase the funding each year to accomplish the \$360,000 funding earlier for the Cultural Arts Center, and that \$50,000 be funded for five years for the Railroad Depot for a minimum funding of \$125,000 each year for the two projects, with funds being matched by the community. The motion was approved by a vote of 6 in favor and 1 opposed. Councilwoman Vaughters was opposed to the motion.

Mr. Owen Sheetz spoke to Council on behalf of the Railroad Depot and pointed out that the railroad was a very important part of the history of Aiken. He said he felt the Railroad Depot reconstruction would be a very good project for Aiken. He pointed out the railroad had a lot to do with bringing the Winter Colony to Aiken. He asked for Council's support for the rebuilding of the Railroad station.

Ms. Brendolyn Jenkins appeared before Council asking for clarity on the proposed funding for the two projects. She pointed out funding of \$150,000 each year would assure funding for the projects earlier while this Council is in office. She was concerned about the commitment of Council for the funds.

Mr. Ronald Finney stated he felt both the Accommodations Tax and the Alcohol Tax funds should be used for the projects, and he did not feel that they should have to resort to fundraising efforts for something that will benefit the entire Aiken community and South Carolina. He asked that Council support funding for the Cultural Center.

Mr. Eli Wilson, III appeared before Council asking that Council support the African-American Cultural Center. He said this would help provide some history of the African-American people that the children will not get in the school system. He said he felt money should be spent in the Hahn Village and Nicholson Village area rather than in the Hitchcock Woods area. He asked that Council support funds to purchase the property for the Cultural Center.

Ms. Chris Holloway-Justin stated she felt the project had been made a black-white issue and we need to get past that issue.

Councilman Smith stated the question of being divisive had been brought up. He said a lot of his constituents do not feel that their funds should go toward the Cultural Center. He said he was concerned that the project may be divisive. He said, however, he had stated he would vote for the project if it were under the Accommodations Tax, because the funds are not from local tax payers, but from tourism.

Ms. Janice Lide also spoke about her concerns about divisiveness and asked that the people work together.

Mayor Cavanaugh called for a vote on the motion to fund the Cultural Center and the Railroad Depot projects from Accommodations Tax funds. The motion was approved by a vote of 6 to 1, with Councilwoman Vaughters opposed to the motion.

Councilwoman Clyburn moved, seconded by Councilman Smith, that since the Cultural Center and the Railroad Depot are deleted from the One Cent Sales Tax List, that funds for the Pine Lawn Cemetery fencing and landscaping in the amount of \$150,000 be added to the list.

Mr. LeDuc stated the area needs to be leveled and stones need to be removed so the area can be mowed easier, and some roads made in the area so people don't drive all over the area. He said possibly a wrought iron fence can be erected around the cemetery. He said the fencing would cost about \$100,000, roads about \$30,000, and \$20,000 for the grading. He said a lot of voluntary effort will be needed to do the work of identifying the graves and cleaning up the cemetery.

Councilman Smith suggested a fund for perpetual care of the cemetery and suggested that about \$20,000 be added to the funds for perpetual care for a project total of \$170,000.

After discussion, Councilwoman Clyburn amended her motion to add the Pine Lawn Cemetery fencing and landscaping project to the One Cent Sales Tax list in the amount of \$150,000 with an additional \$20,000 for perpetual care, for a total of \$170,000 for the Pine Lawn Cemetery. The motion was unanimously approved.

Ms. P. K. Hightower again expressed concern about the Northside Regional Park and creating a park over the former landfill. She said she understood the importance of cleaning up the environment, but she felt the city should be aware of what is involved in the cleanup. She said she was concerned when she met with DHEC and did not find the completed work for the area. She said she wanted to know that the area is safe before it is used for a park.

Council then talked about the Northside Park and what could be done to make it safe, and what the project would involve. Mr. LeDuc reviewed for Council the history of the

landfill, and what was hauled to the landfill. He stated the City would have to follow DHEC regulations in closing out the landfill to be sure it would be safe for a park before any work is done. He said he felt \$4 million could fund the full project, and \$1 million would start the project. He pointed out since this was a landfill the city could not put a lot of structures on the area or trees. He said it has to be basically open grassy fields.

Councilwoman Price stated the area had been unsightly for years, and what is proposed would make it an attractive area. She said her concern is that the area is a safe place for citizens.

Council then started their review of the rest of the list and setting priorities. They were concerned about some of the projects needing coordination and funding from the County in order to complete the projects, as the projects were located outside the city limits of Aiken. They were concerned about storm drainage in the Hitchcock Woods area and the effect erosion from runoff from the City and the County was having on the Woods.

Council discussed the ARTS Funding Projects and the priority of those projects. The general consensus of Council was that the representatives for the committee should ask that the priorities be changed as follows:

**ARTS FUNDING PROJECTS**

<u>Priority Order</u>	<u>Miscellaneous</u>	<u>Minimum Funding</u>	<u>Fully Funded</u>
1	Dougherty Road Intersections	\$ 300,000	\$ 700,000
2	Silver Bluff Road Widening (Indian Trail to Richardson Lake)	4,000,000	4,000,000
3	Hitchcock Widening (Passing lanes only)	2,100,000	5,000,000
4	Connector Road – Whiskey to Silver Bluff ROW Purchase & Preliminary Engineering	1,000,000	18,000,000
5	Connector Road – Whiskey to Powderhouse (Partially Funded in 1 cent Tax)	<u>1,500,000</u>	<u>1,500,000</u>
		\$8,900,000	\$29,200,000

Council continued to discuss and review the amount of funding and the priorities for the One Cent Sales Tax listing.

After much discussion Councilman Cuning moved, seconded by Councilwoman Clyburn and unanimously approved, that the following list be submitted to the One Cent Sales Tax Committee for review and inclusion in the referendum to continue the One Cent Sales Tax for seven years.

POTENTIAL 1 CENT SALES TAX  
CAPITAL PROJECTS

<u>Priority Order</u>	<u>Roadway/Transportation</u>	<u>Funding</u>
1	Dougherty Road Connector to Mall	\$ 350,000***
2	Dougherty Road Connector to Walmart	700,000***
3	USC-Aiken	745,000*
4	New Pumper	250,000**
5	Ladder Truck	700,000**
6	Continue Street Paving Program \$ 250,000 per year	1,750,000
7	Northside Neighborhood Renewal \$250,000 per year	1,750,000
8	Pinelawn Cemetery	170,000**
9	Storm/Sanitary Sewer/Water Impv. 600,000 per year	4,200,000
10	Hitchcock Woods Drainage	3,500,000*
11	Citizen Park Parking Lot/Landscaping	150,000**
12	Citizens Park Restrooms	100,000**
13	Whiskey Road Improvements \$100,000 per year	700,000*
14	Continue Streetscape Program 125,000 per year	875,000
15	Greenway Program	1,000,000*
16	Citizen Park Maintenance Center	1,500,000**
17	Streetscape Bee Lane and Parking (Alley to Richland)	200,000
18	Public Works Complex Expansion	700,000
19	Public Safety Building Expansion	600,000
20	Undergrounding of Electric Line \$200,000 per year	1,400,000
21	Eustis Park Neighborhood Center/Senior Center	1,000,000**
22	Connector -- Whiskey to Powderhouse	1,000,000***
23	Northside Regional Park (Former Landfill)	2,750,000**
24	Environmental Meeting Center (Former Playhouse)	100,000**
25	Hopelands Band Stage Shell	200,000**
26	Whiskey Parallel Connector Study & ROW	325,000***
27	Dougherty Road Corridor Study	150,000***
28	Northside Roadway Study	250,000***
29	Citizens Park Walking Trail	100,000**
30	Mobile Bleachers	50,000**
31	Bike Paths 30,000 per year	210,000**
32	Mobile Stage	175,000**
33	Training Grounds	100,000***
34	Splash Park	250,000**
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$28,000,000</b>

- \* In County
- \*\* Use by County Residents
- \*\*\* Shared Funding Requested of County

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 11:27 P.M.

  
 Sara B. Ridout  
 City Clerk