

## Aiken City Council Minutes

January 25, 2008

### Aiken's Horizons

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Clyburn, Dewar, Price, Smith, Vaughters, and Wells.

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Ed Evans, Pete Frommer, Larry Morris, Glenn Parker, Richard Pearce, Kenneth Cook, Anita Lilly, Sara Ridout, Steve Hale, April Bailey, of the Aiken Standard, and 1 citizen.

The Aiken City Council met in the Aiken City Council Chambers at 214 Park Avenue SW for their annual Council retreat called Horizons 2008, beginning at 12 noon with lunch.

### MAYOR'S COMMENTS

Mayor Cavanaugh welcomed Council and staff to the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual Horizons to review and prepare for the next fiscal year and future of Aiken. One item he pointed out to Council is that in 2010 the City will be 175 years old. He suggested to Council that the City may want to celebrate similar to the celebration for 150 years. He pointed out this takes a lot of preparation and asked that Council think about what they would like to do. Another item he pointed out was the Silver Bluff Road widening and the meetings which had been held regarding the widening. He said he felt Silver Bluff Road will be widened but not widened to the five lanes first suggested, but enough to make a better traffic flow for that area.

### BUDGET

Roger LeDuc, City Manager, presented an update on the budget expenditures and revenues for fiscal year 2007-2008 for the General Fund, Utilities Fund and for the Interfund Loans. Mr. LeDuc discussed the revenue sources, including taxes, business license, water and sewer fees. He stated the revenues are on target for the first 6 months. He reviewed the water consumption for the last 9 years and pointed out the consumption had increased since the 2005 Orion project was completed. He compared the amount of taxes for a \$100,000 home in the City of Aiken, City of North Augusta, and Aiken County, comparing the tax amounts for each. He pointed out the City of Aiken's taxes are below those of North Augusta, but Aiken County had increased, and the School Board taxes had increased significantly. He pointed out City of Aiken taxes are now on line for review on the web site.

Mr. LeDuc then discussed and reviewed the status of the Interfund Loans.

Mr. LeDuc reviewed the city's Wellness Program. He said the City is promoting healthy lifestyles for city employees. He stated the City has partnered with Aiken Regional Medical Center to promote wellness. Some of the programs offered include 3 to 4 lunch and learn sessions each year, preventive screenings, wellness checks in the spring and fall, and an Employee Health Center staffed with a part-time nurse. He pointed out that each employee is required to take a health risk assessment each year in order to maintain their current level of health insurance coverage. He said this year all but three employees took the health assessment. He said the city provides gym reimbursements, lunch hour fitness classes, nutrition and fitness counseling and smoking cessation programs. He reviewed the visits and use of the City Nurse in 2007. He pointed out the city was seeing results from the program, with increased employee moral and health, reduced costs for Worker's Compensation and less use of sick leave.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out the city is presently using GovDeals.com for auctioning of old, no longer used city assets such as tires, computer equipment, ball field light fixtures, vehicles, etc. He said during the last 24 months the City has auctioned 90 items and received \$266,000. He pointed out this was a significant increase in revenue over the old

method of auctioning items using an outside vendor, and it seems a better way to dispose of items all along rather than holding the items and having one auction for the year. He stated the City of Aiken is one of the top 8 sellers in South Carolina with GovDeal.com.

### PRT MASTER PLAN

#### Parks, Recreation & Tourism Master Plan

Mr. Glenn Parker, Parks, Recreation & Tourism Director, stated that in 1986 the City of Aiken hired Arbor Engineering of Greenville, SC to complete the first ever comprehensive review of the Parks and Recreation Department. This review included surveys of residents, an analysis of the park system and an analysis of staffing needs. Based upon that plan, the City developed Citizens Park, Weeks Tennis Center and Skate Park, expanded the PRT maintenance operations and made several internal organizational changes at PRT.

Mr. Parker stated with the changing demographics in Aiken, the concern that PRT has little undeveloped land and the fact that the Open Space and Northside studies were being worked on, it was felt now was the time to update the PRT Master Plan, especially since several new roles had been taken on by the PRT.

He stated the City hired Wood and Partners, Inc. (WPI) from Hilton Head to develop the Master Plan. He reviewed the required components of the Master Plan.

He said a survey was conducted with a mail out to 1,200 citizens, with 384 surveys returned. Of the surveys returned, 78% of the surveys returned were from citizens of the City of Aiken, while 22% were from Aiken County citizens.

Mr. Parker then reviewed for Council the findings of the survey. He reviewed the facilities used, programs used, and condition of facilities. He pointed out the Farmers Market and Hopelands Gardens and Rye Patch were high on the use of facilities.

Mr. Parker stated the information received from the surveys is the first component of the Master Plan—the Findings Report. He said WPI will continue to work on the other stages of the Master Plan, including benchmarking with 12 other cities, marketing assessment, financial analysis, organizational/staffing assessment, level of service and needs adjustment, and cost estimates. He said this information will be shared with Council when the study is completed.

### 211 SYSTEM

#### Public Safety

Mr. Pete Frommer, Public Safety Director, reviewed with Council two items. He briefly reviewed a new program where the Public Safety Officers in the field have laptops in their vehicles and are able to access information needed in the field, rather than having to call Dispatch and use the laptops for completion of reports in the field rather than having to wait and come to Headquarters to complete reports.

He also reviewed a proposal to educate and use the 211 system more. He pointed out Dispatch and other city departments receive many calls which are for other agencies and are for information. He said the 211 system is an easily remembered phone number and can be used to connect individuals with community resources and information they need. He said Aiken County's 211 System has been in place since 1993. The 211 Center is funded by the United Way and Aiken County. The center operates 24/7. He suggested that this system could be used for informational services rather than Dispatch.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out the 211 System is asking for financial assistance and the promotion of use of the 211 System could justify its financial assistance with increased use from city inquiries referred to the system.

## YOUTH/NEIGHBORHOODS

Mr. Pete Frommer, Public Safety Director, reviewed for Council 12 suggestions for improvements or possible solutions to help with a growing problem with changes in youth behavior. He pointed out that last summer there was a problem with youth being out in the neighborhoods all night and calls concerning suspicious youth activities and weapon use. He said the various departments of the city had been working for about six months to come up with suggestions to tackle these problems. Some of the suggestions were youth activities and programs in the neighborhoods, a youth leadership program teaching character and respect to youth, involving more adult males in neighborhood activities, involving seniors as volunteers to help with activities, more community centers, working with the School District and churches to develop more after school programs, and development of a youth protection ordinance or curfew ordinance.

Council discussed the suggestions and were supportive of the suggestions to try to help solve the problem of idle youth. It was suggested by Council that more volunteers be sought, especially from seniors to help with youth activities, and that the city seek more facilities to hold activities or programs, and that the city proceed with a Youth Protection Ordinance. It was also suggested that the city help strengthen existing programs already in place such as the Boys and Girls Club and that the city offer more employment opportunities for youth.

## PLANNING DEPARTMENT

### Comprehensive Plan Design Review Board

Mr. Ed Evans, Planning Director, reviewed for Council some of the issues being faced by the Planning Department. He suggested that the Comprehensive Plan should be revised and completed no later than 2013. He pointed out the plan is to take a long-range view of the character of the city, to be used as a tool for decisions on annexations, rezoning and city utilities, to serve as a basis for development regulations as required by state law, and to serve as a plan for the vision of the city. He pointed out there were upcoming issues such as expansion of the Plan to the south beyond Anderson Pond Road and to the east beyond Toolebeck Road, the Open Space Plan, State laws, and the possible addition of the area east of Beaufort Street to be considered in a revision of the Plan.

Mr. Evans then reviewed the work and background of the Design Review Board. He pointed out the creation of the Downtown Overlay District in August, 2005, resulted in a significant increase in the number of applications for Certificates of Appropriateness and there are two other pending changes that would also cause substantial increases in the number of applications. These include placing more of Old Aiken in an overlay district and creation of a Highway Overlay District, which would establish design standards for developments along major roads.

Mr. Evans then suggested some options for handling a greater workload for the Design Review Board. These include holding more meetings, creating a subcommittee to handle some applications that cannot be approved administratively, creation of an additional board, or increasing the number of projects that can be approved administratively.

## ZONING ORDINANCE

### Amendments St. Mary's Church Landmarks Demolition

Mr. LeDuc suggested that Council may want to consider changing some of the proposed ordinances before Council at their January 28, 2008, meeting regarding St. Mary's Church, landmarks, and demolition. He then reviewed some suggestions for changes in the ordinance which some Councilmembers had suggested would be better than what was proposed for adoption by Council at the last meeting. The Councilmembers were concerned about the proposed definition of demolition, the enforcement of the proposed

definition concerning 40% of the footprint of the building, and removal of landmarks from the listing.

After discussion of the issues Councilmembers were very concerned that citizens and members of St. Mary's Church would be upset as they were expecting some action by City Council at the January 28, 2008, meeting and would be concerned about delaying action until another meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 P.M.

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Sara B. Ridout  
City Clerk