

Aiken City CouncilWORK SESSION

June 24, 2019

Present: Mayor Osbon, Councilmembers Dewar, Diggs, Girardeau, Gregory, Price, and Woltz.

Others Present: Stuart Bedenbaugh, Gary Smith, Sara Ridout, Kim Abney, Mike Przybylowicz, Tim O'Briant, Ryan Bland, Charles Barranco, Lucy Knowles, Martin Buckley, Tom French, Pat Corey, Howart Wayt, Tim Simmons, Mark Chostner, Reggie Ebner, Kay and Ed Brohl, Randy Wolcott, Lloyd Copenhaver, Gary Pope, and Colin Demarest of the Aiken Standard.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Osbon called the work session of June 24, 2019, to order at 5:00 P.M.

FRIENDS OF THE BEST FRIENDRailroad ArtifactsHitchcock WoodsAiken County Council BuildingMuseumBest Friend

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated a group from the Friends of the Best Friend are present to make a presentation to Council regarding the finding of railroad artifacts in Hitchcock Woods and the gift offer of the old County Council building on Richland Avenue to serve as a museum and laboratory to preserve the artifacts. He said Council had discussed the gracious offer which they declined for housing the artifacts. He said, however, given the potential international significance of it, he felt that Council should be briefed on the matter. He noted that the Friends of the Best Friend which was formed with the Hitchcock Woods Foundation and the Friends of the Aiken Railroad Depot. The groups are working together to preserve these artifacts that were found in the Sand River in Hitchcock Woods. He said he was in the Woods last summer when archeologists from the State Department of Natural Resources were digging. He said it is significant and impressive.

Mr. Tom French, Chairman of the Friends of the Best Friend, stated the group was formed as a unit between the Hitchcock Woods and the Depot Friends. He said the artifacts represent a whole new mission for those groups. He said the group is a separate 501(c)(3) with both groups on the board. He said the intention is to extricate and conserve all these artifacts in the Woods because they are so important nationally and internationally. He pointed out that Howard Wayt would give the details of what was found in the Woods and how important they are. He noted a white paper had been included in the Council agenda. The second page consists of a list of bullets as to why these artifacts are significant and why these are top points about the railroad findings. He pointed out the artifacts are from 1832 and still exist underground.

Mr. Howard Wayt stated he appreciated the opportunity to speak before Council about the artifacts and the importance of the artifacts. He noted that over the weekend he had hosted a meeting of the American Society of Civil Engineers in Hitchcock Woods on Saturday. There were about 30 people who came from over the state. He said they were ready to see something that they can't go anywhere else in the world to see and that is the oldest railroad tracks in existence in the world today. He said the history of the tracks is no stranger to the American Society of Civil Engineers because they designated those tracks as a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark in 1970, the 12<sup>th</sup> such landmark that organization designated. When these track were originally found we were not certain that's what they were part of. He said a paper was published which has his name on it, which details the analysis which demonstrated that these tracks are what we thought they were. That they are part of the original Charleston-Hamburg railroad line that extended

from Charleston to Hamburg, South Carolina, and in 1833 were part of the longest railroad in the world and the first railroad to actually run a steam locomotive regular service in the United States. He said that is the beginning of the story.

Mr. Wayt stated the conclusion of the paper was rewritten by the editor to say: The significance of this find is profound. As far as is known, no original wooden rail track remains in existence in the U.S. even in museums, nor is there any intact iron-capped wooden rail anywhere in the world. The fact that there are not one, but two tracks and that they are not only near the original locations, but were also once part of a singular Inclined Plane operated as part of the mainline of the longest railroad in the world in 1833, makes them of extraordinary interest and value as historic artifacts. They also represent the remarkable survival of one of the very earliest and most influential railroads in the U.S.-- one which established precedents and pioneered advancements for the railroad industry everywhere and in so doing influenced the history of the U.S. and many other nations. As such, these tracks deserve recognition as one of the most important artifacts of early American industry, and possibly as one of the most important artifacts of the early history of the U.S. in existence today."

Mr. Wayt stated the Society for Industrial Archeology wrote this, which is the recommending body for World Heritage Sites in the United States. He said the paper which was published in 1999 was a study of the possibility of designating railroad tracks and railroads as Historic World Heritage Sites. The conclusion of that paper was: "Railroads are among the most important industrial locations worthy of designation as World Heritage Sites. The designation of a carefully selected number of outstanding sites would bring to greater prominence the many ways in which railroads have contributed, and in many cases continued to contribute, to the social, economic, political, cultural, and technical evolution of almost every country around the globe."

Mr. Wayt stated they used the B&O Railroad as one of their examples in their study. That was the first common carrier railroad in the United States. Our railroad was the second and far surpassed the B&O very quickly.

Mr. Wayt then showed what the tracks looked like when they were found in 2016 emerging from the sand in the Sand River in Hitchcock Woods. At the time they were not sure what they were. One thing interesting about them is that they were made of wood. All of the rails are made out of wood. He said we are not talking about iron rails. We are talking about wooden rails with iron on top as reinforcement for wear of the wheels. He said the tracks in some places are almost 200 years old. He said they can't be any newer than 1852. He said they believe the tracks are still in the exact location where they were originally laid down. They have so many unusual characteristics. He said you can't find a rail like this anywhere except in the Aiken County Historical Museum. He showed a picture of the iron reinforcement unique to the South Carolina Canal Railroad Company line. He pointed out that they also found other artifacts—a wheel and a piece of iron strap. He said when the railroad was founded in 1827, the goal was to create a connection between Charleston and Augusta so the Charleston people could gain wealth from the cotton that was coming into Augusta from around the CSRA area and going down the river to Savannah. They received their charter in 1827, only the second railroad in the United States to be chartered as a common carrier of goods. The line was expected to be 150 miles long when at that time railroads 3 or 4 miles in the United States were the norm and there was no steam locomotive on any of those. Steam locomotives were not in the United States; everything was horse drawn. When they designed the railroad, they designed for steam and built for a steam locomotive. They built it all out of local pine. They cut a swag 150 feet wide on either side for 136 miles, starting in 1829. They called it the Great Land and Bridge because wherever the land dipped, they drove piles and went straight on through. Where the land rose, they cut straight on through. In 120 miles the line only rose 500 feet from Charleston to Aiken.

Mr. Wayt stated the first steam locomotive designed and built in the United States was the Best Friend of Charleston and it operated on this railroad. It was the first locomotive to be put into regular service in the United States. He said that was the only way to do it as it had to go 136 miles and horses could not handle that. In 1833 the 136 mile long line was completed. He said the South Carolina Canal Railroad Company line became a

pioneer in railroading in the world. Some of the unique features of the SC Canal and Railroad Co. were: This line was the longest railroad in the world in 1833. The first to inaugurate steam locomotive service and night service. This was the first railroad specifically designed for use by steam locomotives. The first and second steam locomotives built for regular service in the United States. The first railroad in the world to use an eight-wheeled locomotive. The first railroad to use four-wheel trucks, before all cars were just two axles and four wheels, like wagons. They made longer cars and carried more freight which allowed them to do more business.

Mr. Wayt showed a picture of Aiken in 1834. Before the railroad came through Aiken was nothing but farm land and a few major landowners. However, after the railroad came through Aiken history was changed. In order for the railroad to go through Aiken an inclined plane was designed for the railroad to go through Hitchcock Woods. He explained how the incline plan worked. He noted there were two tracks and the inclined plane was used to get the cars up and down the hill. He pointed out rollers were put in the ground every 20 feet and used in the process to get the rail cars up and down the hill. He pointed out that a roller had been found in Hitchcock Woods. He showed an illustration of what the tracks would have looked like made out of timber. He said a more full sized re-creation of the tracks can be seen in Hitchcock Woods at the Show Grounds.

He showed a picture of Aiken before incorporation in 1834. He pointed out the engine house for the railroad and the inclined plane was located below the junction of Highland Park Terrace and Highland Park Drive. He said he understands the remains of the engine house are still there, but the archeologists have not dug them up yet. He pointed out that the inclined plane was a bottleneck because you had to wait for enough cars to be on the other side in order to be able to counterbalance to operate the inclined plane. He said if cars came in from the bottom, they could not go up the hill until cars came in from the top to work with them. People had to get off the cars when they arrived here, and they had to wait sometimes for hours and it did not operate over night. Then in that empty country side boarding houses started popping up, dry good stores and places for people to eat opened, etc. In 1834 the Railroad noticed there was becoming a business district and Dexter and Pascalis engineers were commissioned to layout a town which they named after their deceased first president, William Aiken.

Mr. Wayt noted that the bottleneck (inclined plane) which created Aiken eventually had to be eliminated. He pointed out the big ditch with the railroad tracks which residents drive over every day is called the Aiken cut. It was done by hand in 1852 to get rid of the inclined plane. When the inclined plane was bypassed by the cut, it was abandoned. Wooden rails with the iron on top only lasted about 15 years in American history and were replaced by a modern T-shape rail. The wooden tracks did not need to be reused so they abandoned the tracks.

Mr. Wayt stated he did not discover the tracks, but the discovery was quite interesting. He pointed out the dig which the Mayor and Mr. Bedenbaugh saw. The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Archeologists identified this site as of such great importance that they came out for nearly a week to do a preliminary exploratory dig to see if they could figure out the scope of what we were talking about in Hitchcock Woods. He pointed out that they found four rails with the iron on top near the inclined plane area. He pointed out that you can't see that at the Smithsonian; you can only go to Hitchcock Woods where it was put down originally and where it still is today. He pointed out they don't have the pieces of wood in storage at museums. He pointed out that the wood is the rare part, not the iron, which is nearly 200 years old. He noted that none of the other wooden rails in other places survived as far as anyone can tell, except in Hitchcock Woods. He pointed out there are cross ties that held the rails together. There are mud seals 12' x 12' well hued that they put down in sandy soil in order to provide a base for the railroad track when they went through marsh lands, etc. He said all of that is still there intact in Hitchcock Woods. Those were laid down no later than 1832. He pointed out there are also other artifacts in the Woods, including rollers still in place where they were put nearly 200 years ago. After 3 days the DNR archeologists covered the findings up. He said they have found many significant artifacts all over the slopes in Hitchcock Woods. He said Hitchcock Woods has approximately an estimated 2.6 miles of potential locations for artifacts. He said they have only begun. He said the earliest railroad tracks

being in their original position is very significant. He said these are the earliest railroad tracks in the world still where they were put down. They are the only intact wooden double tracks in existence in the world, and the only wooden inclined plane railroad tracks in existence in the world. All the others are long gone.

Mr. Wayt stated these tracks changed the world. He pointed out these tracks are the history we inherited. He said he would be glad to answer any questions.

Mr. Tom French stated as one can see by the magnitude of the artifacts, in order for them to get them out of the ground, they need to get them to some place safe and need to be able to conserve them. They need to have big tanks to soak them in a solution to stabilize the wood. They are not able to pull them out of the sand until that can be done. They need a big facility to handle this, and they need a facility where the artifacts can be displayed and educate the public. If the public cannot see these, then they are worthless to everyone. He pointed out that Lucy Knowles and Martin Buckley have offered the use of the County Council building which they are going to buy from Aiken County. He stated the Best Friends would like to accept the building, but they cannot do that yet. They need a facility before they can raise the funds. Most foundations will ask where this will take place and how it will get done. He stated this is the reason that this is a very important offer. He stated he realizes they have some negative feelings about it, but he would like Council to reconsider since they now know how important it is.

Mayor Osbon stated he did not know of any negative feelings. Mr. French stated he meant for accepting the building. Mayor Osbon stated for the City accepting the building, but he stated he didn't believe anyone had negative feelings for the association accepting the building. He feels it would be great.

Mr. Tim Simmons stated these findings are considered to be bigger than the Hunley. They have actually had the Hunley scientists and their restoration people come to Aiken to tell them how this is to be done. He stated they need a facility to restore the artifacts, and a facility to display them. He stated that Ms. Knowles and Mr. Buckley have been very generous and were going to buy the building and donate it to the City. If the City owns and maintains the outside, the Friends of the Best Friend will fix up the inside and operate the inside. Ms. Knowles and Mr. Buckley's concern is they do not want the building to be destroyed because it represents the Mid-Century Modern Era. He stated a lot of people do not like the building, and he doesn't like it either, but it belongs to a significant era. Mr. Simmons stated this building is listed in a publication by the State of South Carolina mentioning all the buildings that need to be preserved. The County Council building and one other in Aiken is listed as needing to be preserved. He stated the reason they want the City to own the building is because it would ensure it would remain in existence and ensure that it would be used for the public benefit. With the Friends of the Best Friend occupying the building and having a laboratory there to preserve these artifacts and to allow the public to use the building, would be a win – win situation. He stated if they could work to make this a Heritage Site, it would be enormous for the City. He feels it is appropriate for the City to help them do that by at least accepting the building and maintaining it and giving them some Hospitality Tax funds over five years to help them get going. It would be a tremendous payoff for the City and a great investment. He stated they would like the City to accept the generous offer from Ms. Knowles and Mr. Buckley, enter into an MOU with the Friends of the Best Friend to occupy the building, and create another wonderful facility for the community. He said the Clemson folks who are handling the Hunley will assist them and guide them through the preservation process. People will come from all around to see what they are doing. Universities would be involved. It would be big and the City's contribution of taking on that building and helping would pay tremendous dividends in the future.

Councilwoman Diggs asked what the yearly maintenance cost would be. Mr. Simmons stated the City staff would have a better answer for that. Ms. Pat Corey stated it would mostly be the outside grounds. There is not much landscaping. There is a parking area there already, which would be terrific. Once they have a place to put the artifacts, then they can go out and start to fundraise and get grants to be able to extricate. It is a big deal and a big job and fairly expensive. She stated they now have the DNR coming to actually

put big blocks of concrete in so when stormwater comes through there it will back up the sand to preserve the area. The artifacts are being destroyed now because they are open to the elements and when stormwater comes through it washes the sand off the area of the artifacts. She pointed out stormwater washing sand away is how they found the artifacts, but now that they have found them, they need to keep the artifacts covered until they can be extricated. She stated Hitchcock Woods is involved because they want to desperately save it for the City. They spoke with the Mayor and City Manager about a year ago about what a significant find this was, and it is a real possibility that Aiken could be a World Heritage site. She said that is the basis why they wanted to come and make the presentation to Council and tell Council why this is so important. This could have a huge return for the City.

Councilwoman Diggs asked if the Friends would handle the renovation of the inside of the building. Mr. Simmons stated they would handle the inside of the building.

Councilwoman Price thanked the Friends for their history, and stated she has great appreciation for history and Aiken has a tremendous amount of diverse history. She stated as she looks at the diversity with the committee present, there are some pieces missing. There is a small diverse group of folks that have been meeting for about two years on the Aiken Railroad that would welcome being a part of this group and sharing what they know. Having that group, with Larry Friday and Louisiana Wright, would strengthen what the Friends are trying to achieve. She stated she would like to offer those names for the Friends to work with them. She said let's make it what it should be in this town with its rich heritage, having them share what that railroad scene was like. It would strengthen the presentation. Mr. Wayt asked what there were working on particularly. Councilwoman Price stated they were working on an event that would have everyone dress in the clothing people wore then and do a tour down the railroad track. Mr. Wayt asked if she was speaking of the actual operating of Aiken Railroad. Councilwoman Price stated yes. That is one of the things they wanted to do to try to promote the Aiken Railroad. That is the way this town is in terms of bringing everyone together to work on these efforts. She thanked the group for all they are doing for this project. It would draw a lot of people to Aiken and whether the site proposed by the Friends to use is the right site or not, she did not know.

Mr. Wayt stated he had been in and out of the old County Council building for many years. He said the building is almost perfectly set for an open laboratory for the kind of archaeology and science lab where you could have students come into from the community and be able to witness firsthand what is going on. He stated he thinks of the old County Council meeting room, with all the windows, as being almost perfectly sized for a working laboratory for preservation. A lot of what they are talking about is using the out buildings for the majority of the bulk of these artifacts because they are so enormous. This facility is a match made in heaven. It would take almost nothing to convert the interior of it into something that makes all of this history immediately accessible to the young people and visitors in town. He said the building would be an enormously generous gift on the part of Ms. Knowles and Mr. Buckley. Mr. Wayt stated the most interesting thing for him is all of the history that he talked about. He pointed out that it was the railroad that drew all of the things together in Aiken.

Councilwoman Price stated she appreciated them bringing this before Council. She stated there are a lot of individuals who have recently moved to Aiken, and they have no idea of what we have to offer in terms of the historic value of this town. Mayor Osbon stated he believes there are people that have lived in Aiken their entire lives and do not know.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the presentation and history is very compelling, and he agrees on the international significance. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated one of the difficulties from staff's perspective, which they made clear to Council in the budget discussions, is that maintenance of buildings is something the City struggles with and adding an extra building would be nice, but at this point, it would require a lot of creativity, and he does not think we are there yet. He stated we had eight budget worksessions and discussed the maintenance of the fiscal plants and capital assets at a number of them. He said that is a difficult issue given the current assets the City has.

Mayor Osbon thanked the Friends for coming and for their presentation. Councilwoman Price asked how often they meet. Mr. Simmons stated monthly at Security Federal Bank.

Mayor Osbon stated he believes it will be a World Heritage site. What they have is very special. Councilwoman Price stated the City would benefit from this greatly.

#### MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Mayor Osbon stated the next item for discussion is the proposed Municipal Development Commission.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the idea of a development commission was introduced in mid-May. He said this is a matter with staff and Council where there are several schools of thought. A proposed Municipal Development Commission was introduced for first reading at the June 10, 2019, meeting. Several members of Council wanted to defer the item and have another work session on the item before we proceed. He pointed out that the information in the agenda packet is issues that arose after first reading of the ordinance on June 10, 2019, to establish a Municipal Development Commission where questions were brought up on the floor. He noted that he had asked Mr. O'Briant to put together a memorandum with the questions and answers based on what was found in the State Code. The second item of information tries to sum up the overall concept.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he felt there is no doubt that everyone on Council and staff know the direction we want to go in terms of growing the city. It is just a question of how to do it and what mechanisms to use, whether they are existing resources, both monetary and staffing in current officials and current entities, or is it best suited to do it by adding an entity such as the proposed Municipal Development Commission. He said he felt we are at the place where we need to discuss this and talk this through, not as a delaying tactic, but as a way to try to find the answer that meets everybody's expectations while moving us forward as quickly as possible. He said Council had been very clear that we need to address economic development. We have made some effort. When it comes to this sort of thing a lot of progress is incremental. Very rarely do you wake up and have a Fortune 500 company or a major investment announced. He said he had received emails from citizens in the community who have expressed their opinions.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he had given Council issues that address the commission. He noted that the ordinance that was drafted for first reading did not have any exhibits. We did include in the June 10, 2019, agenda some draft bylaws for a discussion standpoint. The bylaws ultimately would be drafted by the commission, not by City Council. He said he felt that was very important to include. He said the question had come up as to whether Council could discuss this item in executive session. The City Attorney felt the matter could not be discussed in executive session, based on the fact that the commission has not been formed yet. He said when it comes to economic development, it has to be about a specific issue whether pending acquisition, pending contracts, or pending development that involves the city. The City Attorney felt the discussion did not fall under any of the categories. He said he could not find an exception under the Freedom of Information Act that would exempt this from the public discussion.

Councilwoman Gregory stated she felt that we were over complicating this matter. She said Council had been talking about this for months. She felt all are on the same page for developing an initiative and moving forward. She pointed out that Mr. O'Briant had made a presentation of what could potentially be a direction. She said they left the meeting asking staff to show what the Aiken initiative would be as the document presented came from another city. She pointed out that instead of that occurring, it turned into an item on the agenda with a draft that was presented to Council on Thursday before the Council meeting with a structure that Council had not discussed. She felt that Council needs to discuss the item and discuss where we are actually going with this commission. She said she did not agree with the draft or the structure. She wondered if Council needed an ad hoc committee or a group of experts to get together and start moving this forward. She felt that is why we are here. It is a work session. It should be public. She said she did not know who wants to discuss the matter in executive session.

She said she does not, and welcomes everybody to give their feedback . She felt the matter had gotten over complicated. She felt Council should talk about the commission, and the potential draft and structure that was presented to Council.

Councilwoman Price stated the idea at the first meeting was to propose a commission. She pointed out that someone requested a document. She asked who requested the document to be on the agenda at the June 10, 2019, meeting. She pointed out that document had not been reviewed or discussed by Council first. She pointed out that someone requested the City Manager to have the document on the agenda.

Councilwoman Diggs stated she remembered some documents that had been presented that had a listing of some cities in South Carolina that had something similar, but she did not ask for anything further.

Councilwoman Gregory stated Council left the work session with the understanding that the next proposal, not an item on the agenda to vote on, be an Aiken version, but that never happened.

Councilwoman Price stated normally when the City Manager provides Council with a document, there is discussion first before it is presented to the public. She pointed out that someone had to say to the City Manager that they wanted to have the document on the agenda or he would not have placed it on the agenda for public review unless someone had requested it. She noted that no one seems to know who requested it.

Councilman Woltz stated he felt the first thing to discuss is whether Council wants an economic commission or not.

Councilwoman Price stated if we don't want the economic commission and don't want to get ahead of some of the things that are coming, then we don't need to waste the public's time. We need to say we are not interested in this commission and move on to something else.

Councilman Woltz pointed out there is a template put out by the State. That was brought in by our current economic person, Tim O'Briant, for Council to look at. Somehow the template got changed around within the city, the newspaper picked it up and the information that came out was wrong. A lot of misinformation was put out that is not correct. It was not the presentation, it was just incorrectly interpreted. He pointed out that Aiken has an economic development arm, but it is not very strong, and it has not been working as we have been stagnant in our growth. The issue is about getting growth in the city. We have to have growth to make the city work. He noted that the city can only raise money a couple of ways, with one being through growth and the other through taxes. He said we can't tax ourselves enough to get out of this, but we need some growth. In the last few years the 1% growth isn't really doing much. He said the question is does Council want to grow the city and do we want to have an economic development commission. After that we can pick the form.

Councilwoman Gregory stated that would be the ideal way, but that is not the way it happened.

Councilman Dewar stated he had never liked the idea of seeing something on a Thursday with a vote on Monday. He felt that should not be done. He pointed out that at the June 10 meeting, Council voted for it, with him opposing the item. Councilwoman Gregory pointed out that she was not present at the meeting. He said he did not think anyone on Council is against economic development. He said it depends on how you define economic development. He said when he sees a commission, as proposed, using taxpayer money for developers he is opposed to that. He said he did not like the idea of using taxpayer money to subsidize businesses coming into the city. He noted that we have had a steady level of reinvestment in the city, which a lot of people don't recognize. He pointed out that \$20 million a year is reinvested in the city, but people are not happy because we have not grown in population. He also pointed out there are 6,000 donut holes. He said if we annex and cut that number in half, that would be a lot of growth for the city. He said that did not seem to be where Council wants to go. He said he agrees

with Councilwoman Gregory that he would like to see something specific if we are going to talk about a commission. He said he is scared when he sees that the commission can borrow money, spend money and make decisions that he thinks should be Council's decisions. He said he needs a lot more details before he can support an economic development commission.

Councilwoman Gregory stated she is so excited about what we can do on the economic development side. She felt there is amazing potential. She felt the way this is developing has been messy, but it should not be messy. She felt we are over complicating things. She felt we really don't have an economic development arm. She pointed out that Mr. O'Briant started in economic development with the City of Aiken a few months ago. That is new. He has not been empowered or given a team, direction, and initiative. She stated we have not established a plan. She felt that is what we wanted to establish in the meeting where Council requested some documents, such as the best practices from all of the cities in the State of South Carolina. She felt that should be discussed and something developed. She said we have some paper from a city that is very generic instead of structured. She said to start to move forward for growth we need to bring the heavy hitters, the brains, and the creative people to the table and start a discussion to set initiatives, goals and a mission. Then maybe take it to the next level. She said Council had not done that. She said to have a commission with a set structure and people before we have even met as a whole to move this forward and develop a plan is backwards for her.

Councilwoman Price stated she was going back to Councilman Woltz's question of, do we want it. If we don't want it, then Council needs to stop the discussion now. She said if we are satisfied with the pace of our town, and we believe the Aiken Corporation is the solution, then we should stop the conversation and not go any further. She said that is the primary question, does Council want an economic development commission and does the staff want it. If the staff believes this is not what we should be implementing, based on their advice, Council should consider that. If Council does not want a commission, it is a mute discussion in terms of moving forward.

Councilman Woltz pointed out there is so much misconception about the matter. It has been pointed out that a position would have to be created. He noted that we already have a position. Another question is why Aiken Corporation can't be the economic commission. He pointed out in the proposal Aiken Corporation would be an adjunct to a new commission. Council has no control over the Aiken Corporation, but would have control over a new commission. He pointed out that we would not get people involved until Council agrees to set up the new commission. The people involved would be the experts and could use the state guidelines for the set up and come back to Council. Councilwoman Gregory stated it would be great if experts were given the guidelines to work with and present their proposal to Council. Councilman Woltz stated his understanding is that is the idea, but it is not the way it has been presented.

Mayor Osbon noted that Councilman Dewar had asked for an example of walking through the whole process. He asked that staff give a scenario.

Councilman Dewar pointed out that there really was not a template, but it was the enabling legislation which was included in the agenda. He said Councilwoman Price's question was a loaded question as to whether Council is against economic development and if so no need to go any further. He said he felt Council wanted economic development, but the question is how we get there. He said he looked at the enabling legislation and tried to relate it. He said he felt it would be a challenge to find seven people in Aiken to appoint to such a commission that are unbiased, and not involved in matters that would be a conflict. He said it scares him when we talk about a commission that can borrow money and do some of the things in the enabling legislation. It might work well for Columbia, Florence, and Greenville, but he was not sure that it would work for Aiken.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff talked to others around the state and the legislation was formed in the mid-80's and some jurisdictions formed them, but over time they have now migrated over to 501(c)(3) type entities like the Aiken Corporation. He said Mr. Gary

Pope said he had talked to some of his colleagues and there are really not any examples of any redevelopment commissions now. The law is still there so entities could create, but the ones that implemented them back in the mid-80's have morphed or migrated over to 501(c)(3). It was noted that all of Greenville's redevelopment corporations have become 501(c)(3) corporations.

Mr. O'Briant pointed out that no two of the 501(c)(3)'s are alike. Some are completely independent. Some are staffed by the city.

Councilwoman Gregory stated she thought Mr. O'Briant was going to come back with some people that he would reach out to in the community—your team—whether it would include Council or not and come back and propose a potential plan or guideline. She said she personally thinks a more independent approach is more productive. She thought it was going to be a get together of developers, etc. to talk together, brainstorm, bring an initiative, set a mission, set goals, set objectives, and then Council hear it, but that did not happen. Instead it appeared on the agenda, and she was concerned.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated in terms of the process, it is not unusual for individual Council members, at their discretion, to ask to have items on the agenda. He said that had been done regularly over recent years and in his tenure.

Councilwoman Gregory stated she felt that is a good thing that Council is able to have that liberty. She felt the document for the bylaws and structure for the redevelopment commission was what threw her and the fact that Council was to vote on the item at the Monday meeting. She did think they might vote on a body or group of people, or an ad hoc committee, but not the document.

Councilman Dewar stated what he is sensing is that staff needs to do more work before bringing the matter back to Council for further discussion.

Councilwoman Price stated that was said at the last meeting. She said it was stated that Council would have several discussions.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated earlier this year Mr. O'Briant's duties shifted to focus more on what those duties are in terms of managing economic development. We could bring back to Council at the next meeting a sense of what those duties are. He said nothing prohibits staff from working with individuals in the business community primarily to offer advice, support, etc. for potential projects. He said to have a municipal development commission could work, but he felt it would add a layer to the process. He said when it was presented to him on May 14, 2019, Mr. O'Briant had mentioned it in passing along with a number of things. In looking at it more, he felt that it has positive attributes, but he felt that if something like a municipal development commission were to be implemented as written, it would add a layer in a lot of cases. He pointed out that the projects would have to, in addition to the municipal development commission, go to the Planning Commission on a normal schedule and then to City Council. He said maybe that could be a good thing, but then again it may not be in terms of the time limits factor. He said he knew that efficiency is something that Council is very concerned with. He said he was not convinced that a municipal development commission would add to the efficiency. However, there could be other areas of improvement by having the commission. He felt if staff could present a more focused objective and description for economic development and for the position, that is something that could be implemented more quickly and could draw more cohesive support on Council from what he was gathering from listening to comments.

Councilman Woltz stated the development commission is something that has been used successfully by many towns. They may have changed some things. He said what he was hearing Mr. Bedenbaugh say was that we are going to reinvent the thing, and we have not done that. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he did not want to reinvent. Councilman Woltz stated the Planning Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeals are reactionary boards. They react to what is brought to them. The big difference is that an economic development commission should be proactive and going after business, soliciting business and helping with growth, taking care of donut holes, taking care of business out

to I-20, etc. He said we have to have a group that is able to do that. He pointed out that Council can always change the commission. Council would have the switch and can turn it on and off. He said Council does not have that switch with the Aiken Corporation. He felt Council needs to start somewhere. He said to think that we can do better than these other cities have, possibly we can, but why spend the time, money and effort to reinvent something that has worked in the past and move forward. If we are going to get industry leaders to serve on the commission and do things, they will know more about it than Council does and be able to bring us better ideas. He said we have to start with something.

Councilwoman Gregory stated she felt that we need to give Mr. O'Briant an opportunity to march this. He works for the city. He is the guru in economic development, and he knows his stuff. She suggested that Mr. O'Briant start with a plan, set his own structure, and start bringing the people in, the groups, and talk to them. She suggested that Mr. O'Briant be empowered to go out there and try to develop his team that will work together initially. She said Mr. O'Briant would be held accountable for it. However, at the same time we have to give Mr. O'Briant the air that will allow him to flap his wings. She said she was not sure that we had done that. She said we have to start from the beginning, but we had not done that. We went from let's talk about it to complete structure, who, what, when and how. She said we missed the middle area. She said let Mr. O'Briant set goals, objectives, set a team, develop a plan, and present it to Council. She said we need to hold Mr. O'Briant accountable for that.

Mayor Osbon pointed out that Mr. Bedenbaugh is the only person who can oversee Mr. O'Briant. He works for the City Manager. Mayor Osbon stated we need to be proactive, purposeful, and intentional. He said when he talks about development, he is not talking just about industry recruitment as we have the Economic Development Partnership doing that. He said he is talking about housing, incentives for businesses coming in, and the things that EDP does not do. He said he is talking about expanding annexation towards the Interstate. He said those are the types of development he is looking at. He said he did not care if we do it through a development corporation, a 501(c)(3), or through an advisory council. We just need to see some progress. He said he does not claim to be an expert. He does not know what fits our needs, but this was in front of us and it was moving the ball forward.

Councilman Dewar stated the concern is that the term economic development is so broad. He said several on Council are confused as to what defines economic development.

Mr. O'Briant stated he would refer Council to the memo from him to Mr. Bedenbaugh trying to frame the conversation of our goals and objectives and the jobs listed that need to be done. He said we have gotten bogged down in procedures. He said he does not love procedures, but wants to focus on the goals. He said if we were to move forward with workshops and discussion, he would prefer that we concentrate on what we are trying to do and then figure out how to do it. He suggested that memo was an effort to give some examples as far as what the objectives would be.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated Council gets a lot of information. He said we could have Mr. O'Briant sort of catalog what he is working on and what he is doing. He pointed out that a very productive meeting had been held today with an engineering firm that has been working with him, Mr. Przybylowicz, Mr. O'Briant, and Mr. Bland about how to expand sensibly with a plan for infrastructure near the interstate exits. It lays out how it can be done and the potential cost. He noted that all of it cannot be done at one time as it is cost prohibitive, but we can prioritize ways that we can do it affordably, both with existing funds, through borrowing and grants. He said that is an example of work that is in progress that we can report on to Council. He said they are working. He said the processes do take time.

Councilman Dewar noted that almost every paragraph in Mr. O'Briant's memo could be a work session individually.

Councilman Woltz pointed out Councilwoman Gregory's point. We need to let our economic development run with this. Council can't do it as they don't have the expertise

or the time. He said we need to let him work with our attorney and develop this and bring it to Council. He said that is why we hire these people. They bring something to Council and Council makes the decision.

Councilman Girardeau stated you have to be proactive within the process of economic development and Council needs to be involved. He said an idea had been presented and Council had talked about it. He said we needed to talk about it and go forward and give them the sense that we don't want the status quo; we want to do some things. He said we tend to go with this being about businesses, but businesses are about people, subdivisions, apartments, etc. He said there is a supply and demand problem where there is nowhere for people to lease an apartment because they are all full. He said we need to open the door to people and say that is what we want. We want to see it happen. This is one way that we could get the ball rolling, but it is just not a situation where one size fits all. He said Councilman Woltz wanted to push it, and he agreed because too often it gets into a delaying pattern and things aren't happening, and they go away. We need to make it known that we want people to come here.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated there are a lot of projects that come before Council that staff have worked to expedite the process.

Councilman Woltz noted another facet. There are many large corporations in Aiken that have money to give to economic development that we are not going after, and we will miss it if we don't have someone to go and ask. He said we have corporations in Aiken that would like to give money, and adjoining areas are asking for money, and we aren't. He felt we need to go after that. He said we are talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars, and we are missing that. To say that we are doing it, we aren't. He said we have a problem with Generations Park, and what we are going to do with it. If we had some economic development money, we might be able to do a lot at the park.

Councilman Girardeau stated there is a lot we can do with Generations Park, and we need to drive Highway 1 into being an asset along the way in development and the exit. He said we have missed the boat for many years. He said it is not going to happen overnight. He said it will take quite an effort just for the process of getting everything, but it can happen.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he thought going forward staff can bring a more detailed description that focuses Mr. O'Briant on these topics until we determine whether some sort of commission or revamping of existing committees or commissions is made. Staff will keep Council updated on these projects of importance.

Councilwoman Price stated she wanted some clarification on the subject. She pointed out there is a lot of information in the public that is incorrect. One of them is comments made that we have a commission already with the Aiken Corporation. She said she would like for someone to define what Aiken Corporation does so the public will know the role of the Aiken Corporation.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated they are supposed to improve the community through economic development and housing. It is a question now of having the resources since the great recession when they got involved in Crosland Park. They were very successful in the early 2000s with shepherding the old Parkers Paint and Body at Newberry and Richland. The building of the AECOM Theater is their crowning achievement. They were also involved in Toole Hill. Since the great recession, they have been somewhat stagnant, and they are ready to get back into the economic development game. He said one thing talked about in terms of injecting some economic development stimulus is an option that we could develop some guidelines regarding a loan of \$256,000 owed to the City by the Aiken Corporation which dates back a number of years. The loan could be forgiven with the understanding that it be used for certain objectives that Council requests. He felt that could be an option to look at. The Aiken Corporation does not have a full time director. It is made up of volunteers. City staff provides support through keeping the Aiken Corporation documents and minutes. Mr. O'Briant is the liaison for the Aiken Corporation. Councilmembers Diggs and Girardeau serve on the board of the Aiken Corporation. The city has some control over the Aiken Corporation, and the city does not

provide any money directly to the Aiken Corporation. The City provides \$60,000 to the Aiken Downtown Development Association.

Councilwoman Price noted that she had sat through some Aiken Corporation meetings, and they have talked about projects that they are working on. She noted that most of the meetings are just talk, and that is what we are relying on to move our city forward.

Councilman Girardeau pointed out that the Aiken Corporation would like to have a mission and goals moving forward as opposed to just talking about things that could happen.

Mayor Osbon pointed out that the Aiken Corporation is the same thing as the CBC in Columbia which is a 501(c)(3). The difference is that they have a full time director.

Councilwoman Price noted that the Aiken Corporation members are dedicated volunteers that meet. They ask what advice the city can give them for projects they can work on. They want to work, but there is no one full time on the board. They need someone to help guide them.

Mayor Osbon asked if Mr. O'Briant or whoever is in charge of economic development for the city could work in a dual role and work with the Aiken Corporation. Mr. Bedenbaugh stated he thought so, but should look at the bylaws to see if there could be any conflicts. He said there is probably some mechanism in the state law that would allow for that. He pointed out that the director of the CBC in Columbia is a city employee, but he works for the 501(c)(3) that develops in the Vista area.

Councilwoman Gregory pointed out then we have a body that could potentially be more involved to move things forward. Councilman Woltz stated he felt we need to turn it over to Mr. O'Briant and let him run.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated the Aiken Corporation is working on revising their bylaws. He said he felt they would welcome some sort of mission change and direction.

Mr. O'Briant stated he is on the bylaws committee, and they have had some discussions about tightening the relationship with the city so it would not be a surprise to further those discussions.

Mayor Osbon stated we will reach out to the Aiken Corporation and will give them some direction for guidelines on being proactive, purposeful, intentional regarding annexation, housing, industry and small businesses.

Councilwoman Price stated she wanted to make a statement regarding Wade Brodie. She pointed out that Wade Brodie took a lot of time and effort to assure that things happened with the Aiken Corporation and their projects. She pointed out that at this time we don't have a Wade Brodie to do that.

Mr. Reggie Ebner stated that he had six years' experience with the Aiken Corporation. He said the Aiken Corporation was established as a 501(c)(3) to serve at the pleasure of Council. There is also a reverter clause to the city. He said there is an easy mechanism to fund the Aiken Corporation. He said he is all for development and redevelopment of the city. He pointed out that in recent times we have only had 1% growth per year. He also pointed out Section 31 for the development commission, which says in a number of places in Chapter 10 that they are supposed to use local, private planning funding. A 501(c)(3) requires internal to the commission. The reverter clause is not to the city. He said his understanding is that Section 31 is essentially funded by the city. The city does all the work for it. Section 33 is the reverse. The commission has to come up with their own funding or get loans from the city, etc. He pointed out there is a funding mechanism between the two. He said his guess is that is why all the others went away from a commission to a 501(c)(3). He pointed out there is a 501(c)(3) within Section 31 also. He pointed out that the Aiken Corporation could provide a lot of things that Council wants to do.

Mr. Bedenbaugh stated staff will work for a good focused narrative job description for the position of economic development. He said staff will reach out to Aiken Corporation in the next few days and work with them. He said he felt the Aiken Corporation members would be pleased, and it would be something to energize them. Staff will keep Council informed of the process. Staff will also keep Council abreast of some of the projects being worked on.

The work session ended at 6:40 p.m.

  
Sara B. Ridout  
City Clerk