

Aiken City Council Minutes

February 2, 2007

Aiken's Horizons

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Clyburn, Price, Smith, Sprawls, 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, Tony Baughman of the Aiken Standard, and Betsy Gilliland of the Augusta Chronicle.

The Aiken City Council met at Rye Patch at 100 Berrie Road for their annual Council retreat, called Horizons 2007, beginning at 12 noon with lunch.

BUDGET

Roger LeDuc, City Manager, presented an update on the budget expenditures and revenues for fiscal year 2006-2007 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 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 had gone down; North Augusta has remained about the same, but Aiken County had increased, with the School Board taxes increasing 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 pointed out the city was seeing results from the program, with increased employee moral and health, decreased health costs 8% first 6 months of this fiscal year, reduced costs for Worker's Compensation and less use of sick leave.

CITY HALL

Municipal Building

Expansion

Space

Office Space

The next item discussed was space for city personnel at City Hall. Mr. LeDuc pointed out that as the city grows there is a need for additional personnel and office space. He stated staff has outgrown the space at City Hall. He pointed out that Public Works/Engineering Department had been moved out of City Hall several years ago, but that space is now occupied by Inspections, Legal Services and Neighborhood and Community Development. He stated we are at the stage where immediate space is needed by the Planning Department and IT staff. We are currently preparing to relocate some of our offices from City Hall, including the City Solicitor and the Neighborhood and Community Development staff. In the future other departments will also need additional space as the city grows and will need to relocate as the core operations at City Hall grow. He said we are at the point where we need to determine what short term and long term options are available to the city concerning future City Hall space.

He pointed out after the discussion last year at Horizons, Hank Moormann and Mike Holland had been hired to do a Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study for City Hall. They presented several options to Council in November, including the addition of a third floor on the back of City Hall or the use of the Conference Center or Council Chambers for office space. The cost for these options range from under \$700,000, to convert the Conference Center into a new Council Chamber with the existing Council Chamber converted to offices, to over \$4 million, to add a third floor over the back half of the building and extend all three floors of the building to The Alley.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out the Conference Center had 172 uses last year, with 77 utilizing the kitchen. The City had 70 meetings in the Conference Center, but most of those could utilize other city facilities like Smith-Hazel, the Weeks Center or Rye Patch. He pointed out Newberry Hall is being expanded to seat over 200 persons and could be used by some of the events which use the Conference Center.

Mr. LeDuc stated he would like to get Council's feeling on what changes they would like to see at City Hall, so we can move forward with plans and determine funding options for these changes.

Council then discussed whether or not the Conference Center should be eliminated or whether there should be a multi-use room for Conference Center use and Council Chambers. After much discussion, it was the general consensus of Council that the Conference Center fills a need in the downtown area, and it should not be eliminated. They also felt that the Council Chambers should be a separate room from the Conference Center to maintain the dignity and respect of the Council Chambers.

After much discussion, it was the general consensus of Council that Option A4, adding a third floor and retaining the Conference Center and Council Chambers, was the option which they liked the best. They also asked that the roof be extended to The Alley so the building could be expanded in the future when needed. Mr. LeDuc was asked to proceed with plans and funding options for expansion of City Hall.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL RESPONSE

Fire Station 5

Public Safety Station 5

Whiskey Road

College Acres

Citadel Drive

Mr. Pete Frommer, Public Safety Director, stated staff is recommending that the City of Aiken provide EMS service in cooperation with Aiken County. He pointed out that Mr. Don Morris had expressed to Council his concerns about growth, the increase in senior citizen population, and response time for EMS services, which sometimes can be 30 to 45 minutes.

Mr. Frommer stated that in 1996, the Public Safety Department began the Medical First Responder Program. All Public Safety Officers are trained using standards set forth by the US DOT First Responders National Standard Curriculum. Each officer receives initial training and yearly recertification training. The program is designed to be at a higher level than basic first aid, but less than state licensed EMT training. He pointed out presently Aiken County has limited service for Aiken, and the response time is long.

Mr. Frommer reviewed the options for providing EMS service to the citizens of Aiken. He stated the city could go full service, which would be expensive and would mean the city would have to purchase an ambulance. He said his recommendation is that the city use the Driver/Operators for the Fire Division and provide the next level of service for training as Medical Technicians. He said the city would have to purchase some equipment but could use some present vehicles to respond to the scene. He said he did not recommend taking the fire truck to the scene. He suggested that the city partner with Aiken County EMS to provide service and assistance. He suggested having one EMS trained person at the Headquarters Station and one on the southside, possibly in the new

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proposed Public Safety Station 5, thus providing two people per shift who could respond with medical assistance.

Mr. LeDuc stated it would cost \$10,000 to \$15,000 per person annually to train and implement the program or a cost of about \$90,000 per year to provide EMS services in cooperation with Aiken County. He said if the city were to provide the service alone the expenses would be a lot more, and there would be more liability.

Council discussed the proposal and the fact that EMS response time in the city is long. Some Councilmembers felt for the city to provide EMS service in partnership with Aiken County would be a good use of taxpayers money for this service as there is a growing need for this service in Aiken. Staff was asked to continue to work with the County EMS to see if a partnership could be formed and possibly share Public Safety Station 5.

WHISKEY ROAD ANNEXATION

Pine Log Road

Talatha Church Road

Mr. LeDuc stated currently the Whiskey Road right of way from Pine Log Road south is outside the city limits. The State Highway Patrol covers accidents and assists motorists when necessary. However, traffic control and other enforcement actions are provided on a limited basis. Also the traffic signals are controlled out of Columbia by the Department of Transportation. He reviewed the areas inside the city and those outside the city along Whiskey Road. He said it is felt several improvements could be made to this section of Whiskey Road, especially enforcement actions and better timing and maintenance of signals if this were inside the city which most citizens already think it is. He said last year the city improved the streetscape along Whiskey Road from Pine Log Road to Centennial. Otherwise the State maintains the landscaping, ditches and street maintenance throughout the rest of the area. Approximately 75% of the road right of way is contiguous to the city on one side or the other from Pine Log Road to near Stratford Hall. However, there are several sections on both sides of the road that are currently not contiguous to the city and, due to the gaps, the city has not sought annexation before.

If this section of Whiskey Road were within the city limits, the City would be able to better manage the traffic and the streetscape on either side of this roadway, and this is important as the city moves forward with plans to improve Whiskey Road. The section of Whiskey Road south of Pine Log Road to the Sonic-Burger King area has property on one side or the other already in the city, and this right of way could be annexed immediately. From this portion south to Powderhouse Road there are several gaps where there are no properties along Whiskey Road which are contiguous or where annexation agreements have been recorded. From Powderhouse south to Talatha Church Road there are several signed agreements for annexation. In this particular area the City could evoke the 75% annexation laws to incorporate that entire area north to Sizemore Circle. The other gaps could be filled in from this area north by providing incentives for existing property owners to consider in exchange for signing an annexation agreement.

Mr. LeDuc stated he would like for Council to consider whether they want to annex Whiskey Road, and whether they would like to provide incentives for annexation of properties along Whiskey Road.

Council then discussed the reasons why the City might want to annex areas along Whiskey Road and the advantages and disadvantages of the road being annexed to the city. It was pointed out the Highway Department may oppose the city's annexation of just the Whiskey Road right of way.

Councilman Smith stated he would like for the city to try to annex just the right of way of Whiskey Road first. He said he would prefer not to offer incentives for annexation at this time.

After discussion it was the general consensus of Council for the city to proceed with annexation of the Whiskey Road right of way at this time and that incentives for annexation of properties along Whiskey Road not be offered at this time.

SUCCESSION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Mr. Kenneth Cook, Human Resources Director, reviewed for Council a proposed Succession Management Program. He pointed out the program is a process that organizations use to identify and prepare candidates for key positions and high-level management positions that become vacant due to retirement, resignation, etc. The plan would provide continuity in leadership and avoid extended and costly vacancies in key positions and encourage individual advancement.

Mr. Cook pointed out that 33% of the department heads could retire in less than five years, and all could retire in less than eight years; 83% of all Public Safety Captains could retire in five years or less; 63% of all Public Safety Officer IVs could retire in five years or less, and half of the superintendents in Public Works could retire in five years or less. He said there is a great need to prepare the next generation of City of Aiken leaders. He said there is concern to address the future loss of knowledge, skills and talents of upper managers and the need to keep and develop younger employees. He said the succession management program will help address these needs.

Mr. Cook reviewed the selection process for the program, the leadership/management training, the mentoring and experiential projects, and training grants. He pointed out the program would be limited to 15 people each year. He pointed out the employees in the program would need to commit to a minimum of two years in order to have time to fulfill all requirements of the leadership development portion of the program. He stated the city would partner with Aiken Technical College to provide training for the program.

Council members felt this would be a good program to encourage employees to train for other jobs for promotion within the city.

OPEN SPACE

Mr. LeDuc stated Council had identified protection of open space as a top priority in an effort to keep the Aiken area a pleasant place to live. He reviewed the efforts which had taken place toward this goal, including the Open Space Plan of 2003, appointment of an Open Space Task Force to develop a methodology for evaluating potential open space tracts which might be purchased using the \$1 million from the Capital Projects Sales Tax, selection of a consultant for a natural resources inventory, and an Open Space Forum conducted on January 16 to increase awareness of the open space issue in Aiken.

Mr. LeDuc stated the Natural Resources Inventory will identify valuable areas, and this information can be combined with the 2003 Open Space Plan to more clearly define areas worthy of protection to create the framework of open space. He said the question had arisen about whether small isolated tracts should be considered open space.

Council then discussed their feelings regarding open space.

Councilwoman Clyburn and Vaughters stated they would like to see small parcels of open space in neighborhoods and see each development have open space and recreation area.

Councilman Wells stated he agreed with Councilmembers Clyburn and Vaughters, but he felt we were talking about two different things. It was suggested that perhaps the city could purchase large open space areas as well as small areas in neighborhoods.

Councilman Smith stated he felt it would be good to get some areas for open space in new developments as they are built.

Council continued to discuss their feelings of large open space tracts and small tracts in neighborhoods. The general feeling was that perhaps there should be two programs—one for small tracts in neighborhoods and another for large open tracts.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out that there was \$1 million to purchase open space, but Council needed to consider carefully how they wanted to spend it and what they wanted to


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purchase. He stated it would be helpful to have some criteria for what property should be considered for open space.

Councilman Wells suggested that perhaps a special committee should be set up for considering small areas. He stated he felt the criteria suggested by the Open Space Task Force would work fine for large tracts of land for open space.

Mr. LeDuc suggested that the Recreation Commission could consider the small neighborhood areas and set up criteria for purchase of small areas. It was also suggested that perhaps there could be consideration of designating a percentage of the money available such as 70% for large open space and 30% for small neighborhood tracts.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 P.M.


Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk

Aiken City Council Minutes
February 3, 2007

Aiken's Horizons

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

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Bill Huggins, Gary Smith, Ed Evans, Pete Frommer, Larry Morris, Glenn Parker, Kenneth Cook, Anita Lilly, Sara Ridout, Steve Hale, and Tony Baughman of the Aiken Standard.

The Aiken City Council met at Rye Patch at 100 Berrie Road for continuation of their annual Council retreat called Horizons 2007, beginning at 8 A.M. with breakfast.

MAYOR'S COMMENTS

Mayor Cavanaugh encouraged Council members to review the weekly e-mail Legislative Update from the Municipal Association. He pointed out the newsletter reviews the bills being considered by the Legislature. He pointed out some important bills to be considered which affect the city, including annexation laws, billboards, a bill to allow the Public Service Commission to regulate utilities outside the corporate limits of a city, criminal gangs, etc. He encouraged the Council members to contact the Legislators and talk to them about the bills coming before them.

Mayor Cavanaugh then pointed out some items which he felt were important items which will affect the city and how it grows, including the Southside Comprehensive Plan and how far the city limits should be extended. He felt the Traffic Management Ordinance should be moved up higher on the Planning Commission's list.

MUNICIPAL CUP

Wellness Program

Al Cothran and Anita Lilly presented the City's Wellness Program as a program for consideration for submittal for the Municipal Cup Award. Mr. Cothran presented a poster board with the theme "Aiken's Marching to a Different Beat." He briefly reviewed the program, which includes fitness programs, nutrition, education and benefits. He reviewed how the program works, how the employees are benefiting, and how the city is benefiting with healthier employees and healthier families.

Council briefly discussed the presentation and the program. Council members suggested that the program be expanded to the whole city and that the city become known as a healthy city.

GARBAGE RATES

Commercial

Mr. Larry Morris, Public Works Director, reviewed for Council the city's solid waste disposal costs for commercial and residential service. He pointed out the city is losing money on both the commercial and residential garbage services.

Mr. Morris stated the city provides commercial dumpster collection for businesses within the city limits up to 6 days a week. The current rate is \$2 per cu yd based on the size of the dumpster. The city currently has 433 dumpsters being used by 372 business customers. There are 44,304 trips to these businesses per year. This garbage is disposed of at the Three Rivers Landfill, 10 miles south of Jackson.

Mr. Morris stated the last rate change was in FY 2002-03, from \$1.93 / cy to \$2 / cy. Since the 2002 rate increase, the cost for disposal at the landfill has increased from \$31 / ton to \$35 / ton (13% increase), and the cost of diesel fuel has increased from \$1.24 / gal to \$2.46 (99% increase). He said these cost increases have caused the division to operate at a deficit for the past two years, and with current spending there will be a deficit this

year. The deficit was \$124,142 in FY 2005-06. This deficit is currently covered with General Fund dollars.

Mr. Morris then suggested some proposals for a fee increase to reduce the deficit. He suggested that instead of charging by the cubic yard, a more accurate way of charging for this service is a charge based on the number of cubic yards contained in the dumpster and the number of trips per week required to service the dumpster. Under the new combination rate, the user fee would be determined by the customer's dumpster size in cubic yards multiplied by the tipping fee portion, plus the customer's number of service trips per week multiplied by the service fee portion. This would produce the weekly rate for the customer, which would be multiplied times 52 weeks and divided by 12 months to arrive at the customer's monthly rate. Businesses that have small dumpsters requiring multiple trips per week would see an increase in fees, but would be able to increase the size of their dumpster and reduce the number of trips needed per week. This would hold their increase to a minimum.

Mr. Morris pointed out the advantages of a combination rate. The combination fee is a more accurate way of assessing the user fee by accounting for the volume of garbage and the number of service trips required per week. It would eliminate the revenue shortfall. The combination fee would be recalculated and adjusted each year. This would eliminate the need for changes to the ordinance each year. Automatic adjustment is needed due to the fluctuation in the landfill tipping charges and the fuel charges each year. The upcoming landfill tipping charge increase is expected to be 25%. Because the rate is recalculated each year, the rate is automatically corrected to match the total operating expenses of the division. In years when the division loses money, the next year's rate would be increased to offset the loss, and if the division makes a "profit" the next year's rate would be reduced.

The city has to provide Saturday service for some large volume customers. This service is provided on an overtime basis. A combination charge allows a premium adjustment for Saturday service at 1.5 times the normal service rate. This would cover the overtime salaries and truck operational expenses. This proposal would also allow an additional service charge. During peak seasons, businesses ask for additional dumps. This is an important part of the elevated service level that the city provides at no additional cost to the business asking for service. Occasionally, these additional dumps are abused by businesses using a dumpster that is too small for their garbage volume. The combination fee allows an additional service fee to be charged to recover the city cost for the additional service. Dumpsters must be replaced and repaired as needed. At the end of the year, this cost would be included in the service portion of the combination fee. The cost of these dumpster replacements and repairs could then be passed on as part of the service portion of the customer's bill. This would give every business owner incentive to take care of their dumpster.

Mr. Morris pointed out that in 1999 the city made the decision to allow private waste haulers to service commercial customers inside the city limits. This has allowed private haulers to select those accounts they want to serve and leave the rest for city service. As a result, city revenue has fallen while fixed costs have risen. In order for revenue to equal expenses, either the customer base must be expanded or rates increased. If rates are increased too much, customers may turn to private haulers and cancel city service. This would decrease revenue resulting in a shortfall. He proposed several options which may be considered after initiating the combination rate. He said the city could advertise the city garbage service like the private haulers do. He suggested the City may consider not allowing any more private hauler accounts. This would gradually increase the number of customers that are served by the city. Another option would be to eliminate private hauler service in the city. As current private hauler customer contracts expire, the customers could be required to switch to city service. Another option would be for the city to cease commercial garbage service and let private haulers do the job.

Mr. Morris stated Council needed to decide if the city should be in the commercial garbage business. And, if this is a service the city wants to maintain how the city can make the user fee pay for the service so it is fully funded without general tax dollars being required to meet expenses

Council discussed the proposed rate, and their concern about how the garbage will be picked up. They were concerned about having control problems with private haulers and the service provided. They also discussed that the city could be a monopoly and not allow private haulers for commercial pickup as in the past. It was felt that if the city were to eliminate private haulers that Option 2 would be the best choice and not allow any more private hauler accounts, which would gradually increase the number of customers served by the city.

Mr. LeDuc stated rates could be raised gradually over a three-year period to reduce the impact on small businesses. The proposed commercial garbage rate increase will be brought to Council for action within the next 30 days.

Residential Garbage

Mr. Morris then discussed residential solid waste pickup. He stated the City of Aiken provides garbage, recycling, and yard trash service on a weekly basis for \$12.50 per month. In reviewing the revenue and expenses the solid waste division experienced revenue shortfalls over the last six years ranging from \$304,000 to \$539,000. During this time the user fee was increased twice from \$8.75 to \$11.25 to \$12.50 per residence per month. In the past it has been Council's desire for the service to balance revenues with expenses. In order to make up the shortfall, the fee for garbage service needs to be increased. He suggested that the fees be indexed upward for the next four years. The proposed rate at the end of the period would be \$17.50 per residence per month. This rate includes an increase for personnel and equipment needed for growth. This proposed rate compares well with other cities offering the same service charging a rate to fully fund expenses.

Mr. Morris pointed out private haulers are not allowed in the city for residential garbage pick up. He stated the city had been able to save some of the increased cost for the service by providing roll cart service. He pointed out the number of customers has continued to increase, with the city getting about 300 additional customers with the annexation of Gem Lakes.

Mr. Morris stated he is proposing an increase of \$1.50 per month per residence for garbage pickup for the next two years followed by a \$1.00 increase per year for two years to balance the revenue with the expenses.

Mr. Morris stated he had looked further into a transfer station, but after considering the operation and capital costs he would not recommend a transfer station at this time.

Mayor Cavanaugh suggested that the city may be able to work with the County for a transfer station, as he thought they were considering a transfer station at one time. He said a transfer station would cut down on the number of trips to the landfill.

Mr. Morris stated in his review the cost of a transfer station and operation would not be feasible for the city. The savings in trips to the landfill would not be enough to justify the cost of operation of the transfer station.

Councilwoman Clyburn pointed out that Council states that they have not raised the millage rate for taxes for many years, but she stated many citizens feel the increase in garbage rates is really an increase in taxes—at least that is how they perceive it.

Council discussed the proposed rate increase and stated they understood the reason for proposing the rate increase. However, they were concerned about increasing the rates. It was pointed out that with the proposed increase the City of Aiken's rate would be in line with other garbage providers in this area and in the state.

Mr. LeDuc stated the garbage user fee should pay for the service and at the current rates solid waste does not pay for itself. It was suggested that this matter be brought back to Council for consideration in preparation for the upcoming budget.

NOISE ORDINANCE

Mr. Richard Pearce, Staff Attorney and City Solicitor, reviewed the city's present noise ordinance and stated it is difficult to enforce and does not apply to many of the noises which we have today. He made a presentation to Council of different noises, including an antique Victrola phonograph, fire siren, horn blowing, loud car radio and stereo system. He pointed out the City's present ordinance does not take into account changes in technology and the decibel levels of various sounds. He pointed out today we are subject to leaf blowers and other yard equipment, car sound systems, etc.

Mr. Pearce suggested that the present ordinance be revised and that modern technology be used to assist law enforcement to measure decibel levels. He pointed out that other South Carolina cities have used sound measuring decibel meters. He suggested that the ordinance could have a clearer definition of different noise sources, time-of-day noise measurement minimums and maximums, and categories of sounds. It was suggested that Public Safety officers could be equipped with digital decibel meters to gauge sound levels that might be in violation of the proposed ordinance. These devices cost about \$20. He presented a sample ordinance for Council's information. It was suggested that any cases in violation of the noise ordinance could be taken to Livability Court.

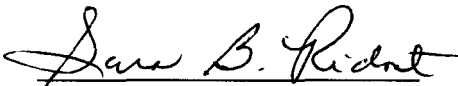
Council discussed the proposal to change the noise ordinance to make it more applicable to the noises of today and felt that it would be good to revise the ordinance to make it more enforceable and more applicable to the noises of today.

Mr. LeDuc stated a proposed noise ordinance would be brought to Council in the next 30 to 90 days for Council's consideration.

GOALS

Mr. LeDuc stated each year at Horizons Council reviews the programs and operations of the city and sets goals as to what they would like to see accomplished next year. He asked that Council review last year's goals and set goals for budget year 2007-08. The proposed goals will be presented to Council for formal adoption.

The meeting adjourned at 12:22 P.M.


Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk