

**MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING
LEXINGTON COUNTY COUNCIL
JUNE 13, 2005**

Lexington County Council held a Special Meeting on Monday, June 13, 2004 in Council Chambers, beginning at 6:00 p.m. The purpose of the meeting was to receive public comment and to vote on a millage rate increase for the Indigent Care Fund and Midlands Technical College. Vice Chairman Cullum presided; Mr. Jeffcoat gave the invocation; Mr. Derrick led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Members attending:	M. Todd Cullum	William C. Billy Derrick
	George H. Smokey Davis	Debra B. Debbie Summers
	Bobby C. Keisler	John W. Carrigg, Jr.*
	Johnny W. Jeffcoat**	Joseph W. Owens

*Mr. Carrigg arrived after the meeting convened.

**Mr. Jeffcoat left the meeting during the public hearing due to illness.

Also attending: Art Brooks, County Administrator; Larry Porth, Finance Director/Deputy County Administrator; Katherine Doucett, Personnel Director/Deputy County Administrator; Jeff Anderson, County Attorney; other staff members, citizens of the county and representatives of the media.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, a copy of the agenda was sent to radio and TV stations, newspapers, and posted on the bulletin board located in the lobby of the County Administration Building.

Mr. Cullum welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. He stated that the purpose of the meeting was for a public hearing on two issues that will require millages increases should Council vote to approve the requested funding (Indigent Care and Midlands TEC). Mr. Cullum read the guidelines for participation and asked that those who signed up to speak provide their name and address and each speaker would be allowed three minutes to make comments. Mr. Cullum added that Council would be voting on a possible tax increase. He asked that attendees refrain from clapping; that the meeting be kept orderly.

Public Hearings - Indigent Care Fund - Mr. Cullum opened the meeting for public comments from those in favor of the one-half (.5) mill increase for the Indigent Care Fund.

No one spoke in favor.

Mr. Davis asked if he could address the body on the Indigent Care Fund.

Mr. Davis stated that when he first came on Council he had no idea what this particular fund was, he asked for information which was provided and learned that Council has no input into how much

the amount is and how much the taxpayers have to be charged. He stated that State law 44-6-146the State of South Carolina takes fifty cents per person of the population for the funds that are directed to the County to go into this fund.... In addition to that fifty cents, they also have a figure of \$13,000,000 which is divided by all the counties in the State and using a formula of population, of income, of property value and indigent care expenses, they come up with an amount that they send the County a bill for and on April 4, 2005, the County received the bill and for fiscal year 2005-06, it is \$930,552 which is substantially more than was paid in 2004-05. That's the reason Council is conducting the meeting to go through the public hearing process of raising taxes more than the CPI because the County has this bill that has to be paid to the State. Mr. Davis stated he wanted everyone to be aware of the reason Council is studying, almost in jest, this particular issue because Council did not have a choice. If the bill is not paid, the State will charge five percent and one and one-half percent per month.

Mr. Cullum opened the meeting for comments from those opposed to the millage increase for the Indigent Care fund.

Mr. Perry Bungarner, 508 Cherry Blossom Road, Gaston, SC 29053 - I'm not really against this indigent care thing, but I am against raising the millage. I'm against raising the millage for anything. There should be some where we can get money without raising taxes. Our taxes are so high now that about half the people are losing their homes and there's something wrong with a County that gets like that, when they let it get like that. So I'm strictly against raising the millage. I don't care what it's for. I mean. That's all I've heard for years now, we're only going to raise it \$7.00 on a \$100,000 house. Well, man, if I had all those \$7.00 they raised it on my house since then I wouldn't have to do anything, just sit back, join the County Council, get on the County Council, something like that. There's something wrong here. They've reassessed our property. Everybody says they're not going to raise the taxes because of reassessment, but everybody knows better than that. I mean, you know they're going to raise taxes. The last time they reassessed, they went out of sight. We sent a bunch of County Councilmen home and that maybe what it takes, but I don't know, I'd appreciate if you'd help us; I mean, you're the only ones that can; nobody else can do anything about it. I realize the State sent you this thing, but you can't do anything about the State they've got a world of their own up there as far as taxes are concerned. They don't care if you lose your house over here in Lexington County. There are a few people up there that do but most of them don't give a hoot; Williamsburg County, Calhoun County, all different places so they just raise the taxes or send you something to get you to raise them, get you in trouble. Thank you.

Mr. Boyce Crow, 107 Water Oak Court, Lexington, SC 29072 - I concur with Mr. Bumgarner.

Ms. Carol Wise, 1637 Taylor Drive, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I concur with Mr. Bumgarner, but I also feel like the way the taxes are assessed and the property values the way they are handled, it's unfair, that it's stealing from poor people, they don't have the money to pay their taxes and homes should not be valued according to some big home next door or some down the street because when the people bought their houses they did not pay anywhere near what's being charged for the value. We don't have the money to pay for it then, especially people that are getting ready to retire and they're on a fixed income and we have people in our neighborhood that are having to sell their house because they can not pay for their taxes. The millage and the stuff that goes for the schools and

everything, we're not against schools, it's great to have schools, but it should be done in a conservative manner. These expensive schools that are being built with all this expensive equipment all the architects that are, we have to pay every time a new school is being built it's a waste of money. There needs to be some conservatism in spending our money. It's hard for us to earn our money. If we had to build a house or something we would be careful how we spend it and go out and get bids and make sure that everything was good quality, but it doesn't have to be the top of the line, it doesn't have to be fancy trim work or fancy rails and that's all I have to say, but just please consider, consider the people, our taxes are going out of sight. Thank you.

Mr. John McManus, 111 Water Oak Court, Lexington, SC 29072 - I concur with the previous two folks. I've been here 15 years and I've lived in quite a few of the states around the country and really what surprises me is for 48th in the nation on education we've got some of the highest taxes in the southeast and we still can't seem to climb above that. Some of our neighboring states which don't have property taxes, they reap the benefits, or they get the money through other means and this might not have anything to do, like for instance, \$300.00 cap on sales of new vehicles, I would much rather pay the full sales tax on the vehicle and pay property tax on it one time rather than keep the vehicle for five years and continue to pay on it. That's one way we can get money. Another way we can get more money is raise the sales tax to seven percent; that right there alone would do away with the property tax and if we could get help from people like you to get this through to the folks down at the State House that would just solve a lot of problems particularly in Lexington County, because I have to tell you I hear it over and over every year when I come to this very building to pay just the taxes on the vehicles alone which a lot of us in this room here pay more than some states pay for their homes and their property and that's just vehicle taxes and I'm definitely opposed to anymore millage rate increases and another sore spot with me is when Governor Hodges was in office we passed this education lottery and I would like somebody to have an accounting on where all this money is going because I haven't seen any changes whatsoever since we passed the lottery. Thank you very much.

Mr. Bobby Price, 1835 John Circle, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I concur with Mr. Bumgarner and Carol Wise.

Ms. Linda Allred, 1901 Shull Avenue, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I concur with Mr. Bumgarner and Carol Wise.

Ms. Allison Brewster, 1915 Shull Avenue, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I concur with everything that has been said.

Mr. Jim Allred, 1901 Shull Avenue, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I concur....

Mr. William Brewster, 1915 Shull Avenue, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I concur with the previous speakers.

Mr. Jesse Wise, 1637 Taylor Drive, Gilbert, SC 29054 - That's on Shull Island in the middle of Lake Murray. Most of these people are from Lake Murray. And I want to tell you a little story before I actually want to ask you a question. We've got seven widows on that island and already

three of them, one of them, her property has already been seized by you all and it is already being auctioned off for \$91,000; \$91,000, that lot is worth \$350,000. Been auctioned off. We're trying as property owners around her, we're going to take up enough money to pay the taxes on this thing; we're not going to let somebody steal that woman's land. You all ought to be ashamed of yourselves for letting this thing get this far. We got seven widows. One of them has had to sell out, she's closing her house out this week. We've got two others that said they can't hold on any more. My next door neighbor is telling me that if they can hold on for one more year, one more year and they are going to have to move out of the house that they have built with their own hands. I've had to have my taxes, I mean my house appraised because I'm going to fight this thing. I'm going to fight it and I mean I'm going to fight it. I've had to have it appraised in case that you all don't do anything; I'm going to have to sell it and move out. I built my house with my own two hands; I didn't hire it done; I dug the footings; I poured the concrete; I did the finish on the sheetrock, the painting and everything; the roof and everything and it's being taken away from me. I'm mad. I'm sorry, I'm not mad at you but I'm mad at what you all did.

Now, after I said that I want to point something out to you all and the people right here. In 1994 the Republican Primary in the Republican Primary, now that was controlled by the Republicans, okay, Republican Primary, okay, now, everybody sitting right here, in front of me, except one person, except one person, where is he, where is he, there he is, is not a Republican, not a Republican. On that primary we had three questions that you all wanted to know how we felt about. Let me read those questions. This is an actual ballot from that year, an actual ballot. I want to read this to you. This is one of the questions. Should term limits be, should terms limits for elected officials in South Carolina be enacted? This thing, this thing was voted on by, in that Republican Primary now, I want you to understand that, just the Republican, not Democrat, no national, no election, but the percentages that that thing passed by was 88.71 percent. The second question. Should the Confederate Flag be taken down from the State House Dome. That's in material, I mean, you know, it doesn't matter. I want to give you the figures anyway. It said no, leave it up, 72.18 percent said leave it up. The third question on that ballot is really the reason I'm here. Should property taxes for homeowners and business be eliminated in South Carolina. That passed with a yes vote of 79.27 percent, 79 percent. That was passed. That was the Republican Primary. You were Republicans. You can't blame this on the other party.

Whenever I go and I look at the *State Paper*, this came out of the *State Paper*. January 26, 2005, the caption on it says Council rejects legislator's request for one year delay, one year. They delayed it in Richland County. The County Council in Richland County delayed it. You all didn't. You all didn't. You all said let's go with it. That's wrong. That's wrong. I want to read you something that one of the Councilmen said, I want you all to hear me. "I see no assurance among, excuse me, coming out of the State House that we are going to get any relief. I believe we're just delaying the inevitable." Mr. Owens you said that.

Mr. Owens - I sure did.

Mr. Wise - Yes, sir.

Mr. Cullum - Mr. Wise, pardon me for interrupting sir, but we've got procedures and rules we have

here of three minutes and I will grant you some more time.

Mr. Wise - Okay, okay, I'm almost through.

Mr. Cullum - Pardon me - let's just see if we can get this wrapped up in the next three minutes, okay.

Mr. Wise - Okay. It won't take me three minutes I don't think. We have another comment, "moving forward with addressing, assessment, said Councilman Debbie Summers, meant residents would have time to appeal. We have to go ahead with our plan," Summers said. "If they, the legislators, help us any way, that's great, but there's no plan there yet." Well it is a plan, because the House has already passed a bill, it's already passed a bill. That bill number is H.R.3264, it's ready for the Senate to take up next year when they come back. Now, I want to know why did you all, why didn't you all put this thing off a year and why can't you all go back and undo what you all have done. I want to know that.

Mr. Cullum - Thank you Mr. Wise.

Mr. Milton Densman, 1629 Taylor Drive, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I concur with every speaker that's already spoke to you so we won't discuss any of that and if I run over my three minutes, please interrupt me and I'll sit down and I may have to have a little extra time later, we'll see what it can do. First of all, I have questions here that I'll read out and I'd like to, and again, you don't have to answer me, but I'd certainly like any comments from you now or later. Number one - and I guess this is pretty obvious, but I don't know and I'm sure there's a lot of others - does Lexington County have an annual report that shows the 2004 revenues and expenses and the 2005 estimated revenue and expenses for the total millage base that is available to the public? I'm sure there must be, but I don't know about it. The next thing is, if the Senate passes, and I think Mr. Wise has already said this, no, no, he hasn't said this; if the Senate passes bill H.R.3264 and the bill becomes law, law now, will Lexington County reimburse the taxpayers the difference between the difference in the 2003 taxes because that's part of bill 3264 and the 2005 taxes, will they reimburse. Now this is one thing that I don't understand, but why are school districts in charge of providing dollars to each school instead of the State of South Carolina. Maybe the state can't handle it. Maybe that's the reason why, but I think the law says the State is supposed to do it. And that's about, that concludes my questions. I will say this and I know each one of you on this panel, I've got pictures of you, names, but come next election time I'm going to remember some of this and hopefully those that stand up for the public because we are the ones that pay you all's salary, the taxpayers, and we are the ones that put you in office, but we will remember. Thank you.

Mr. Cullum - Thank you sir. By the way also to let you know and the rest of the public know, there is a comprehensive manual that entails the expenses and revenues from past budget years and you can find it at your local library, your County library.

Mr. Densman - Thank you. I didn't know that. Thank you.

Ms. Annie Ruth Huffstetler, 1705 Cofield Drive, West Columbia, SC 29169 - I concur with everyone before me.

Ms. Marilyn Bundrick, 217 Palmer Drive, Lexington, SC 29072 - I had no intentions to get up here and speak. I thought my husband was going to show up but he had to work to pay the taxes. But anyway, I want you to know that I've already gone and I talked to Smokey a couple of nights ago, I've already gone down to the Auditor's office and got an estimate on my home where I live right now and my property tax has gone up \$2,000, a little over \$2,000 and I'm very agitated, I want you all to know, I guess you know I know all of you, I've met all of you, Billy's the only Democrat, I know that because all of you have filed with me and I thought when all of you went on County Council that you'd be conservative; even Billy a Democrat I know him, I know his family and I thought all of you would be conservative. And I can't believe all of you knowing that this was a year that we were going to have reassessment and yet you keep increasing the budget and considering increasing it tonight. I just can't fathom you all thinking that way. I think you all need to just stop and pray and think about people that's losing their homes. We have two pieces of property up for sale right now and it's a shame that the way our County, you know, our County's going and the way the taxes are going. Somebody better regroup and think again and thank you.

Mr. Cullum opened the meeting for anyone else to speak who had not signed up.

Ms. Barbara Rogers, 336 Palmer Drive, Lexington, SC 29072 - I am a widow and I just.....location with all my assets as a safe place to live. However, I live off of Social Security, a state retirement and my little what one and one-half percent increases and things like that will not cover the reassessment, the taxes, and this increase that you're planning here. So I ask you to really think about those of us in that situation. Thank you.

Ms. Collette Phillips, 1810 Evelyn Street, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I concur with what everybody said. I'm one of the widows that Mr. Wise has talked about and it's very difficult to even think about retiring, trying to live on what little bit that, you know, we have coming in. But, I agree.

Mr. Joel Player, 1936 Leander Drive, West Columbia, SC 29172 - Nobody has to fool you, my financial situation, I'm not the richest man in the world, I'm not the poorest man in the world, God has blessed me. Well gentlemen, I've got a lot of property, but overall Lexington County has got to where I'm having to sell, if you don't believe it check the records at the place, I've been selling it left and right, got more to sell. I can not afford the taxes. Back in August they raised me under a hundred thousand dollars on one building on a piece of commercial property. It's a pole building gentlemen, let's laugh about it. I appealed it, I won it. But I've been treated like a dog. But let me say this, we can not afford as a whole in Lexington County to keep up going on taxes, taxes, taxes. I can't. And I know that I can raise money, okay. I've got enough different things I do, businesses. But, gentlemen we've got people that can't afford to pay their medical bills, can't afford to pay their rent, house payment or whatever, car payment. We all aren't in a financial situation like some people, some of us are and some of us aren't. I'm not as financially sound as I used to be because I'm old. I can't work like I used to. And anybody can check my record, I'm on the tax books and everything, but we have got to do something to cut back on taxes. They have raised our taxes like crazy on this reassessment and most people, not all, don't know how to figure your taxes. You got assessment, people aren't going to appeal it 90 days later, of course, we had a mistake with a

computer. In other words, we got a lot of things going on. I couldn't even get a tag, I won't name the kind of car I got, from the tax people because I paid my taxes on time. The Highway Department sent me a late fee and I couldn't get my little sticker. Why? Errors, errors, errors. When I was on Council I brought this up, I think, Mr. John Carrigg and Mr. Johnny Jeffcoat, Mr. Smokey Davis, and Mr. Billy Derrick aware that we've all talked about this you all got a lot to do and a short time to do it and I tell you what, politics is tough, you aren't always the best loved person in the world, but I'm saying from the bottom of my heart, you all think and you all pray a lot because when a person in my stats has to start selling property because they can't make a profit because of your County taxes, and it's proven, it's on the record, I don't have to show it to you, I know I'm over my limit, but please you all think and pray about this thing and think about it because it's getting tough times out there and there isn't a department in the County that I haven't had a run in with, why? Maybe it's because I'm arrogant, maybe because whatever I did at one time, you follow what I'm saying, I'm paying very dearly into Lexington County and I think people in Lexington County should be treated dearly because I'm out but I will be back. Thank you.

Mac Toole, Chairman, Lexington County Delegation - I appreciate the opportunity to come before you and I've heard several people mention, you know, this is not just a County problem, it's also a State problem and I recognize that, it's an issue that must be addressed and I know that the bill that they were making reference to actually puts a cap on reassessment and I'll let everybody know in this room that the Lexington Delegation, on the House side, eight Republicans and two Democrats, are working extremely hard to do something as has been suggested here a two cents sales increase would replace your school operating millage and allow the State to fund totally the school expenses.

I come before you today, you know, I don't know how much taxes is enough, but I do know that the more taxes we take out of people's hands at the four, basically four levels of government that we have, then the less they have to spend, the less they can do for their family, the less they can maintain and we have gotten to the point, most of these people that have spoke here today are individuals that probably are not in the lower 40 percent income bracket. And if you think they're suffering, then how much do you think that lower 30 or 40 percent bracket is suffering? They're suffering, so I asked the question how much is enough taxes. Also I asked a question sometimes we go way beyond our needs and we go into our desires at all levels, I included the State level which I'm a part of and I included myself in on that. We have reached a point that we must consider how serious of a situation we are getting ourselves into that we're going to start creating reverse economics.

Now, just at the state level as I hope there will be tax reform and there is going to be an ad hoc committee that is going to be put together during the off session that's going to go around throughout the whole state and it is my hope and listening to the leadership of the General Assembly that there will be a bill that will be prepared to be filed, I'm going to file one, the one that we filed this year we'll have to refile it again, but we're going to come up with hopefully a bill that everybody can agree on that will be filed the beginning of next year and eliminate at least on a permanent basis some of your property taxes. And I believe in talking to you folks that most of you would concur or agree with that.

On tax reform at the County level. I'm just going to throw out, you know, I hate to stand up here in front of you folks and not oppose what I would consider some solutions because I'm not going to stand here and prioritize your projects I know you have some important projects that you're dealing with and I'm not going to make judgments on those projects, I will say that if we look at our priorities that there are some projects that we could delete out of the County budget. I will say that there are some line items that the County budget has in it that could be reduced. I will say that there is some surplus that the County has, property, etc., that could be sold. And I will say that I believe that fees versus taxes on those people that use those facilities, etc., is a better approach than taxes to the general public because if for no other reason, that lower 30 or 40 percent. And I appreciate your time that you've allowed me.

Mr. Owens - Mr. Chairman, can I ask the Representative one question?

Mr. Cullum - Yes, you may. This is not ordinary, but Mr. Toole is a member of the House of Representatives.....

Mr. Owens - Mac, we're sitting right here getting beat to death by a State levy. Not a single solitary person on this Council wants to raise the millage for the Indigent Care. We don't get any....it's almost like we got a choice in things...why don't you all just send us the levy and us send it without having to go through County Council. We're being set up and we're paying..this levy has nothing to do with County Council, it's coming from the State. And I think people ought to be aware of that; we don't have a choice in this matter.

Mr. Toole - And I, right, I think Mr. Davis made that point and I included the State has its problems also in on that, Mr. Owens. And I wrote down that particular information that Smokey had provided and I will look into that. I do not know the details and specifics of that. Now, I do know, for the record, though, since you brought that up the State does contribute to political subdivisions which this County is one of those political subdivisions in the tune of about \$225,000,000 and you all get your share of that and it's based on a percentage of the overall budget and I know Billy made....I don't want to get into a debate, so I just wanted to.....

Mr. Cullum - Hold on, let's control this right here real quickly right now. But all I'm saying is now that you've been able to visit with us tonight and we're glad you're here, to be here, Mac as Chairman of the Delegation, but I believe as you have heard, these folks are constituents of yours and mine.

Mr. Toole - Right, correct.

Mr. Cullum - And we represent them at two different levels, but there is a specific question that stuck out in my mind that was asked tonight and I think that Joe kind of touched on it and I just want you, while you are here, to be able to clear this matter up. We were told in this very Chamber at the start of this year that if we did postpone reassessment that we would have action. And I think that the body realized at that point when there were no bills filed, not only by our own Delegation, but no one in the State, that there was going to be little action at all and I just want these folks to

understand that the reason reassessment went through is, is because we felt like, and we were right, there was no action in property tax relief from the State level and that had we put it off the following year would have been a six year reassessment value which would be worse than what you have today. Now, with that being said, also, having sat on this body, you can also, I guess, tell these folks too that in some areas of this County as little as a third of the bill comes to the County with the remaining 70 percent going to schools which are funded by the State of South Carolina, by the property owners of the State of South Carolina. So, as I've spoken in the past, I don't know that we have a property tax problem, we definitely have a school funding problem. So if you'd like to speak to that I'll be more than happy to give you ample time.

Mr. Toole - I don't want to get into a debate with you folks, but there was an awful lot, there was about a half a dozen bills filed dealing with property taxes and as you folks know you got two bodies, you got 180 people that you've got to convince and get enough of those convinced to get something passed. There was a tremendous amount of work and effort on property taxes this year and I think we've made some good progress and as I indicated I'm hoping the first month of the beginning of the session next year that some type of property tax bill will be passed. It is a State issue, State should be funding schools and I'm afraid if the State doesn't step up and do that that the court case that's going on will force the State to do it and then we'll be behind the eight ball jumping through hoops trying to get something done. Right now if you add up all the school funding, it amounts to \$9,000, this coming year's budget, \$9,826 if you add up basically four different categories, property taxes being one. The bill that Lexington County has filed would raise taxes two cents to seven cents and it would totally eliminate your operating school millage which throughout the whole State is somewhere between 55 to 70 percent of your entire property bill.

Mr. Cullum - Say that one more time for me.

Mr. Toole - Okay.

Mr. Cullum - No, no, just the portion that 55 to 70 percent of your property tax bill.....

Mr. Toole -Depends on what school district you in, but the, only the operating millage of your school would be replaced under the bill that Lexington County has filed and it would represent anywhere from 55 to up to 70 percent, depending on which one of the 86 school districts you're in. In Lexington County it ranges right around 60 to 65 percent of your property tax bill. So that's the type bill we're talking about. And thank you for your time.

Mr. Cullum - Thank you Mac.

Mr. Carrigg - Can I ask you one question. And I'm not trying....

Mr. Toole - I just wanted to come up here and share some information, share the concerns that you are, but I don't want to get into a debate with you guys, and I included the State and the County's got it's problems.

Mr. Carrigg - If the Legislature, obviously this year it's too late to pass anything.....

Mr. Toole - No, they did not get it too late to late to pass it..just didn't get enough action and the leadership decided that they wanted to have a forum during the off session and try to have a bill prepared because there were about a half a dozen bills that were filed and that's, but we did not file ours too late to.....

Mr. Carrigg - Okay, I understand, but it's gotten, it's because of the internal delays and things like that it isn't going to get dealt with this session, but you say it could get dealt with, possibly, next session. If a bill was passed, let's see, it wouldn't be, I mean, when would it possibly be effective.

Mr. Toole - It could go effective July 1st of that year, of next year.

Mr. Carrigg - It could be.....

Mr. Toole - Yes, it could go....

Mr. Carrigg - If you fund it with a sales tax you, don't you have to collect it first?

Mr. Toole - Yes.

Mr. Carrigg - So, I mean, it would be another year before you'd be.....

Mr. Cullum - ...another year for implementation...

Mr. Toole - No, it would be paid on a monthly basis instead of the annual distribution that you have now. Some of the bills that were filed, the sales tax distribution would be paid on a monthly basis.

Mr. Cullum - Okay folks....

Mr. Carrigg - Okay, I'm just, I was asking about the timing of that.

Mr. Toole - Thank you, thank you.

Mr. Cullum - Mr. Derrick wants to make one comment....

Mr. Derrick - No, I don't, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Cullum - Okay and we'll move on.

Mr. Toole - Thank you.

Mr. Cullum - Thank you, Mac. Do we have anybody else that would like to.....

Mr. Lloyd Carson, 156 East Drake Road, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I'm here to tell you tonight that I oppose any millage in any form to raise property taxes in our County. As numerous people have alluded to this evening, we're under a lot of pressure to basically pay our taxes, especially people that are retired. We're on a fixed income. We can't go out and make extra money or get pay increases and things like that. So we have to operate within a budget. When I say budget, I'm basically talking to you folks because you all have a budget and I can't understand why we don't operate within that and not come every year back to the taxpayer and want more money. It just, with our tax base growing the way it is, the County is growing really fantastic, I mean, these new homes built, new businesses moving in the tax base going up why doesn't that bring the taxes back rather than increasing them? It's just, it's a logical question to ask.

In relating to Representative Toole's comments, there's a bill that was just introduced in the Senate by David Thompson on property tax relief which would basically remove your personal home from the property rolls. Okay. It would cut back, it would actually take two cents off of your taxes for groceries. It would take 20 percent off of taxes for businesses, thereby attracting more industry into the State enhancing your tax base. It would take four constitutional amendments to basically do this which is a big job, because like you say, we've got a lot of people down at the House, Senators and House members, that you'd have to convince that this is a worthwhile project.

But gentlemen you have to realize that you're talking about your constituents, you're talking about the people that put you in office, you're talking about the people that look to you for leadership and that's the key to this thing. If you do not exercise leadership in these matters you will be held accountable by the voters, by everyone else.

Actually I don't know, people seem to, I asked a young kid one day, he's probably in the sixth or seventh grade, where the power in our nation, what controlled it, where it lay, okay. And he gave me a lot of different answers and I said no, you're wrong, I said the power lies with the people, that's where they get their money from, that's where they get their power from to exercise these things and it takes good judgment and wisdom to basically come up with the right ideas and laws that are hopefully equal to everybody.

You're not going to satisfy everybody, that's, human nature is just that way and I just can't help but wonder if we, we need to get away from property taxes for funding our major expenses like education. Rollback taxes and taxes that they give you credit for that, that's not the answer because they can always come back and basically say well if you don't pay it I'm going to take your home and that's what it amounts to and it's not right. Legally it's the law, but morally, I have no right to come to anyone of you all and ask you for your house that you live in and the law shouldn't be set to where the County has the right, last year the County took 22,000 pieces of property away from people in South Carolina, 22,000. It's just, don't take it personal it's just business, but it is personal, it's your home, it's where you live, it's where you go to get away from the world, it's a place, it's a place of sanctuary. You look at it personally. Look deep in your heart and consider all these things. It's the quickest way to become homeless.

I mean, let me tell you, the economy is such today that you can have one catastrophic injury or

sickness in your family and with the way things are now you can be wiped out. You can lose pretty much what you've accumulated all your life and that's, in most of our cases, we're just average people, we work, we go to church, we, you know, we try to pay our taxes. I won't take up any more of your time, but I would appreciate your consideration and look into this 880, Senate bill S880 and it basically addresses this issue and tries to be equitable with everybody and do what's best for the County and for the people that live here.

Mr. Cullum - Thank you. Okay, we're running very short on time now, we've got another public hearing to go through. I am going to close the public hearing for the Indigent Care Fund. I am now going to open the public hearing for the Midlands Technical College.

Midlands Technical College - First, before we begin, I see that there are a number of folks names back on the list again that are opposed. If I call your name, if you don't have anything further to add to what we have previously heard, because I think most folks, I don't know if you understood that we were going to have two different time periods to speak for each individual topic but if you don't have anything to add I'll just note in the record that you were here with your address, your sentiment is still the same in opposition. The first one listed is Mr. Perry Bumgarner.

Mr. Perry Bumgarner, 508 Cherry Blossom Road, Gaston, SC 29053 - This technical thing is probably the best school we've got in South Carolina, but I don't think we should increase the millage to build it or do whatever you going to do to it. I think we should cut something, get rid of some other tax and build whatever they need because it does do a service to the State of South Carolina and a big one. But we can't afford anymore millage. We can't afford anymore taxes. The people just, you know, they're about ready to throw up their hat and I know just exactly how they feel. I hate like the devil to take half my pay check and pay taxes with it, you know. My pay check isn't very big anymore. I'm working hard. Thank you.

Mr. William L. Monts, 443 Barr Road, Lexington, SC 29072 - I'll be very short and sweet with what I have to say. Assessment this year, tax increase this year, assessment on my property 35 percent in five years. Can't make me believe that anything's gone up 35 percent in five years other than gasoline. But the whole problem we've got right now is we've got Midlands TEC standing here asking for a rate increase or a tax increase. You're getting ready tonight to discuss a general tax increase. Something needs to go by the wayside. Property has reached a point where if something happens to me today my wife will have to sell the house because she can't pay the taxes. There's no way. And I thought I had provided for her, but it's not there now. Taxes have gone up on my property in seven years just close to a thousand dollars, in seven years. So I ask you to consider tonight what you're doing to the citizens of Lexington County. I'm not against Midlands TEC, but I'm like everybody else it's got to stop somewhere. Thank you.

Mr. John R. McManus, 111 Water Oak Court, Lexington, SC 29072 - Concurred with all the previous comments.

Ms. Sandy Payne, 228 Payne Lane, Lexington, SC 29072 - I have nothing else to add. Everything I feel has already been said.

Mr. Boyce Crow, 107 Water Oak Court, Lexington, SC 29072 - I own and operate a small business with eight employees. Started in 1983. And it was pretty tough at first, but it's getting tougher. I have about four vehicles. My wife and I own a piece of property. She has a boat. I have a motorcycle. It seems like every month I'm paying tax on something I own. I would encourage you to try to find another way to fund this thing. Again, I'm not against education, but as I said, I'm a surveyor so I see it from both ends. We get calls occasionally when mother and dad have passed on and left the property to the children. The children realize early on that we can't afford the taxes on that property. They almost go into tears sometimes because they want to keep the farm or the lakehouse, or whatever, but they realize they can't do it because they can't afford the taxes. That's not right. I don't know what you need to do. We elected you to lead. Try to do something. Thank you very much.

Ms. Carol Wise, 1637 Taylor Drive, Gilbert, SC 29054 - Wasn't there a law passed, wasn't a one cent tax increase that was passed a few months ago or a few weeks ago that, when, in order for it to pass it was insinuated that that would help with the schools or with the property taxes. Could we not wait until some of that money came in before we reassessed again? And also the Education Lottery, that was passed. I'm against the lottery, but the law was passed anyway. That has not helped anything. In fact, our taxes have gone up, tripled almost since that's come into effect. I'm told that the Education Lottery is used for college, to help children through college. What about the grammar schools that need it? You're not going to get a kid in college if you don't teach him in grammar school and have the right things you need then. Use that money. I'm sure there's a lot more money. We need to find out where all of it's going. It can't be just for that little bit of college. And also, we've always had the American dream if you work hard, you can own your house. In Russia, in the communist countries you don't own anything, in South Carolina you don't own your home. Please find another way. Do away with home property taxes. That's an unfair tax. And it only hurts people. And the people that are down and out and don't have money or can't, older people that are on a fixed income it hurts them the worst. Please find another way to do taxes without taking our homes away from us and using property taxes. Surely there's another way. We've got a smart group of people that make the laws and everything, they can come up with another way. Thank you.

Ms. Flora Price, 1835 John Circle, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I just wanted to just show you a for instance what is happening with the assessment and with the taxes. I made a little diagram here of what I paid for my taxes last year and what I would pay this year using the assessment, the new assessment and using the same millage that I had last year. Now I'm going to show you how much the difference is there just using the old millage. Last year, now you have to understand, we had homestead exemption, of course, we had tax relief last year too so my total taxes were \$1,426 on the piece of property up there at the lake. This next year just using the millage from last year my taxes will go up to \$3,263. Now you look at that. That's over 65 percent and heavens only knows Bobby and I are both retired; he doesn't get an increase on his retirement very often and how in the world we're going to be able to continue to do this. We built our house from the bottom up, me and Bobby and our two children and what's going to happen? They won't ever be able to take over that property if something happens to us. We'll just have to sell it and get rid of it somehow because we won't be able to afford the taxes not on this level anymore. We live on a dirt road. We have no garbage

pickup and can't even get the roads scraped half the time you got to get down on your knees almost and beg to get that done. So we don't get any privileges for the taxes that we pay on our home. Just the taxes. So I ask you please don't raise these millages anymore because heaven only knows I may not even be able to pay it this year. Thank you.

Mr. Bobby Price, 1835 John Circle, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I concur.

Ms. JoAnn Butler, 1535 Shull Island Road, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I know a number of you. I'm really upset about what's going on. And the first thing I'd like to say, this morning I got up and I was all fired up, I was ready to come talk to you. Then I opened the newspaper and read the article there and realized everything had pretty much been rubber-stamped through. So it really took the wind out of my sails. The situations you hear tonight are real. I know these people. They are losing their homes. And quite honestly, I don't want to live in a County or a State where that doesn't matter. If you asked me would you like to have some new schools, Midlands TEC Schools, a new library, yes, that's great to have, but if you say you have to displace people from their homes to get that then no. Then we can't afford it. I really hope this matters to you because these are real situations that you're hearing tonight. In order for us to even stay equal with last year's taxes which were exorbitant you'd have to reduce millage and we're standing here tonight talking about increasing millages. People can't pay them already and yet we're going to think about increasing taxes. One other thing I'd like to ask. I got this nice notice in the paper, in the mail which said your new appraised value is this; that's all the information I got. It doesn't say what last year's was. It doesn't itemize what I'm being charged for my house. I've been in it two years. The increase is 50 percent. If that house went up 50 percent in two years I need to understand that because certainly I can't keep up with that. I want that bill itemized and so when I questioned this I'm told I should call and ask. Have you tried calling the Assessor's office lately? You will not get an answer. So it's almost as though we don't have the right to understand exactly how that assessment was done. We need to look at that people and do something about this. The situation is real. I know it doesn't all lie here. Mr. Toole made a very valid point. These are all nice to haves. We'd love to see our education progress, but can we afford it. I drive a '93 Lumina Chevrolet, not a Lamborghini because I can't afford a Lamborghini. We all need to grasp that concept. Thank you.

Ms. Linda Allred, 1901 Shull Avenue, Gilbert, SC 29054 - Chose not to speak.

Lloyd Carson, Jr., 156 East Drake Road, Gilbert, SC 29054 - Agree with the previous speakers.

Ms. Allison Brewster, 1915 Shull Avenue, Gilbert, SC 29054 - No comment.

Mr. James Allred, Jr., 1901 Shull Avenue, Gilbert, SC 29054 - Chose not to speak.

Mr. Jesse Wise, Jr., 1637 Taylor Drive, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I don't have too much to add. We don't rear back up there and drink those Pina Coladas like everybody thinks we do. We're a working class of people. But the only thing I would like to add is this; 1999, my taxes were \$1,400 on my house. In 2000, I paid \$3,600 on my house. Now if it goes like it's going now I'm going to pay \$6,500 on the same 2200 square foot house on a dirt road. We have nothing. We have no water.

We have no sewage. Like folks said we can't get the road paved. We have nothing up there. We're not getting anything for our tax dollars, yet our taxes keep going up. You all know what that's like? Be in a position you can't do anything about it and we come down here and we talk and we plead and we beg, we beg you all to do something about it and you all can. You all can do it and I know you can. But I have nothing against education. I feel like for the last 20 years I have been financially raped in the name of education because it takes up 72 percent of what you all take away from us. Already, already the middle class of people, we pay over 52 percent of what we make to some form of tax in this country. Fifty-two percent. That's too much; come on, come on. Help us. Help us. Like I said, I don't have anything against education.

What I have against is this. When we build these schools we need to have one set of plans and I know we've argued this before with the school board, we need to have one set of plans and we need to stamp them out people. Why should we have..this stair right out here we just walked up, everybody walked up that stair cost you between a hundred and seventy-five and two hundred thousand dollars, that room right there did. We can do better than this and I know we can. We go to White Knoll school and I see salt water aquariums in there. You know those fish cost \$150.00 a piece, but yet, we, when are we going to stop this spending. We need, I've been in construction all my life and if you need somebody to come down here and look at a set of plans before you build it I guarantee you I can save you at least a half a million dollars on that building if it's any size. We need to have somebody to point out these things because an architect is going to get seven percent of the cost of the building and he's going to put these stainless steel round stairs in them.

This hasn't got anything to do with us but we got a school right now in Blythewood. It's got a glassed hand rail stair in that high school. Curved, glass hand rail. It's getting out of hand. I know we want something nice but Johnny, you remember what kind of school you went to? Yes, sir. You? Why have we got to have all this fancy stuff. If we take the money that we're putting in these schools maybe we can get good qualified teachers that can teach. Give the teacher the authority back in the school room. Give her the authority. If that child does not obey her, expel him. Three strike rule. He gets expelled. The second time give them the authority to tear their rear end up. The third time call the parents in and give it to them.

Mr. Cullum - Pardon me for interrupting, sir, but we are short of time.

Mr. Wise - I understand, I understand. I'm through, but you understand where I'm coming from. We're losing our homes people. We're losing our homes. You all might not be, but we are. Please help us.

Mr. William Brewster, 1915 Shull Avenue, Gilbert, SC 29054 - No further comments.

Mr. Milt Densman, 1629 Taylor Drive, Gilbert, SC 29054 - Again, I concur with all the speakers before me concerning the funding for the Midlands TEC project, but it's got to stop somewhere and again there's got to be some other ways, some other ways besides property taxes. You know you never own your property at all and that's already been said and I'm not going to touch on that any more, but you never own it because you have taxes always to pay. One thing I'd like to say is, there,

and I read this in the paper too, it came in the paper that Lake Murray owners of properties and I know there are other people that are not Lake Murray owners but they can afford the taxes. That's not true. It doesn't make any difference if my home is out in the middle of a field somewhere, that's my home and that's how, if I have to pay taxes that's how it has to be assessed, not because I live on Lake Murray. That's a wrong impression that people's got right there. I've owned that property since 1965 and I built my own house just like Mr. Wise from scratch. Been up there that long and I'm proud of it, but when you start at a hundred dollars back in 1965 and you're up to \$3,200 today with the possibility that's going to \$4,500, \$5,000 next year or this year, this year, it's just hard to take. I will reinforce this too because I was talking with a lady before the meeting and she did some research but, I'm sure this is what happens at different places around the County, but specifically Shull Island they paid \$244,000 in 2004 taxes. This is real property now, just real property. We have got nothing up there in 35 years except Shull Avenue paved. That's the only thing that we got. No water, no sewer, no road paving, every now and then a police car will come around, every now and then, every now and then they'll grade a little bit, but nothing else. In 1986 I got a petition signed to pave part of Shull Island. I was told by Mr. Larry Koon that we were 25 on the list. I checked the other day and it was 280 if we're still on there now. Nothing for the money that we pay. Nothing. And I know I'm feeling very sour about this but I think I represent a lot of people in this County. Thank you all for my time.

Ms. Annie Ruth Huffstetler, 1705 Cofield Drive, West Columbia, SC 29169 - I concur.

Ms. Marilyn Bundrick, 217 Palmer Drive, Lexington, SC 29072 - I feel like the lake people feel like they've been discriminated against. Well, I can identify with them. I have felt like that for years especially with a small piece of commercial property that all of you I think know about on 378. In 2001, no in 2000 we paid a little over \$3,000 in taxes. The next year it jumped up to way over \$11,000 an acre. Last year we paid \$12,600 an acre and I've gotten an estimate that this year it's going to be over \$19,000 for taxes. Excuse me, I think I was using the wrong word. This year it's going to be over \$19,000 for taxes. But there's this man that has property just about across from the highway from us that uses his property for the same thing that we do. His taxes were just about nothing. I feel like I have really been discriminated against and I have brought that before a lot of you County Councilmen. I might be wrong in saying this but I think that somebody should check out how this stuff's being assessed. Just things do not add up. I have pulled up on my computer this year probably way, probably about fifty pieces of property and nothing makes any sense. I can not see how they can appraise one piece of property for one amount and right across the highway another piece that even looks better for a lot less. It's just no rhyme and reason in the Assessor's office and the way they do things and there should be some investigating. It's bad enough that you all are raising our taxes, but the way they do the reassessment or the appraisals is unreal. Things are totally out of control. And I'd like to say to you all if you tell all of these agencies that they need to live within the means of the amount of money that you all give them they'll learn to live within it. They'll cut corners. I have to penny pinch just to pay my taxes. And if you tell all of these agencies you're going to get just this amount of money, they'll learn to control that money and use it the way it should be used. Thank you.

Mr. Cullum asked for any further comments in opposition to the millage increase request for

Midlands TEC.

.....Shull Avenue, and I concur with everybody else as well and I also have a business here in Lexington as well...

Mr. Cullum - Sir, if you're going to continue to speak other than concur, I'd ask could you please come down to

.....fixing to say is on Highway 6 our millage went up 400 percent for our business and property there. On the lake out there about 40 percent.

Mr. Cullum opened the public hearing for comments from those in favor of the millage increase for Midlands TEC.

Ms. Wendy Samuel, 103 Smiths Ford Road, Chapin SC 29036 - I'm a student at Midlands Technical College and I'm a management major. I take most of my classes at the Airport campus, but last fall I had the opportunity, excuse me, I'm a little nervous, I had the opportunity last fall to take a class at the Harbison campus and I don't know, I can't tell you how much easier it was for me as a working mother to be able to just shoot to Harbison campus rather than drive the extra mileage to and from the Airport campus. It helped me out tremendously being able to spend more time with my family, lot more study time and be able to get back and forth to work on time. As a student, I know first hand how the County's investment in Midlands Technical College helps individuals like myself improve their lives. Midlands Technical College students are educated to be competitive in the job market and also to contribute to our communities. After graduation, most of us like myself will stay around here and work and raise our families. In fact, within a year after graduation, 94 percent of Midlands Technical graduates are working or pursuing advanced education. Midlands TEC college really provides the individual attention, the resources and the career focus programs that help students like myself to succeed. The students at Midlands TEC are certainly grateful for the investment that the community makes in their future and on behalf of the student body I'd like to, tonight, thank you for that commitment to our college over the years and let you know that it would mean a great deal to us if you would support the college's request for additional funding. Thank you.

Ms. Samantha Straws, 105A Ell Street, Leesville, SC 29070 - I am also a student at Midlands Technical College in the marketing program. I just want to tell you a little about my start and how I got started going to Midlands Technical College. I chose Midlands Technical College because I knew that obtaining an Associate's Degree there and marketable skills could provide me with an opportunity to obtain a good job within a couple of years. It would give me a foundation to pursue additional education for upward mobility later on in my life. I now work as an intern at a local bank here in Lexington and I've gained valuable skills there to make me a more valuable member of the Batesburg-Leesville community. I know there are a lot more people like myself that live in the Batesburg-Leesville area who would like to pursue a college education if the classes were available locally. I overheard and sitting through the discussion here today that Midlands Technical College may bring additional academic classes to the Batesburg-Leesville area and I hope that you guys will support this decision because I've been a resident there for about 12 years and there are many

citizens there that are on limited budgets or have families and work responsibilities and find it difficult to make the journey to the Airport campus or the Beltline campus. The travel adds time to their day and often additional transportation and child care costs. As a result, some local citizens end up not attending colleges and not getting valuable skills that are needed to contribute to their families and to the economic needs of Lexington County. With that being said, in this proposal, Midlands Technical College is seeking to address these needs. I now am speaking on behalf of many others, many other residents, when I ask this Council to support Midlands Technical College in its willingness to extend programs and services into the western Lexington County area. This move would contribute to the education and job skills of our citizens, the economic development of our community and the quality of life of our families. Thank you very much.

Ms. Delynn Barnes, 641 Willis Street, Batesburg-Leesville, SC 29006 - Although I wish we could find the funding for this within the budget it's not available there. As a lifelong resident of Batesburg-Leesville, I'm thanking you for giving me a moment to explain why I feel that the college's request should be funded. It's hard to imagine how Lexington County would find skilled and capable employees without the programs and services Midlands Technical College provides. They provide nurses to our hospitals, technicians who fix our vehicles, police officers, even our teachers start their education there. All these people come to us compliments of Midlands Technical College. It's called a community college because the students, even though they may go on to higher education, they tend to have a, have a tendency to come back to our communities. My husband's a graduate of Midlands Technical College and he owns and operates a business in Batesburg-Leesville. As the owner of a local business myself, I feel that having a technical college campus in our community will give many of our residents the opportunity to pursue degrees which will then enable them to seek quality employment. As citizens, we should feel compelled to take advantage of any opportunity to further the college's ability to enable its students and the local businesses that employ them to succeed. Thank you.

Mr. Mark Deloach, 142 Fulmer Street, Batesburg-Leesville, SC 29006 - I've been an outspoken supporter of Midlands Technical College, its mission and its students for many years. Midlands has been and continues to be an integral part of Lexington County's educational system. In fact, about one-third of all of Lexington County's college-bound high school students go to Midlands TEC. In addition to the credit programs that it provides to 11,000 students each year, Midlands Technical College also brings training and continuing education to more than 100 area businesses and industries. We must look to the future with the development of the certified industrial park in the Batesburg-Leesville area to provide secondary education needed to supply future businesses and industries that will move into our area.

If you want tax relief for residents then it comes from having an industrial base. If you want an industrial base then you have to supply a workforce that is educated to be able to work in that industrial base. If you don't have that, then we don't have to worry about our residential property values because they'll end up in the toilet because our property will be absolutely worthless. Nobody will want to live here. Therefore, if we make this investment in Midlands Technical College, our industrial base will grow and we'll be able to afford to keep our homes in this area.

We must also be competitive with Piedmont TEC that is right across the street in Saluda County as well as educational opportunities in Aiken County that also takes away from our young people's base in the Batesburg-Leesville area. These young people are going to these other schools, they're finding jobs in those other areas and they are not coming back to Lexington County or the Midlands area. It's through these programs and more that Midlands Technical College keeps Lexington and central midlands competitive in the global economy.

I thank you for your history of support to Midlands Technical College and I hope that you will also support this issue so that we can build for the future. I have five children and seven grandchildren. What am I going to offer them 20 years from now, 10 years from now, five years from now. I have a son getting ready to graduate in four more years. What can I guarantee that he will have higher education in my local community without me having to pay for gas money to go to Columbia or pay for a dormitory in Columbia. It is much less expensive on the residents to be able to have this educational opportunity right inside of our community than to have to send it out some place else. Thank you very much.

Mr. Jim Jamison, 107 Cottontail Lane, Batesburg-Leesville, SC 29006 - I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to speak in support of Midlands Technical College. I'm a transplant to this County since 1993 and have decided to make it my home for the rest of my retirement years. If there's one thing that I've learned it's that people of Lexington County are willing to invest in a good idea. Making an investment today in education and the payoff will come in a few years in the form of economic growth, jobs and quality of life. The facts about Midlands Technical College speak for themselves. Ninety-seven percent of the Midlands Technical College graduates say the college has helped them to reach their educational goals. Midlands Technical College has one of the largest undergraduate enrollments of any college or university in South Carolina. Each year MTC provides thousands of Lexington County residents with the career training they seek to find better jobs and live better lives. Finally, the college not only provides opportunities to the citizens of our County, but it contributes to the County's economic growth. I know the plans that Midlands Technical College has for Lexington County are a good investment. I support them and I ask you to support them as well. Thank you.

Mr. Jerry McSwain, 410 Willis Street, Batesburg, SC 29006 - I am the President and CEO of the Batesburg-Leesville Chamber of Commerce. We are the voice of business and in Batesburg-Leesville, we are very proud of all of our members who support...I'm here today to say we support Midlands Technical College in Batesburg-Leesville. You all know that we have an industrial park that the County owns that's in the Batesburg-leesville area and it will be of great value for our town to have Midlands Technical College so that they can train our existing business as well as future businesses. I believe that this partnership with Midlands Technical College should be supported. The business leaders of our communities support the proposal and strongly encourage you to support it. I have one other thing to say to you all. God bless each and every one of you.

Mr. Val Ray, 120 Killian Point Circle, Chapin, SC 29036 - Good evening, and I think I can be very brief. I'm currently the Technical Manager at the Honeywell facility located on St. Andrews Road which is in Lexington County. We currently employ about 400 employees and we have used

Midlands Technical College in the past and I support the college in its initiatives. We've used them in strengthening our workforce around total quality management philosophies, around around defect reduction management, to anything from supply chain management. Our business, however, does continue to shrink. We're no different than any other textile company in South Carolina. Lexington County needs to continue to attract other businesses to the area. Strong technical schools attract growth businesses. Strong technical schools attract good people who will help grow the community. The needs of the workplace and workforce are changing. Midlands Technical College has to be on the forefront of these changes. This County depends on the career and technical programs offered by Midlands Technical College. I hope you support this initiative. Thank you very much.

Mr. Matt Lincoln, 448 Wagner Highway, Leesville, SC 29070 - First I'd like to read the college wide goals and priority initiatives. Goal one, priority nine is to forge international partnerships. Goal two is to prepare a workforce in demand by business and industry. Priority two of the same goal is the integration of current technology into the curriculum. Priority four of the same goal is to prepare students for career adaptability. Goal seven, priority one is to seek partnerships with local agencies and senior institutions to offer learning and opportunities for students. Priority four of the same goal is to position the college to maximize State and local support.

I am currently enrolled in both the Associate's of Science and the Associate's of Arts programs at Midlands TEC, I go to the Airport campus. I am in the direction of becoming a, going into crop soil research and development because I believe that when you give somebody the power and the knowledge and the ability to plan and provide for their families then you give them a gift that no temporal, that there is no temporal measurement. There is no way you can hold this to anything.

Sixty Minutes, last night, talked of a young lady going to school. She had no money. She came from Africa. She was provided, her family was provided a \$35.00 goat and from the milk from that goat she went to an adobe hut to go to school and from that she gained a scholarship to go to a little larger adobe hut to go to high school and from there she gained a scholarship to come to an American prep school and then to an American ivy league college. All from milk from a \$35.00 goat. Is there any way to measure that and her worth and value to this society and to her future society? I don't believe that there is any way to value, to put a measure on that.

Plato, from his republic in the allegory of the cave, talked of people being chained to a wall and you're only allowed to see the fire and the shadows that are right there reflecting off of the wall and then one time, at this certain point you're allowed to be released from these chains and drug up this steep precipice and it's painful and it's not very fun and it's very scary because you don't know what to expect out of life and then you get out to the opening, the mouth of this cave and you realize that it's just as scary, there's just as much pain involved in being, as there was being drug up. But the thing is, is once you're out there you realize that there is more to life than just looking at what's right there in front of you, that there's a larger box and in our family, in our community and our family is Lexington County I think we need to increase the box to include the people of Batesburg-Leesville to bring something closer to them so that it's right there for them to take.

In conclusion, I would like to ask what is the mathematical, the scientific, or the monetary value of 7500 square foot technical education facility in Batesburg-Leesville. There is none. There never will be a way to equate that and we will never know and understand and be able to fathom what we do tonight and the steps that we take tonight and who that will change. Last I would like to end with MTC's statement of role and scope. The college actively seeks to promote business growth and increase regional prosperity and that's what we're in the mind for. Thank you.

Dr. William Gummerson, 338 West Columbia Avenue, Batesburg-Leesville 29006 - I want to concur with the statements that have been made and also want to say on behalf of my Board of Trustees that we are willing to work in any way with Midlands TEC to help them and also anything that we can do so that we don't duplicate services. We've had discussions. There's some things going on with the school district that I can not speak about that could work in conjunction with what you're going to do tonight. I will say having looked at the graduates that come out of Batesburg-Leesville, over 42 percent attend technical education. I'm used to coming from systems where I've taught before where over 80 percent are and one of the issues that I deal with when I talk with students and parents is the distance that they travel for those institutions based on their income and based on where they live. And so the location of a site in Batesburg-Leesville is very, very important to the citizens there, it's also important to our Chamber of Commerce as we try to attract businesses and industry that will help lower the tax rates on our homes and things like that. So we hope that you'll consider it.

Mr. Cullum opened the meeting for any further comments in favor of the Midlands TEC request.

Mr. Craig Lemrow, 1605 Lindler Drive, Gilbert, SC 29054 - I would like to chide the Council and the County a little bit for some of what we heard here tonight. When all of us got our reassessments I think for a large part we thought that the same millage would be applied. And as I understand the reassessment process it's essentially, initially a zero sum process. The old assessment times the old millage rate raised so many dollars, the new assessment is divided into that many dollars and the millage is, therefore, reduced. I also understand that there's supposedly a one percent maximum increase in that translation. And I think that the things that we've heard about tonight, the indigent care and the technical college have been put in a disproportionate light based on the fact that people have seen their assessments go sky high, and I live on Shull Island so I can feel their pain, think that all their taxes are going up by the amount that their assessment went up and now additional taxes are being tacked on on top. So I would like for all of you to think about anytime we do an assessment explaining what the process is when you send those assessments out. Also, for the record, the budget is available on line it can be downloaded, it's in PDF form if anybody wants to do it, I'm part way through it and it's 1,759 pages of detail. So if people want to look at the budget and see where they think a few mills can be pared to help support these things the millage for Indigent Care, that's a slam dunk, we're forced to do that and the millage to add to the technical college, I fully support all those things that they said. It will help our industrial base, it will help the taxes, it will help keep the taxes down on our homes and so I think we should do that. So I support what we are here to talk about tonight in terms of, our hands, the gun to our head from the State about the indigent care, we need to take care of people in the State I don't know how we got charged \$900,000 when the average per County was about \$250,000, but that's another issue to debate with

the State. But I hope that when you debate these things among yourselves you who know how the reapportionment is going to take place will take that into account in your decision making process today. Thank you.

Mr. Derrick - Mr. Chairman, we need to clarify one point, Craig.

Mr. Cullum - Mr. Lemrow.

Mr. Derrick - When you said maximum increase of one percent let's be sure and clarify that that is Countywide total revenue of money can only go up one percent. That does not guarantee that your taxes won't go up but one percent. Let's be real clear about that.

Mr. Lemrow - Yes, sir...

Mr. Derrick - I think most of these folks are from probably my district up at Shull's Island and I know, I've been hearing from you, maybe not you individually, but I've heard from you and a lot of the things you talked about tonight were directly related to State statute as far as we have, we have the ability to tax people and the Chairman of our Delegation stood up here in front of you and told you how he was going to take care of you so I'm sure that'll probably take place during the course of the next year, but it's difficult and it's convoluted and the things you were talking about, you can't explain reassessment in three minutes, I mean it takes volumes to explain reassessment one on one and it is difficult. I appreciate your comments.

Mr. Lemrow - I think if you had just sent out something with the assessment saying that, you know, our old assessment was "x" the millage rate was "y" the total dollars was this the new is going to be that way and therefore, the new millage rate to stop Ms. Price from having to have heart attacks the new millage rate is going to be 70 percent of the old rate or 50 percent of the old rate then they can do that math and they can feel a little bit better about the whole situation.

Mr. Derrick - I totally agree and Ms. Butler brought up the point. We need to itemize that thing. You don't need to have to guess what it is your stuff's being assessed at. It ought to be all written out so you don't have to go back and find last year's tax bill. But I appreciate your comments and I appreciate all of you all being here this evening.

Mr. Keisler - Mr. Chairman, you have Representative Toole.

Mr. Cullum - Mr. Toole would you like to speak in favor of.

Mr. Toole - No, I would like to rephrase what Mr. Derrick said. He stated it wrong.

Mr. Cullum - Well let's get through our public hearing and you can rephrase with Mr. Derrick here in just a minute. We're vastly over time. Is there anyone else that wishes to speak in the matter of Midlands TEC in favor of? No response. Mr. Cullum closed the public hearing.

Consideration of Millage Increase - Indigent Care Fund - A motion was made by Mr Davis that the Council concur and pay the State exactly what they told the County to pay which will require millage be increased on the taxpayers of this County (.5 mill).

Mr. Carrigg asked the amount.

Mr. Davis responded the amount from the letter is \$930,552.

Mr. Carrigg asked if this was a bill from the State.

Mr. Davis responded that this is a quarterly bill the County will receive.

Mr. Cullum asked for a second to the motion before any further discussion.

Ms. Summers seconded the motion.

Mr. Davis reiterated that this is mandatory; if the County does not pay it the charge will be five percent plus one and one-half percent a month and he did not know if Council would go to jail or to the House.

Several citizens attending said to tell them no.

Mr. Cullum called the meeting back to order; that Council was not going to deliberate with those attending.

Mr. Derrick stated for clarification he thought it was also written into the law that money can be withheld from aid to subdivisions so it was a matter of whether it comes out of one pot or the other pot. It would be taken from the County before received.

Mr. Owens stated that he resented the way it is billed to the County. The State could levy it and just send the County a bill through a different formula or just levy property tax. No, they drag it to Council and threaten with penalties if not paid. He stated you said what are they going to do put us in jail? Yes they will. Absolutely, they'll get a court order and we'll either pay. We don't have a choice. This is a State levied item. I wish we did. I think I'll vote against it just for the pure heck of it, but it won't do a bit of good.

An attendee asked why Council was even having a hearing.

Mr. Carrigg stated that he heard a question about why Council had a hearing. He stated because the State does require the County to pay this, but the State also requires in a reassessment year if you have any millage increases there must be a special hearing. Mr. Carrigg stated that Council conducted a public hearing the last time there was an increase for Indigent Care.

Ms. Summer stated that she hoped she said this correctly. The question of why are you here. It's

because myself as well as the rest of these councilmen want to hear what you have to say and we do take it to heart. As we go back every month and we look at the budgets and we look at what we can do, we will do our very, very best to do just that. I appreciate each and everyone of you coming here because I think you genuinely care and you want some changes made. I wish we were in total control, but we're not and I know that some of you believe that and I'm the youngest one up here as far as being on this Council, but we truly have obligations in so many other areas that we can't cut, but because we listen to you and because we are taking what you have said to heart we will go back and we will work hard every month to try to do what we can and I truly believe that.

Mr. Owens stated that Mr. Wise read an article in the paper and said that I refused to go along with putting off reassessment a year. Mr. Owens stated that's true; I wanted two years. I asked for two years to do it. State law prevented that because I knew we were going to be right where we are. No tax relief coming from the State level and we were going to be here so I said I will support doing it for two years then they found out the State statute doesn't allow two years. You can only do it one year. I think what we all thought has come to pass. There has been no tax relief from the State and here we are. But the fact that I said I didn't want to put it off a year, I wanted to put it off two years. Don't know if it would help but it would give them more time to work out something at the State level because we've been hearing these same promises for a decade.

Mr. Carrigg asked Mr. Porth if according to the information distributed to Council was the old millage around 84 mills?

Mr. Porth responded the 2004 was 80.9 mills, first column.

Mr. Carrigg asked what was the 83.6?

Mr. Porth replied the 2004 millage plus the 2.7 percent CPI.

Mr. Carrigg asked including Indigent Care and Midlands TEC would that be 71 mills?

Mr. Porth responded no. He indicated that the top of the sheet outlined the County operating millages which includes Indigent Care. The Midlands TEC appropriation is on the second part. Mr. Porth stated that the County millage for 2004 was 80.977. Also on the sheet are the preliminary estimates of what the calculation would be, based on the current assessed value. We would roll back to 68.905 and if the one-half mill (plus the 2.7 percent CPI) is added the total would be 71.265.

Mr. Densman asked what the total millage would be for Lexington County taxpayers, the bottom line, the total millage that would be multiplied by the assessment?

Mr. Davis responded that Council only sets the County millage and asked Mr. Densman if he had been to the school board meetings.

Mr. Densman responded, I've been to those.

Mr. Davis stated that will determine the major portion.

Mr. Densman stated, 72 percent, I understand that.

Mr. Davis commented, it could be more or less.

Mr. Densman asked, when will we know the total millage that will be applied to our assessments?

Mr. Davis responded, as soon as these budgets are all calculated and the totals are set in stone and they will divide that by the assessed value and come up with the millage.

Mr. Densman stated, that will be right before the tax bills come out.

Mr. Davis replied, yes, sir.

Mr. Derrick stated and the assessments are decided.

Mr. Davis stated and the assessment appeals are decided.

Mr. Cullum closed any further discussion.

In Favor:	Mr. Cullum	Mr. Davis
	Ms. Summers	Mr. Derrick
	Mr. Keisler	Mr. Carrigg
	Mr. Owens	

Midlands Technical College - A motion was made by Mr. Derrick and seconded by Mr. Davis that Council approve one-half mill for Midlands Technical College.

Mr. Cullum opened the meeting for discussion; no discussion occurred.

In Favor:	Mr. Cullum	Mr. Derrick
	Mr. Davis	Ms. Summers
	Mr. Keisler	Mr. Carrigg
Opposed:	Mr. Owens	

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana W. Burnett
Clerk

M. Todd Cullum
Vice Chairman