

Aiken City Council Minutes

February 4, 2005

Aiken's Horizons

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

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

The Aiken City Council met at Rye Patch at 100 Berrie Road for their annual Council retreat, called Horizons 2005, beginning at 12 noon with lunch.

BUDGET

Roger LeDuc, City Manager, and Anita Lilly, Finance Director, presented an update on the budget expenditures and revenues for fiscal year 2004-2005 for the General Fund, Utilities Fund and for the Interfund Loan Status. Mr. LeDuc discussed the revenue sources, including taxes, business license and other revenues. He reviewed the city's health insurance costs and the city's Wellness Program and the city's partnering with Aiken Regional Hospital for health screenings. He reviewed the cost for the city's liability insurance, Worker's Compensation and health insurance. He reviewed the city's experience modifier and how the city's insurance rates had dropped. He attributed this to the city's emphasis on safety and wellness for all employees. He reviewed some of the safety and wellness programs the city had held and some future programs. He also reviewed the Utility Fund revenue and expenses. He pointed out that water revenues had increased 7% to 9% after changing out 17,500 water meters so he had not come back to Council asking for an increase in water rates.

Anita Lilly reviewed for Council the city's water meter reading program and the equipment used. She pointed out that two readers read almost 18,000 meters in two days, where it used to take six readers twenty-two days to read the meters. She pointed out Aiken's meter reading program is the first fully implemented Orion System in the United States, and other cities are looking at our system. She pointed out one of the problems the city has is people tampering with the meters.

Mr. LeDuc then discussed the status of the Interfund Loans and the Special Holding Reserves as of December, 2004.

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNorthside

Mr. Ed Evans, Planning Director, stated one of Council's priorities was that a Comprehensive Plan be prepared to address the area north of the city limits to be served by city utilities. He said a plan is necessary in this area to provide guidance to the Planning Commission and City Council in making decisions on proposed developments that would use city utilities. He said preparation of the Plan would require that a consultant be hired to play a major role in its preparation. He presented a map showing the area proposed to be covered by the Comprehensive Plan study. It included an area basically from Crosland Park to just beyond I-20. It was pointed out this is a very large area, and that a detailed study of the entire area would be too expensive and unnecessary. It is recommended that the project focus on the major road corridors, including U.S. 1, U.S. 19, Wire Road and Reynolds Pond Road.

Council discussed the project and felt the whole area was too massive and would be very expensive. It was pointed out the County is in the process of a Strategic Plan, and that the City should work with the County and coordinate a plan with Aiken County, sharing information. They were concerned about spending money on a land plan when Aiken

County is working on a Strategic Plan. After discussion, it was felt the city should meet with Aiken County and talk with Clay Killian, Aiken County Administrator, to see what direction Aiken County will be going and try to fit a Comprehensive Plan in with the County.

INCENTIVES

Development Incentives

Mr. LeDuc reviewed four proposed development incentive plans, including Northside Development: New Construction and Renovation, Downtown Façade Rehabilitation, Empty Building Reuse, and Downtown Development.

Council discussed the proposed plans. They felt the proposed area for the Northside Development for new construction and renovation was too big and should be reduced. They expressed concern about people buying up properties and renting them. They felt Section 8 housing should not be included in an incentive program. They felt the program should just be for a builder or homeownership. The Façade Improvement Incentive would be a grant and should include the design guidelines for downtown areas. They felt the Empty Buildings Incentive should be for big boxes and not buildings downtown. It was suggested that the incentive be for buildings over 30,000 square feet and the incentive be limited to three years. Staff will review the proposals and bring them back to Council for adoption.

SIDEWALK SALES

News Stands

Merchandise on Sidewalks

Mr. Bill Huggins, Assistant City Manager, talked to Council about the growing number of newspaper racks and merchandise being displayed on the sidewalks downtown. This is a growing concern because of the number of newspaper racks and the unsightliness of so many stands and merchandise on the sidewalks and safety concerns. He reviewed how some other cities control these items. He showed the approach that Greenville uses in regulating these items with a uniform box that must be used.

Council discussed the problems, the unsightliness of the racks and the merchandise on the sidewalks. It was suggested that staff meet with the vendors who have news racks in the downtown, and that ordinance changes be drafted to give the city authority to regulate how many and where news racks could be placed. It was suggested that Aiken use the Greenville model, with a uniform box for the news racks. It was also suggested that ordinance changes be made to the code to deal with the display of merchandise on sidewalks and other public rights of way to make the code clearer.

SPAY/NEUTER PROGRAM

Mr. Pete Frommer, Public Safety Director, stated the city is encountering a problem with stray animals. He said a substantial cost is incurred in the budget yearly to prevent stray animals from roaming the city. He said to help with this problem he has asked SPCA representatives to present information on a spay/neuter program that they would like to see implemented to control the increase in the number of stray animals.

Ms. Barbara Nelson and Ms. Vivien Bunce talked to Council about implementing a spay/neuter program that would target low income areas, as this is the area where most stray animals are. They felt such a program would reduce future costs of animal control. They suggested offering a low cost neutering program and enlisting the support of the local veterinarians and asking for their input on their capacity and willingness to participate in a voucher program that targets the low income individual. They pointed out that such a program will reduce the stray cat and dog population and reduce future costs of animal control. It was stated people need to be educated about the program.

Mr. LeDuc stated the citizens need to be educated about spaying and neutering animals so there will not be a great population of stray animals. He stated the city presently spends about \$50,000 per year with the SPCA for stray animals that are picked up. It was

suggested that Council consider such a spaying/neutering program for Aiken and include money in the budget for the program.

SALARY SURVEY

Council Salaries

Mr. Kenneth Cook, Human Resources Director, stated each year he does a survey on 25% of the city's job descriptions to assure the city is offering competitive compensation to its employees. This is about 20 positions a year, which allows a 4 year rotation where every position is surveyed during that time. This method of surveying helps keep cost down and maintains relatively current salary information on all positions.

He suggested that one job that he might include in the next survey would be salaries for Mayor and Council. He asked if Council would like to have a survey of Council salaries. He said the survey is done by an independent firm, rather than the city.

Council discussed the proposal. Councilmembers expressed the feeling that the Councilmembers know what the salary is when they run for Council and they felt serving as a Councilmember was a community service. Councilwoman Vaughters stated she would like to give a tax break to the taxpayers before increasing salaries for Council. After discussion Mayor Cavanaugh and Councilmembers Smith and Cuning stated they would be in favor of conducting the survey.

PLANNING AND ZONING ISSUES

Mr. Ed Evans, Planning Director, reviewed for Council the status of the FY 2005 Planning Commission Action Agenda. He pointed out the Old Aiken Master Plan is pending before Council, amendments to Land Development Regulations for detention ponds and for concrete curb and gutter had been accomplished. The Zoning Ordinance has been amended for PUDs; Northside Comprehensive Plan should begin in spring, 2005. BZA issues regarding fences and walls are pending before Council. Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance are before the Planning Commission and Design Standards for buildings is with the ADDA Committee. An ordinance for curb cuts is being reviewed by staff, and the overlay district along Whiskey Road is awaiting County approval.

Mr. Evans reviewed other recent accomplishments, including large retail project ordinance, lighting in Planned Commercial zones, and adoption of a Traffic Management Ordinance.

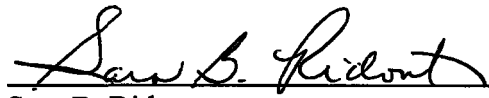
Mr. Evans then reviewed issues for the coming year, including Comprehensive Plan for the northside, Old Aiken Master Plan implementation, Zoning Ordinance amendments regarding accessory buildings, attached housing, tattoo facilities, evaluation of LP zone, inoperable vehicles at commercial locations, Institutional zone, public notice for amendments, underground wiring, design standards for new buildings along major roads, design standards for downtown, control of curb cuts, overlay district for Whiskey Road, and Powderhouse Connector Study.

Council discussed for some time tattoo facilities. It was pointed out that Gary Smith and Richard Pearce feel the City should have an ordinance setting up requirements for allowing tattoo facilities and where they may locate. They pointed out the state law allows the facilities so Council should pass an ordinance setting up regulations to control such businesses. It was pointed out that Aiken County attorneys feel that the County should not adopt a tattoo ordinance. Council felt staff should meet with the County to review the County's status on tattoo facilities and if County Council is going to adopt such an ordinance. It was suggested that the City Attorney and County Attorneys meet to talk about the reasons for such an ordinance.

Councilwoman Clyburn stated she was not in favor of placing tattoo facilities in the Industrial zone because they are so close to residential areas. She felt tattoo facilities should be in areas where they can be watched, not in an out of the way place.

Council then briefly discussed reviewing the permitted use list for Limited Professional zones. Councilmembers were concerned about some of the uses allowed in the LP zone. Councilwoman Vaughters stated the use list had been all right so far, since the uses were designated in 1999. Some Councilmembers felt if one zone was going to be reviewed for uses permitted that all zones should be review. Councilmembers Clyburn and Cuning were not in favor of looking at all uses permitted in all zones at this time. They felt this would be a tremendous job.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 P.M.



Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk