

Aiken City Council Minutes

April 14, 2003

WORK SESSION

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

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Gary Smith, Bill Huggins, Ed Evans, Glenn Parker, Sara Ridout, Philip Lord of the Aiken Standard, Josh Gelinas of the Augusta Chronicle and about 15 citizens.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 6:05 P.M. He stated Council had three items that they would like to discuss in the work session.

THEATERDemolitionLaurens Street NWRobbins, Royal

Mr. LeDuc stated City Council previously discussed the city's participation in the removal of the theater in the 100 block of Laurens Street NW. Originally Aiken Corporation was planning on assisting the developer with plans for this building. Council wanted to have these plans reviewed by them, as they relate to the development of downtown Aiken. The developer has decided not to use Aiken Corporation for this work but has photographs of what he intends to build at this site and would like to present this to City Council for review. The developer is also asking Council's assistance in the hauling of the debris from this site as part of the city's participation in the removal of an empty "Big Box." As stated earlier, the developer intends to have a multi-story structure with commercial on the front of the building and residential townhouses on the rear and upper levels. The developer is present at this meeting and is asking Council's permission to have the city crews remove and haul the debris from this building to a landfill site.

Mr. LeDuc stated the developer has been working with an architect from Atlanta and has developed a conceptual idea of the proposed project. He has some pictures of how the project would look. The developer is asking that when the building is demolished that the City assist in the hauling of the material to the landfill. He said if Council does not have any problem with the plans, the City can work with the developer, Royal Robbins, to haul the material away. Then the developer could complete the design and proceed with the project.

Mr. Royal Robbins, developer, stated he had a preliminary picture of a proposed development for the area of the present theaters on Laurens Street. The project would be retail space on the street level and condominiums on the upper level, being one or two stories, depending on the height requirements of the city. He presented pictures of a preliminary plan. He said he could not have specific plans yet until the theater is removed, as it is not known about the ground level floor and whether it is compacted enough to support a higher structure. He said there was also an option of putting underground parking under the structure. He pointed out the concept is a three-story building, 44 feet high.

Councilwoman Vaughters stated she was concerned that there were not specific plans for the project. She was concerned that something might be built that Council would not be pleased with in the downtown area. She said if the City was going to commit effort to the project that the City needed to know what will be built in the area and have a design plan of the project.

Councilman Cuning pointed out that the plan presented is a concept plan and the project is to look similar to the pictures, depending on the elevation of the property. If the plans change the developer has to come back to Council for approval. He stated the proposed

project should improve that area of Laurens Street with retail space and about six housing units.

Council discussed the proposed project, how it would improve the area and add to the tax base for the city. Council asked for some assurance from Mr. Robbins that the project would look similar to the pictures presented or that he would come back to Council if the plans changed.

Mr. Robbins stated the proposed project would be similar to the concept pictures presented to Council and if there was any drastic change from the pictures presented he would come back to Council with the plans. If Council did not agree with the changed plans, he would reimburse the city for hauling the material away.

CONNECTOR COMMITTEE

Appointment

Cunning, Pat

Smith, Richard

Vaughters, Jane

Mr. LeDuc stated City and County Council along with their Planning Commissions recently met and heard the results of a study concerning the connector roadway between Whiskey and Silver Bluff Road. It was decided at that meeting to form a committee consisting of City and County Council members and a few residents from that area. At their last meeting County Council selected Scott Singer, Rick Osbon, and Chairman Ronnie Young to represent the County on this committee. They are now asking the City of Aiken to select three members to be on this committee. The six member committee would then select residents who would participate in the selection of this route. The Committee would look at the seven alternates presented and recommend one of the alternates.

Mayor Cavanaugh asked if any Councilmembers would like to volunteer for the Committee. Councilmembers Cunning, Smith and Vaughters volunteered to serve on the committee for the City of Aiken.

OVERLAY STUDY

Mr. LeDuc stated a date had been set for the overlay meeting with Aiken County. That date has been set for Tuesday, April 29, 2003, at 6 P.M. in the County Council Building.

TRAFFIC IMPACT ORDINANCE

Impact Fee

Traffic

Mr. LeDuc stated City Council has been working on a Traffic Impact Ordinance for over a year. We hired the firm of ARCADIS to draw up this ordinance and Roger Dyar, who currently is the Traffic Engineer for the City of Spartanburg, has been working on a potential traffic impact fee. He stated when the matter was discussed last November with Council, Council had stated they wanted an impact fee in the proposed Traffic Ordinance. Since we last reviewed the ordinance in November there have been several changes which have been made to incorporate language from the state law concerning the use of impact fees. Roger Dyar has been working with the Augusta Regional Transportation System (ARTS) for the last several months to prepare a traffic model to project future traffic volumes for the Aiken community. The increase in trips over the next five years (87,165) is divided into the projected roadway projects cost (\$7,589,971) for the next five years and an impact fee is developed.

To recover the city's cost for the projected roadway projects the impact fee would need to be \$87.08 per trip. Thus the maximum fees for a gas station/convenience store (like the one on Silver Bluff) would be \$83,000, a new fast food restaurant \$104,000, a medical office \$41,000, and a single family house \$827. Based on last year's growth, the city would have received \$692,000. The impact fees per trip for other cities are \$100 (70% of maximum) for Mount Pleasant and \$170 for Hilton Head. Beaufort County has an

impact fee county-wide and depending on the area of the county the fee is either \$28 or \$44 per trip.

The State's major concern is that we do not charge a fee greater than the amount of the improvements that would be needed in any given five year period. Gary Smith, Ed Evans and Roger Dyar have spent a great deal of time putting the draft ordinance together for Council's consideration.

Mr. LeDuc stated Council had discussed how the city would fund the proposed transportation projects several different times. He said in looking at the proposed fee of \$87.08 per trip, it would be expensive for some proposed developments to come to Aiken. He said Council has to balance fees versus the possibility of some of the projects being developed outside the city, but the city would still have the traffic through the city to get to the development. He said one option Council had discussed at length which works well for the city and the county as a whole is the one cent sales tax. He said the one cent sales tax was approved by the voters in November, 2001. Originally it was figured the one cent sales tax would take seven years of revenue to pay for the projects. Revenues have come in much faster than anticipated, and it is felt that by December, 2005, all the revenue for the proposed projects will have been collected. He suggested that Council might want to look at whether they would like to continue the one cent sales tax for the next seven years to fund needed projects. He said if Council decides to continue the sales tax there would have to be an election in November, 2004. He pointed out the city collected about \$12 million dollars from the last sales tax, and he feels that figure would be about \$22 to \$25 million for seven years. He pointed out that some of the roadway projects needed could come out of the one cent sales tax. He said in looking at the impact fees Council could decide whether they wanted to use the maximum fee of \$87 or something less than that or whether they would like to have a small impact fee and then consider the one cent sales tax to help with the roadway projects.

Council discussed the proposed ordinance at length. There was discussion on what an existing lot is. There was also discussion on when the impact fee would be paid.

Councilman Cuning expressed real concern about businesses and residential developments being built outside the city or other places in the county rather than Aiken if an impact fee is imposed. He said he felt the fairest way to charge the impact fee is when the Certificate of Occupancy is issued. He felt Council needed to consider carefully the amount of the impact fees. He was concerned that projects would be built outside the city, and the city would still have the traffic problems without the fees.

Mayor Cavanaugh expressed the same concerns as Councilman Cuning. He pointed out that a vacant lot does not have an impact, but when a lot is built upon there is an impact on traffic.

Mr. Roger Dyar spoke briefly on the proposed ordinance and how he arrived at the proposed impact fee with the projected traffic increase and the proposed projects needed for the area.

Councilwoman Clyburn expressed concern that the impact fees would affect development on the northside. She wondered if the impact fees could be different for the northside and if there could be some incentive for developments on the northside.

City Attorney Gary Smith stated it is preferred to have the same fee for all areas because of the state laws. He pointed out if there is any difference it has to be justified.

Council discussed that developments were based on a square footage for the proposed impact fee. However, residences were based on a flat fee for a residence. It was pointed out there could be a difference in traffic impact from a small house to a large house with several cars.

Mr. Dyar stated he used the average national rate of 9.5 trips per single family residence per day to arrive at the recommended rate. He stated residential units can be divided into different categories for apartments, condominiums, retirement villages. He said data is

not available that relates trips to square footage of residential units at this time. He said there are many ways to figure the rate for residential units.

Council discussed whether it would be fair to charge the same impact for all developments and residences regardless of size and location. There was concern about how complicated the matter of an impact fee is and if an impact fee is not charged who pays for the traffic problems created.

Councilwoman Vaughters expressed concern about the Big Boxes and if there could be an incentive for developers to use the Big Boxes.

Mr. Ronny Bolton spoke regarding the proposed traffic ordinance and impact fee. He expressed concern about the increased cost for development and causing developments to be built outside the city but the city still having the traffic problems.

Councilman Smith stated he felt a traffic management ordinance and a traffic impact fee are separate issues. He said he felt a traffic management ordinance is needed in Aiken.

Councilman Cuning stated there is a problem in Aiken with traffic and there are projects which need to be funded to help the situation. He said the challenge is to figure out the best way to solve the problem. He said it can be ignored for a while, but it will not go away.

Council felt the matter of an impact fee was a very complicated matter and that Council needed to study the matter for a while before making any decisions.

Mr. LeDuc stated the Traffic Management portion of the ordinance could be brought back to Council for consideration without the Impact Ordinance. He said then Council could consider later the one cent sales tax as a way to help pay for some of the traffic problems. He said income from the one cent sales tax would probably take care of most of the traffic improvements. He said Council may want to consider the one cent sales tax as an alternative for revenue to make traffic improvements and whether a traffic impact fee is needed at this time.

After discussion it was the consensus of Council that this is an important matter and that the Traffic Management portion of the ordinance should be studied by the Planning Commission. It was pointed out the Planning Commission is currently studying the Old Aiken Master Plan and some other issues so it will probably be several months before the matter can be considered by the Planning Commission. The impact fee is a separate issue and will be considered separately by Council, and it was suggested that Council possibly consider the one cent sales tax to help pay for some traffic improvements.

HORSEPLAY

Mr. LeDuc pointed out that on Tuesday, April 22, 2003, Council is invited to help select the design for the city's horse for the Horseplay event and where it will be located.

TENNIS CENTER

Mr. LeDuc pointed out Monday, April 21, 2003, will be the grand opening of the Tennis Center at Virginia Acres.

VOLUNTEER LUNCH

Mr. LeDuc also reminded Council that the Volunteer Lunch will be held at 12 noon on Tuesday, April 29, 2003, at the Municipal Conference Center.