

MINUTES
LAURENS COUNTY COUNCIL
JULY 22, 2008

Members Present: Jim Coleman, Council Chairman; Diane Anderson, Council Vice Chair; Council Members Edward McDaniel, Ted Nash, Keith Tollison, David Tribble and Joe Wood

Staff Present: County Attorney Alexander Cruickshanks; Director of Public Works Scott Holland; and Administrator Ernie Segars

Chairman Jim Coleman called the July 22, 2008 meeting of Laurens County Council to order at 5:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Laurens County Court House. Councilman Edward McDaniel delivered the invocation and all recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

On a motion by Mr. Nash and a second by Mrs. Anderson, Council agreed on a unanimous vote (7-0) to approve the agenda for the July 22, 2008 meeting of Council.

On a motion by Mr. McDaniel and a second by Mr. Tollison, Council agreed on a unanimous vote (7-0) to approve the Minutes of the July 8, 2008 meeting of Council.

On a motion by Mr. McDaniel and a second by Mrs. Anderson, Council agreed on a unanimous vote to approve the Minutes of the July 15, 2008 meeting of Council. This was a work session to review the 2008-2009 budget for the Laurens County Fire Service.

Council then engaged in a discussion of Ordinance 665, which is the FY 2008-2009 budget for the County Fire Service. Chairman Coleman requested that County Fire Coordinator Ray Blackwell review a proposal that the tax credits provided on the primary vehicle for county volunteer firemen be increased from \$50 annually to \$100 annually. Mr. Blackwell stated that he had reviewed the line expenditures for this credit for the last four years and the average cost to the county had totaled \$3,604. The total for FY 2006 was \$2,567 and the total for 2007 was \$3,280.

Mr. Blackwell said that, based on his research, Council could increase the credit to \$100 annually without increasing the \$15,000 allocated for the credit. On a motion by Mr. Wood and a second by Mr. Nash, Council agreed on a unanimous vote (7-0) to increase the maximum tax credit per eligible vehicle from \$50 to \$100 per year.

On a motion by Mrs. Anderson and a second by Mr. Nash, Council agreed on a unanimous vote (7-0) to approve Ordinance 665 on second reading. In comments prior to the vote, Mr. Wood said that he had talked to representatives of several Laurens County Fire Departments concerning the Fountain Inn City Fire Department. Several volunteer departments have complained about the amount of county funds that the Fountain Inn Department receives annually to provide protection in that area of the county.

Mr. Wood stated that, in his opinion, the only alternative to the current service model is a newly formed volunteer unit to serve the district. Until the development of such a volunteer unit, Mr. Wood said that the only viable plan is the contract with Fountain Inn.

In a matter related to the fire service, Mrs. Anderson made a motion that the county provides county credit cards to the volunteer fire departments for the purchase of fuel. This centralized method of purchasing should result in considerable savings to the county and to the fire departments because of fuel tax reductions available through the centralized systems. In response to a question from Mr. Wood, Ray Blackwell said that of the 15 volunteer fire chiefs polled on the subject of centralized fuel purchases, 13 are in favor and two are opposed.

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Mr. Tribble offered a second to Mrs. Anderson's motion and Council approved the motion of a unanimous vote (7-0).

Administrator Segars advised Council that a public hearing and third reading approval of the FY 2008-2009 Fire Department Budget has been scheduled for August 26, 2008.

On a motion by Mr. Tribble and a second by Mr. Tollison, Council agreed on a unanimous vote (7-0) to approve on second reading Laurens County Ordinance # 666, which is "An Ordinance Providing for the Transfer of Authority for Conducting the City of Laurens Municipal Elections to the Laurens County Registration-Election Commission."

On a motion by Mr. Nash and a second by Mr. Wood, Council agreed on a unanimous vote (7-0) to award a Commendation to State Representative Adam Taylor upon his retirement from 10 years of service in the South Carolina General Assembly.

Chairman Coleman recommended that Laurens County Council present the Henry Laurens Award to the family of the late Judge James W. Johnson, Jr. of Clinton. On a motion by Mr. Tribble and a second by Mrs. Anderson, Council approved the recommendation unanimously (7-0.) County Attorney Alexander Cruickshanks advised that the Laurens County Bar Association will present a portrait of Judge Johnson to be displayed at the Hillcrest Square Judicial Center. Administrator Segars said that he is looking into the hanging of a plaque in Judge Johnson's honor at Hillcrest Square.

Council then considered Laurens County Ordinance #667, which is entitled, " An Ordinance to Provide for the Issuance and sale of a Not Exceeding Seventy Hundred and Seventy-five Thousand (\$775,000) General Obligation Bond, Series 2008 of Laurens County, South Carolina, to Prescribe for the Payment Thereof and Other Matters Relating Thereto."

Mr. Tribble made a motion to approve Ordinance # 667 on first reading and Mrs. Anderson offered a second to the motion.

In comments by Council members, Mr. Nash said that he is not satisfied with the Ordinance, because it does not offer any detail as to how the funds from the Bond will be used. Mr. Nash said that the primary function of county government is to provide public service, infrastructure and public safety. The county should not be in the business for providing funds for the development of a pharmacy school at Presbyterian College, he said.

Mr. Nash pointed to a recent report from the Laurens County EMS director in which he stated that the county does not have sufficient equipment or personnel to transport patients to hospitals outside of Laurens County. The county does not have a sufficient supply of patrol cars and funds will be needed to expand infrastructure to industrial parks

In responding to Mr. Nash's concerns about the brevity and lack of detail in the ordinance, Attorney Cruickshanks said that Ordinance 667 was presented for first reading " by title only." Prior to second reading, Council will receive the full text of the ordinance. The purpose of Ordinance 667 is to provide funding from Laurens County to assist the City of Clinton in locating a pharmacy school at Presbyterian College.

Mr. Tollison said that he agreed with Mr. Nash Laurens County needs better services. He said that he will support the Ordinance because of the economic growth that the pharmacy school will bring to the City of Clinton and to Laurens County.

In other comments, Mr. Wood said that he opposes the Ordinance because the full Council has never received a complete explanation as to what the funds will be used for. Mr. Wood said that no one from Presbyterian College has met with Council to discuss the project. The Clinton Development Corporation has approved the project at the urging of city officials, but the Laurens County Development Corporation has chosen not to participate, Mr. Wood said.

"Laurens County has a property tax, an Accommodations Tax, a solid waste tax, a Piedmont Technical College and now a Presbyterian College tax,' Mr. Wood said. "There are people in this county who cannot buy a loaf of bread and we are approving a plan that will increase taxes. Now is not the time to be increasing taxes."

Mr. Wood said that, with \$750,000, the county could buy five new ambulances, 35 patrol cars, three new fire trucks, "turn-out gear" for firemen and new equipment for the Department of public works. He urged Laurens County citizens to join in opposition to the Ordinance. He also said that Mr. Tribble and Mrs. Anderson should abstain from the vote because of their ties to Presbyterian College.

Mr. McDaniel said that he will oppose the Ordinance because Presbyterian College is a private institution that does not contribute to the tax base of the county. The college has millions of dollars in endowment, Mr. McDaniel said, and he is not convinced that the pharmaceutical companies are in need of pharmacists.

Mr. McDaniel said that he is not convinced that professors at the school will choose to live in Laurens County and he does not believe that the college can require the professors to live in the county. "I do not believe that this project is in the best interest of Laurens County," he said.

Mr. Tribble said that the project will be a major economic boost for the county and that he will support the project enthusiastically.

Chairman Coleman called for the vote and Council voted 4-3 to Ordinance 667 on first reading. Mrs. Anderson, Mr. Coleman, Mr. Tollison and Mr. Tribble voted in favor of the Ordinance. Mr. McDaniel, Mr. Nash and Mr. Wood voted in opposition.

In a staff report, Public Works Director Scott Holland reported that work is proceeding well on roof replacement at the Historic Court House. The roofers have recoated the dome and installed most of the replacement roof. The project should be completed within two to three weeks. The roofing project at the Emergency Services Building on South Harper Street is also proceeding well.

Administrator Segars advised that the Laurens County Assessor had received less than 60 requests for a hearing related to tax reassessment notices that were mailed to Laurens County property owners last week. There were more than 47,000 notices mailed. Assessor Jerry Robertson said that his office can handle the requests for appeals without difficulty.

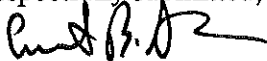
During Public Comment, Skip Hallady, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Cross Hill Fire Department, said that his department is badly in need of "turn-out gear" for firemen.

On a motion by Mrs. Anderson and a second by Mr. Tollison, Council voted unanimously (7-0) to go into Executive Session for two legal briefings.

Council returned from Executive Session at 6:35 p.m. and Chairman Coleman advised that Council had two legal briefings and no action was required.

Council adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Ernest B. Segars
Laurens County Administrator