

BARNWELL COUNTY COUNCIL
June 29, 2020
Regular County Council Minutes

<p>Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, the news media were notified & notice was posted 24 hours prior to the meeting.</p>
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A Public Hearing for the final reading of the Ordinance to Raise Revenue and Adopt a Budget for Operations and Debt Service for the County of Barnwell, South Carolina, for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021 and a Special Called County Council Meeting were held on June 29, 2020, with the following present: Chairman Ben Kinlaw, Councilman Freddie Houston, Councilman David Kenner, Councilman Don Harper, Councilman Daniel Alexander, Administrator Tim Bennett, and Clerk to Council Elaine Ferguson. County Attorney, J.D. Mosteller, joined the meeting by teleconference.

The following were also in attendance: Barnwell County Business Manager Debra Fickling, Treasurer Sandy Cochran, and Jonathan Vickery with the Barnwell People Sentinel.

The public hearing was held for the Final Reading of An Ordinance to Raise Revenue and Adopt a Budget for Operations and Debt Service for the County of Barnwell, South Carolina, for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021. No comments were made.

The regular meeting was called to order by Chairman Kinlaw. Councilman Harper gave the invocation and Councilman Kenner led the Pledge of Allegiance. A quorum was declared. Councilman Houston made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilman Alexander. Motion carried. Chairman Kinlaw thanked everyone for coming to the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Administrator Bennett read an email from Pender Disposal in opposition to the increase in the C&D Disposal fees at the Solid Waste Landfill (copy attached).

NEW BUSINESS

S&P Global/Bond Rating Update

Administrator Bennett stated he was contacted by Standard & Poor's Global Ratings and because of the recent issues involving the Treasurer's Office, they are requesting a conference call with the county in the next couple of weeks to review the situation. He contacted S&P today to get several optional times for this call. Chairman Kinlaw reminded everyone that last year S&P gave the county a rating with a negative outlook but over a 10-year period was able to save a million dollars in the finances of the bonds. He said when the vacancy happened in the Treasurer's Office, he shared with Administrator Bennett that he was accustomed to submitting an SEC form 4 or some notification that there had been a change, however Parker Poe said it was not necessary. He said now we have been contacted by S&P so it is the county's goal to assure S&P that the county has made an earnest attempt to reduce the losses and to move forward to turn things around.

E911 Reimbursement

Administrator Bennett stated the county staff met with the E911 addressing office, and they are exploring the reimbursements the county is eligible for from DOR. He said the staff believes there is a substantial amount of money that they can show DOR the county is eligible to receive, and the staff is working with the E911 office to prepare for a July 6 meeting with DOR. He said the county's goal is to get reimbursed for all that is owed to the county.

Treasurer's Report

Barnwell County Treasurer, Sandy Cochran, said Ashley Tarter had been hired to fill the deputy treasurer's position, and she started on June 22 and is working out very well. She said the forensic accountant was here on June 22 and 23 to scan the bank statements from September of 2017 to March of 2020. Treasurer Cochran said her office had been comparing the bank statements to the general ledger and were finding discrepancies that were being corrected so these would not delay Pickens Williams and Wendy Gibson in their process of reconciling the books.

Chairman Kinlaw told Treasurer Cochran that he had talked to Mr. Williams and Mr. Gibson last week and they felt the \$2.5 million was not a loss but was entries that needed to be made to balance this out. Treasurer Cochran said she thought this was an accumulation of several bookkeeping posting errors and once the entries are made, things will come out nicely.

Courthouse Renovations/Elevator

Barnwell County Business Manager Debbie Fickling stated that when the plans for the courthouse started, they knew the elevator needed to be upgraded because there had been problems for 5 or 6 years. She said she had talked to the architects who suggested the county talk directly to Otis Elevator in order to save money, and before Jesse left, he had talked to Otis and got a breakdown of everything that is needed to be done to bring the elevator up to code. Mrs. Fickling said she and Rhonda McElveen had met with Otis who has agreed to the prices they had given last year and will also hold these figures for another month. Otis has also agreed to include a new light scanner for the doors in the Administrator's building at no additional cost if the county allows them to upgrade the elevator between the Courthouse and the annex at their estimate of \$119,000. The elevator would then be up to code and like new. She said this is the only access to the second floor for anyone that cannot take the stairs and until this is done the courthouse will not be ADA compliant.

Councilman Alexander said he felt they should not have maxed out the courthouse budget to \$3.7 million knowing the elevator needed to be repaired at some point. Administrator Bennett said their recommendation would be to look at the alternatives for the courthouse and rather than do some of the alternatives, make repairs to the elevator. Debbie Fickling said she thought they could get by with the 2 alternates that had already been done: a second courtroom and remodeling some of the restrooms downstairs.

Councilman Houston asked for the amount now in the contingency. Mrs. Fickling said they had \$200,000 at the beginning and one of the change orders was just a few thousand dollars but she did not have the exact figures in front of her. Councilman Houston said he would recommend that they use the contingency to repair the elevator. Administrator Bennett recommended that they review the alternates with Rhonda McElveen and see which ones could be eliminated in order to bring the elevator up to code and bring the recommendations back to council for their approval. Councilman Kenner asked if someone got stuck in the elevator could the fire department get them out. Debbie Fickling said the fire commissioner, Timbo Williams, has an override he can use to get the doors open.

Replacement of Library Roof

Debbie Fickling said back in February, Mark Beasley with Building and Grounds found a stack of shingles beside the library and questioned the staff about them and was told that they had been picking them up as they fell off the roof and putting them in a stack, but they had never told anyone with the county. She said she filed a claim with the Insurance Reserve Fund, but due to the age of the roof, the claim was prorated and after the \$1,000 deductible, the county received a check for \$4,992.44. Mrs. Fickling said Mark Beasley requested bids from several vendors; however, he only received one bid in the amount of \$14,675. Recently Mr. Beasley had to get bids for reroofing the museum and the lowest bid received for that job was from Red Shirt Guys out of Columbia, so Mrs. Fickling said she contacted a Red Shirt Guys representative and asked them to bid on the library roof. Their bid came in at \$11,788, which included \$917.50 in options at no cost.

Mrs. Fickling said this vendor was planning to reroof the museum mid-July to mid-Augus, and they said they could do both jobs during this time if this was approved by the council. There was discussion concerning contingency in the library budget, which the administrator confirmed was \$16,400; however, these funds were set aside for other purposes. Councilman Houston said the library is well used and certainly should not be ignored. He said if the funds could be found, the roof should be replaced as soon as possible and he made a motion to this effect, seconded by Councilman Harper. Motion carried.

Resolution Implementing an Increase in the Landfill Fees for Construction and Industrial Construction and Demolition Debris

Administrator Bennett directed council to a copy of the resolution in their packet which was prepared by County Attorney Mosteller. The administrator said he and staff were prepared for an extended conversation with council unless they were ready to vote on the resolution. Councilman Alexander said this was a significant increase and they only had 5 members present. He questioned whether council should proceed or wait until next month when all members might be present.

Councilman Harper said he thought council should go forward tonight and Councilman Houston agreed asking the administrator when this would go into effect. Administrator Bennett stated that the plan was for it to go into effect immediately; however, Councilman Houston said the county would need to give notice to the public. The administrator said he was prepared to send the notice to the newspaper, put it on the website and on facebook, and if the county uses a July 15th effective date, the notifications could be made.

Councilman Harper made a motion to accept the resolution, seconded by Councilman Houston. Under comments, Councilman Alexander said this appears to be a 40% increase and this seems to be a large increase at one time. There was some discussion concerning step increases and the fact that there had been no increases in three years. The vote was 4 for and 1 against. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

Third Reading of An Ordinance to Raise Revenue and Adopt a Budget for Operations and Debt Service for the County of Barnwell, South Carolina, for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021

Councilman Houston asked that Administrator Bennett present an update on the budget. Administrator Bennett stated the budget is balanced at \$16,443,150 following major cuts to all departments' expenditure requests. Budget requests from \$100,000 to \$300,000 were cut 3%; requests from \$300,000 to \$700,000 were cut 5%; and requests \$1 million and above were cut 7%, except for the Sheriff's Office. Mr. Bennett said the budget includes property tax revenue from a countywide millage rate of 144.861, and this rate includes the 1.81% millage cap. He said the forecasted value of a mill, as provided by the County Auditor, is \$57,724. Mr. Bennett added that per the county's bond council, an additional 1.03 mills was levied to cover the debt service, which mean there will be an overall millage increase of 3.61 mills.

Administrator Bennett said this budget does not cover all of the expenditures the county expects to have this year, but he feels the county is making progress in reducing expenditures and bringing them more in line. He said he was asking for approval of this balance budget. Councilman Houston made a motion to accept the financial report and to pass the Budget Ordinance, seconded by Councilman Alexander. A roll call vote was requested.

The roll-call vote on the motion was:
Councilman Houston Aye
Councilman Kenner Aye
Councilman Harper Nay
Councilman Alexander Aye
Councilman Kinlaw Aye

Motion carried.

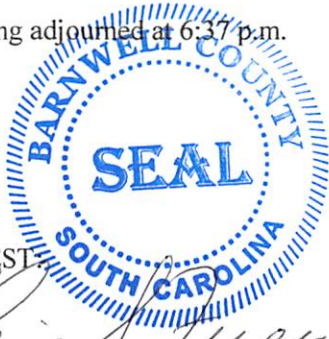
Councilman Houston said he wanted to thank the Administrator and his staff for their extra hard work. He said he hopes council will continue to let the administrator handle the budget rather than trying to prepare the budget and approve it. He said he would like to encourage the council that has made promises to employees, and said they should work towards bringing the employee's salaries from the outdated salary scale and bringing them up to date. He said he understands that this was a reassessment year but every year is not a reassessment year and there comes a time when council should vote for what they tell employees and what they believe rather than just talk.

Chairman Kinlaw said the county continues to look for available funds, even this week hearing about some federal funds. He also stated that it was a goal to get the landfill to break even. Councilman Alexander said he wanted to acknowledge that the MIAP program cost had been reduced by \$100,000 and he wanted to thank the legislative delegation for this. He

also wanted to thank the Sheriff's Department for their willingness to move forward with the Federal Inmate Housing program.

Councilman Houston made a motion to adjourn. This was seconded by Councilman Kenner. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 6:37 p.m.



BARNWELL COUNTY COUNCIL


Ben Kinlaw, Chairman

ATTEST:



Elaine S. Ferguson, Clerk to Council

Approved: 7/14/20

**PENDER'S DISPOSAL SERVICE
P. O. BOX 1077
BARNWELL, SC 29812**

(803)259-5636; (803)541-1595

June 26, 2020

DEAR COUNCILMEN:

I would like to address the issue of the increase of landfill fees at the Barnwell County Landfill. Now is not the time to have an increase, especially with the economic times businesses, contractors and industries are facing. There have been layoffs, cutbacks and downsizing. An increase of any substance would cripple some businesses who spend a lot of money already to keep this landfill operational. We will be losing one industry at the end of the year and we have seen major cutbacks from other industries as a result of the pandemic and other factors. Now is not the time to add another cost on an already struggling economy. Instead, find ways to better operate the landfill and make it more efficient.

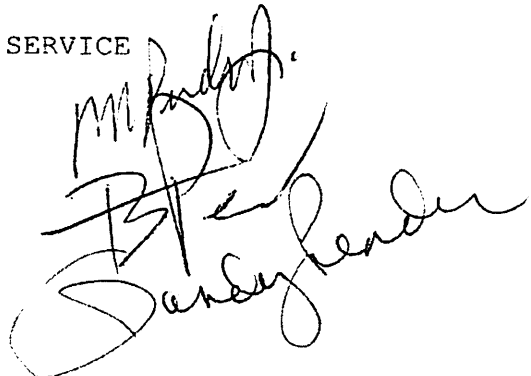
You could save money by converting the way you pick up trash from your convenient sites by implementing a system that would go to a one truck system and eliminate your front loader truck all together. There are ways you can save costs without increasing the fees the businesses, contractors and industries are paying.

Please consider the fees that the paying businesses, contractors and industries are already paying and the damage and increase in costs it would absorb. It would be best for Barnwell County economy not to make this increase at this time. We need to let our businesses/contractors/industries get back on their feet again.

Thank you for your time and God Bless you all.

PENDER'S DISPOSAL SERVICE

DONNIE PENDER
BRITT PENDER
SANDY PENDER

Handwritten signatures of Donnie Pender, Britt Pender, and Sandy Pender. The signatures are written in black ink and are positioned to the right of the typed names.