

**BARNWELL COUNTY COUNCIL**

**June 9, 2020**

**Budget Workshop Minutes**

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, the news media were notified & notice was posted 24 hours prior to the meeting.

A Budget Workshop was held on June 9, 2020, at 5:00 p.m. with the following present: Chairman Ben Kinlaw, Vice-Chairman Harold Buckmon, Councilman Freddie Houston, Councilman David Kenner, Councilman Don Harper, Councilman Daniel Alexander, Councilman Jerry Creech, Administrator Tim Bennett and Barnwell County Business Manager Debra Fickling.

The Budget Workshop was called to order by Councilman Houston, Chairman of the Finance Committee. A quorum was declared. Councilman Alexander made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilman Kenner. Motion carried.

Councilman Houston reported that there was a Finance Meeting held on the morning of June 8, 2020, and he asked Administrator Bennett to give an update on that. Administrator Bennett said that there is a balanced budget but that he and Maria Williams, the Finance Director, had spent time over the past two days working on this with Neal Crider, the accountant. He referred everyone to page 2 of the revenues where Federal Inmate Housing Fund was highlighted showing revenue of \$669,480, and on page 1 of the expenditures where the expenses of \$156,000 had been added and also the next line "contingencies" for use as the sheriff spends it. Mr. Bennett said the \$156,000 was deducted from the Sheriff's budget. He also said that Neal Crider is satisfied with the format; however, when it comes time to do the financial statement, he will need to lift out these line items. Mr. Bennett said the remainder of the \$669,480 is meshed in with the departments to support the general fund.

Administrator Bennett said that the \$180,000 expenditure that was under the "C" Funds, which Mr. Alexander had pointed out was a double entry, had been deleted. Mr. Bennett said he had confirmed with Curtis Hogg that this was indeed included in his budget so this further brought down the expenditures. He said this results in a balanced budget on Second Reading of \$16,285,515 with revenues and expenditures being equal. Mr. Bennett said that Maria Williams had found that there was also a \$5,700 entry for Blackville which was in there twice so this will be corrected and it will change the totals for the balanced budget. He also said he was asking Debbie Fickling and Maria Williams to take another look at the budget so extra eyes can review it.

Administrator Bennett said he had been working with Cynthia Ray with the Sheriff's Department on the SRO funds, and he had asked her to give him an accurate amount of SRO funds coming from the State and from the schools. Mr. Bennett said he had put in a placeholder of \$270,000 and also there is some other potential revenue on the sheriff's side that he is looking at.

Councilman Houston said there had been a question about the purpose of the Evergreen Fund. Mr. Bennett said he had talked to the County Attorney, J.D. Mosteller for his corporate memory, and J.D. said the Evergreen Fund is unrestricted. Mr. Bennett said it is like a rainy-day fund, to be used only if necessary. He said the other good news today was he had emailed Danny Black and asked if he would mind delaying the requirements on the county to pay SCA for the building until late October, and Danny Black is okay with the delay.

Councilman Houston asked if the final reading was scheduled, and Mr. Bennett said the ad had been run announcing the meeting would be held on June 29 for the Public Hearing and the Third and Final Reading.

Councilman Alexander asked if Captain Rasar was aware of the expenditures that were deleted from his budget for the Federal Inmate Housing. Mr. Bennett said that Finance Director Maria Williams called Captain Rasar and explained the amounts and the line item numbers for the expenditures that were deleted which were salaries, fringe benefits, medical and food.

Mr. Bennett said he felt he should go ahead and alert the department heads of the cuts to their budgets; and if and when they were notified, there would be many objections and council should be prepared for the telephone calls. Councilman

Houston asked if Mr. Bennett was referring to the departments that he had sent memos to asking them to cut their budgets, but they did not respond. Mr. Bennett confirmed that was what he was referring to and Councilman Houston said council did not need the approval of the department heads to approve the budget. He said it was Mr. Bennett's job to present council with a balanced budget, and council did not have to fund the department's luxuries, just their needs. He said he felt it was the council's intent to provide for the department's needs, and it was his opinion Mr. Bennett had given everyone the opportunity to cut their own budget and when they didn't do it, Mr. Bennett had to cut it in order to present a balanced budget to council. Chairman Kinlaw said he thought Mr. Bennett was just trying to give council a head's up, and Mr. Bennett said the council could expect to hear from all of the departments.

Councilman Houston asked Administrator Bennett if he had adjusted the Coroner's budget because council had already been told that the owner of the hospital was expecting to get paid. Mr. Bennett said he had not heard back from them, but he thought the county could anticipate having to pay \$4,800 a year.

Councilman Alexander asked if the landfill fees had been increased. Mr. Bennett said his preference was to increase the fees to \$50 per ton on July 1. He said Mark Blackwood has done research on neighboring counties and most are at least \$50 per ton and some might be above it; and the intent was to implement it on July 1 and notify everyone of that. Councilman Alexander asked did this require action from council. Debbie Fickling said a Resolution was required, and Councilman Houston said that would need to be done next week. Ms. Fickling said it would also need to go in the newspaper twice before it was implemented. Administrator Bennett said this Resolution could be done at the June 29<sup>th</sup> meeting, and said he would get with J.D. on the structure of this. Debbie Fickling said she thought the county had an old Resolution they could use and Councilman Houston agreed.

Councilman Alexander said he had received a call today from the fire commission saying they needed \$60,000 to replace some trucks, and they were asking if this had been included in the budget. He had responded to the caller that he had no idea. Councilman Harper said he had also received a call. Mr. Bennett said it was not in the budget but it may have been in Timbo's fire commission budget. He said the county pays Timbo's salary and the fire commission gets millage for the rural fire departments. Councilman Houston asked if they were talking about getting new trucks to which Councilman Alexander responded that it was his understanding the fire departments try to purchase trucks every 3 or 4 years and this \$60,000 makes the payment on them.

Councilman Houston said the way they have been doing it is this was coming out of the fire commission budget. Mr. Bennett said that the Budget Ordinance shows they get 11 mills at \$32,689 per mill which would be almost \$400,000. Councilman Alexander recommended that this issue could be worked on by the Services Committee.

Chairman Kinlaw said he had spoken to someone recently about how the rural poor counties could get additional funds from the credit facilities. He said in 2017 or 2018, Councilman Creech had asked about pay raises and asked if the Evergreen Fund could be used, but it was said that if the county used it, it would have to be repaid in one year. Chairman Kinlaw said Councilman Creech had made comments recently about people getting raises, but council would have to cut expenses by \$200,000 or would have to raise taxes by that amount. Chairman Kinlaw said there was a neighboring county that has been doing that, and they are now in severe financial trouble at this time. He said their general fund balance is \$6,000,000 compared to Barnwell County's at \$8,000,000, and their intergovernmental is \$27,000,000; and as council thinks through this, it will be faced with this every year, and he questioned how council was going to handle this.

Chairman Kinlaw said council had voted to give Cascades the additional 3 years which was about \$800,000. The schools get approximately one-half of this and about one-third goes to the Town of Barnwell, but this did save some 130+ jobs. He further stated that if council raises taxes, it cannot raise them during a reassessment year.

Councilman Houston said it was his opinion that council could have been making necessary increases in the budget in small increments and it chose not to. He said the council needed to do something or it was going to be in a position of losing those people that can find better jobs, especially now with the unemployment rate so high. He said the county may lose some of its key people. He said he thought the county needed to put something into place and plan for the future. He questioned how the council got itself in the position that it needed to do something but was not financially able to do it, and council kept saying let's keep the millage down but it did not do anything about raises. He asked Debbie Fickling how old the study that was done on this was to which she replied it was probably 23 years old. Councilman Houston said someone had mentioned upgrading this. Debbie Fickling said that the law enforcement and detention center salaries had been upgraded but nothing had been done for the clerks. Councilman Kenner said council also needed to look at whether they could sustain what was put in place.

Chairman Kinlaw said that on the grant match fund, the budget currently showed zero. Administrator Bennett said he was going to add a minimum of \$10,000 for grant match.

Chairman Kinlaw said there had been money in the 19-20 FY budget for the big STEM festival but it did not happen this year because it was postponed. Councilman Houston said he did not think this was sent out. Administrator Bennett said he would check with Maria Williams on this.

Chairman Kinlaw also said the SCAC was supposed to send an email out today about the conference in Hilton Head. He said there was to be a short conference and Councilman Houston said this should help out the budget.

Councilman Alexander said that Administrator Bennett and his staff had done a great job, and Councilman Houston said that Administrator Bennett had made it a lot easier for he and Councilman Alexander this year since they did not have to sit through the long budget meetings. He said the role of the Administrator was to prepare the budget and present it to Council for approval which Administrator Bennett had done.

Councilman Alexander asked if the bid on the cemetery was in the budget. Chairman Kinlaw said this would come out of the Cemetery Fund where the money is deposited when people buy plots. Debbie Fickling said some months the grass would only need cutting 1 time. Administrator Bennett said that the winning bid was \$1,370 times 12 months would be roughly \$15,000, and this would deplete the Cemetery Fund real quickly.

There being no further comments or questions, Councilman Alexander made a motion to adjourn the budget workshop, seconded by Administrator Bennett. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 5:50 p.m.



BARNWELL COUNTY COUNCIL

Ben Kinlaw, County Council Chairman

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Freddie Houston, Sr., Finance Committee Chairman

ATTEST:

Elaine S. Ferguson, Clerk to Council

Approved: 7/14/20