

BARNWELL COUNTY COUNCIL
June 28, 2021
Special Called
County Council Meeting Minutes

<p>Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, the news media were notified and notice was posted 24 hours prior to the meeting.</p>
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Barnwell County Council met for a special called meeting on June 28, 2021, at 5:00 p.m. Attending were Chairman Harold Buckmon, Vice-Chairman Jerry Creech, Councilman Freddie Houston, Councilman David Kenner, Councilman Don Harper, Councilman Daniel Alexander, Councilman Ben Kinlaw, Administrator Tim Bennett, and Clerk to Council Elaine Ferguson.

Also attending were Representative Lonnie Hosey, Barnwell County Business Manager Debbie Fickling, Charter Communications' Senior Director Regional Government Affairs Ben Breazeale, and Charter Communications' Senior Manager State Government Affairs James Knox. Attending by teleconference was Senator Brad Hutto.

Chairman Buckmon called the meeting to order, gave the invocation, and a quorum was declared.

Councilman Houston made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Vice-Chairman Creech. Motion carried.

Councilman Harper made a motion to go into Executive Session for a discussion of proprietary matters regarding potential Charter Spectrum broadband coverage of the county and matters regarding the county attorney, seconded by Councilman Alexander. Motion carried.

Executive Session

Open Session

Chairman Buckmon reported that council was back in open session and no decisions were made while in Executive Session.

Councilman Houston made a motion that council ask Administrator Bennett prepare a letter to be signed by Chairman Buckmon to be sent to the County Attorney expressing council's concerns as mentioned in Executive Session, seconded by Councilman Harper. Motion carried.

PUBLIC HEARING

A Public Hearing prior to Third and Final Reading of the FY 21-22 Budget was held on June 28, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. Chairman Buckmon asked the Clerk to Council if she had received any Public Comments to which she replied that she had not. There was no one from the public present, and therefore, no public comments were made during the Public Hearing.

SPECIAL CALLED MEETING

Barnwell County Council met for a special called meeting on June 28, 2021, at 6:05 p.m. Attending were Chairman Harold Buckmon, Vice-Chairman Jerry Creech, Councilman Freddie Houston, Councilman David Kenner, Councilman Don Harper, Councilman Daniel Alexander, Councilman Ben Kinlaw, Administrator Tim Bennett, and Clerk to Council Elaine Ferguson.

Also attending was Barnwell County Business Manager Debbie Fickling.

Chairman Buckmon called the meeting to order, gave the invocation, and a quorum was declared. Councilman Houston made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilman Alexander. Motion carried

OLD BUSINESS

Third and Final Reading of FY '21/22 County Budget Ordinance

Councilman Houston said that the FY 21/22 Budget was ready for the Third and Final Reading and asked Administrator Bennett to present the balanced budget. Administrator Bennett said the budget is balanced at \$18,480,775, and no funds were transferred from the Fund Balance. He said the 1.23% millage cap is included in the budge, which will produce an anticipated \$91,440, which was divided as follows:

- a. \$5,000 was allocated to the Library;
- b. \$5,000 was allocated to the Public Defender's Office;
- c. \$4,225 was allocated to the Public Works and Solid Waste Departments to cover initial costs of a bulldozer and motor-grader, whose lease costs will begin in FY 22/23; and
- d. the remainder of \$77,215, is included in the Contingencies line item of \$305,080 in Expenditures.

Administrator Bennett said the remainder of the \$305,080 contingency comes from \$266,000 in money he double-budgeted in the Detention Center, and thanks to the eyes of our Finance Team, Maria, Debbie and Elaine, we pin-pointed that redundancy and jerked it out and dove-tailed it back into the contingency. He said there are some various ideas on the table as to what to do with that money. He said his recommendation is to sock the money away and not spend it for several reasons. He said reason number one is it will be a feather in the county's cap with S&P Global, formerly known as Standard and Poor's. He said the county had a major rating review by them last week, and they have downgraded the county's bond rating from A+ to A, and the county's Barnwell Facilities Corporation rating from A to A-, but they have said that the county is stable. They said the county is stable because it made a good, solid, realistic impression on the guy rating us, which probably kept us from going lower, but we impressed upon him that the county has several things going to stabilize ourselves internally financially and, therefore, they did not drop the county even more in our rating. He said reason number two is we have new monies in this budget thanks to the work of Elaine, who has been at Finance for a while. He said he would like to make sure those new monies come in on track. He said he would like to see a track record of that for at least a year, but to stand by and have that money to fill any gaps. He said the third reason is the actuarial valuation by McGriff is on the county, and we have \$140,000 built into the budget to help us in that evolution, but we do not know exactly what it is going to cost. He said, to sum up, he is asking the council to sock the money away and don't spend it. He said any expenditures coming from it should not be done by staff but should come to this county council for a decision.

Administrator Bennett said on the Budget Memo, council will see that Public Safety comprises 32% of the operating budget. He said lastly, effective July 1, we are requiring our department heads to submit purchase requisitions for anything over \$250. He said anything over \$250 or any line item on which that \$250 is applied, or if it is near or over the budget for that line item, it will come to him or whoever is the County Administrator, to review it and basically take a hard look at it. He said that will also include travel requests, and when a request is made or when travel is anticipated, we will have a form that the department head will fill out which will also come to the County Administrator to review. He said the purpose of this is another step to get a handle on where the county is overspending, and to be able to tackle this issue before it gets out of hand or gets even larger than what it is.

Councilman Houston asked if the administrator could give council millage allocations. Administrator Bennett said the total millage is 146.6 mills with a value of \$58,425 which is a conservative value from the County Auditor Gwen Kinard. Councilman Houston said he was asking for how many mills it would take to run each department, and Administrator Bennett replied Public Safety in a Rural Area is 4 mills, and the value of a mill in the unincorporated area is \$32,688.09 x 4 mills is \$130,752.36.

Councilman Houston asked if 25 mills or 30 was the total for the county operations. Administrator Bennett replied that county operations was 146.6 mills, the Public Safety in Rural Areas was 4 mills, the Rural Fire Protection was 11 mills and the Debt Service was 11.7 mills.

Councilman Houston made the motion council approve this balanced budget of \$18,480,775, seconded by Councilman Alexander. Under comments, Councilman Kinlaw said he wanted council to know it has some other looming issues that are budget related and when they start talking about spending money, they need to look at how they are spending it.

Chairman Buckmon asked for any other discussion. Councilman Alexander asked for a roll-call vote.

Councilman Houston – aye
Councilman Kenner – aye
Councilman Harper – aye
Councilman Alexander – aye
Councilman Kinlaw – no
Vice-Chairman Creech – aye
Chairman Buckmon – aye

Chairman Buckmon said the Budget is approved.

Councilman Houston said he wanted to thank Administrator Bennett and all the help he had because he and Councilman Alexander have been coming in, but it has been a lot less work when they have allowed Administrator Bennett to prepare a budget and do what he does. He said he wanted to thank the finance group for all their work and help. Administrator Bennett said he wanted to thank his finance team along with Sandy Cochran in the Treasurer's Office, who has been helpful as well.

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

Meeting adjourned at 6:23 p.m.

ATTEST

Elaine S. Ferguson
Elaine S. Ferguson, Clerk to Council
Minutes Approved: 7/13/21

BARNWELL COUNTY COUNCIL
Harold Buckmon
By: Harold Buckmon, Chairman