

BARNWELL COUNTY COUNCIL
September 14, 2021
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 regularly scheduled meeting on September 14, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. Attending were Chairman Harold Buckmon, Vice-Chairman Jerry Creech, Councilman Freddie Houston (via audio), Councilman David Kenner (via Zoom), Councilman Don Harper, Councilman Daniel Alexander, Councilman Ben Kinlaw, Administrator Tim Bennett, Clerk to Council Elaine Ferguson, and Acting County Attorney, Joanie Winters (via Zoom).

Chairman Buckmon called the regular council meeting to order. Councilman Kenner gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance. A quorum was declared.

Councilman Harper made a Motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilman Alexander. Motion carried.

Vice-Chairman Creech made a Motion to approve the minutes for the Regular Council Meeting held on August 10, 2021, seconded by Councilman Harper. Motion carried.

Chairman Buckmon welcomed everyone and said today's meeting is on Zoom, but nevertheless council is here to represent the County of Barnwell; and he thanked everyone for their participation.

Public Comments

Nancy Knopf said she was here to ask permission from council to have a fundraiser for the Animal Shelter. She said she had hoped to create a calendar featuring a fireman and an adoptable animal from the Shelter and splitting the proceeds from the sale of calendars between the two organizations. She said she did have a handout that she would be sending to council's emails so they will each get a copy of her proposal.

Appointment and Nominations to Boards, Committees, and Commissions

Councilman Houston reappointed Mattie Odom to the Museum Board, and reappointed Chantane Mason- Tobin to Axis I from District 1. Councilman Houston made a motion to appoint Darren Bernard Ferguson from District 2 to the Airport Board for District 1, seconded by Councilman Alexander. Motion carried.

Councilman Kenner had no appointments for District 2.

Councilman Harper nominated Ryan Bragg, who is in District 1, to the Housing Committee for District 3.

Councilman Alexander had no appointments for District 4.

Councilman Kinlaw said all of his appointments were full, so he had none at this time.

Vice-Chairman Creech reappointed Sam McKay to the Airport Board and reappointed Jennings Owens to the Museum Board.

Chairman Houston made a motion to appoint Harriett McKnight from District 1 to the Recycling Committee for District 6, seconded by Councilman Kenner. Motion carried.

Committee Reports

There were no reports on the Science, Technology and Regulatory Matters Committee, Housing Committee, Transportation Committee, and Judicial Committee.

Government Committee

Chairman Buckmon said that the Government Committee met a couple of weeks ago, and their main topic was redistricting. He said Ms. DeFrenn met with them, but the County cannot do anything final with this until it gets accurate numbers. He said those numbers are supposed to come in later this month, and Administrator Bennett confirmed that we should receive them by October 1, 2021.

Chairman Buckmon said the Building Inspector Michael Grubbs is retiring on September 30, and the County will be transitioning into getting the inspections done by SafeBuilt. He said there were several ongoing projects that SafeBuilt will have to take over, but hopefully some of those can be resolved by Mr. Grubbs.

Chairman Buckmon said they also had a discussion about retirement for council members. He said he and Councilman Harper were the only two council members involved. Councilman Kinlaw said he was asked if he wanted insurance and retirement, and he had replied that he did not want them, because he did not want the County to have the extra expense. Administrator Bennett said that the County's HR, Linda Cook, had done further research, and the County has no liability. He said everything is good, and said the three councilmembers involved were Chairman Buckmon, Councilman Harper, and Mr. Lowell Jowers. He said they were putting in a better way to document retirement data.

Finance Committee

Councilman Houston said the Finance Committee met on the 8th of September, and they discussed a few things that were important and pertinent to action items for tonight. He said Kim Bowman came before council talking about the broadband for the downtown area of Barnwell, but eventually Williston will be added on. He said this is being done like an Eco-Boost to get businesses involved which would like to expand their business outside the area with broadband. He said Ms. Bowman came to the Finance Committee Meeting and said that she has applied for a \$75,000 grant from Commerce. Commerce is saying that she has got to come up with \$75,000 from the County and other sources. He said she was asking council to come up with \$50,000, and she would seek through EDC, SCA and others to get the other \$25,000. He said he knew ahead of time that it was going to cost the County something, and the County is already partnering with the other group with the broadband, but this will give the County an even better chance of getting some things done. He said he would like to ask that the County set aside the \$50,000 from the American Rescue Funds to meet her needs, providing she can get the other \$25,000 from the other agencies. Councilman Houston said he would like to make this in the form of a motion, seconded by Councilman Alexander.

Under discussion, Councilman Alexander said the Finance Committee is going to suggest later in the meeting appointing an ad hoc committee to review a lot of these proposals. He said Council will hear about two of them that have not gone through that process, this being one of them. He said the reason

the Committee is presenting this tonight is there is a grant application due, and there is another request that has some time sensitive issues. He said going forward, they would like for this to go through a more formal process. If these two are approved by council tonight, it will allow these two agencies to get started on initiatives, and these would come out of the \$4 million American Rescue Plan money that has been allocated to the County. The motion carried.

Councilman Houston said that during the Finance Committee meeting, there was also a discussion concerning the Accommodations Tax Program that the County receives monies from hotels and motels in the County. He said they learned the County is supposed to be offering some of these funds up for grants to agencies in the County that are active in supporting tourism. He said they had not known about this until the Finance Committee meeting, and they asked Administrator Bennett to move forward with this and come back to council with a plan for approval. He said he thought we probably had to have an ordinance or resolution on how the County intends to handle this and how this money will be issued out.

Administrator Bennett said he had worked with an Accommodations Tax (ATAX) program in Beaufort County, and tourist-related organizations and events would submit requests to a County ATAX Committee which reviews the requests. He said the requests should be very detailed. He said the Committee would then rank those requests and make their recommendations to the County Council for approval. He said that would be the process he would propose via ordinance which will be coming council's way.

Councilman Houston said that about a month ago, the County received a request from Generations Unlimited requesting some funds from the American Rescue Plan. He said the Finance Committee was recommending and he was making a motion that the County approve an allotment to Generations Unlimited of \$25,000 to keep them in operation for about 45 days until the Ad Hoc Committee could meet to review Generations Unlimited's application, seconded by Councilman Alexander. Motion carried.

Personnel Committee

Councilman Alexander said first he wanted to talk about this Ad Hoc Committee, and as council knows the federal government issued the County several million dollars from the American Rescue Plan. He said under that Plan, the Finance Committee would like to put together an Ad Hoc Committee of three community members that could review the applications. He said during the Safety Committee's EMS review process, everyone can agree that the County had a good process there by having outside people looking at these, and also the Finance Committee believes that these proposals that are coming in now, and will continue to come in, should go through some formal review process, where the requests will be scored, with everything documented, etc. He said the Finance Committee would like to propose a small group of people that could be this Ad Hoc Committee, and the three names that are on the table tonight are Julie Dempsey from Barnwell, who is a former SCA employee who worked on the Promise Zone, and a person who is good with grants. The second will be Larry Adcox from Williston that Councilman Harper and Councilman Houston know, and then from Blackville, Councilman Houston and Councilman Kenner recommend Evelyn Coker.

Councilman Alexander said those are the three, and council can certainly discuss those, but those are the three that the Finance Committee would like to propose tonight, and he put it into the form of a motion for council to create an Ad Hoc Committee to review the American Rescue Plan applications with those being the three members of the committee. Councilman Houston seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Councilman Alexander presented the job description for the administrative assistant for the Landfill. He said it was not in the packet last month, but it was in there this month, and this position was included in the budget for this fiscal year. Councilman Alexander made a motion to approve the job description of administrative assistant at the Landfill, seconded by Councilman Harper. Motion carried.

Councilman Alexander said the Personnel Committee had received a request from the Magistrates to hire a part-time clerk for weekend coverage. He said they have one weekend clerk now, but they needed to hire a second one, and there would be no extra money needed in the budget because they would rotate weekends. He said if the one they have now gets sick, they are stranded, and they had a couple of issues with COVID. He said they want to hire one additional part-time clerk, and the only money that would be necessary up front would be about \$2,500 for the training for that position, but the Finance Committee believes that this could be paid for by funds from the American Rescue Plan. He said they would look into that, and he made a motion that council approve for the Magistrate's Office to hire a part-time clerk with no extra expenditures in the budget except for the \$2,500 for training, seconded by Councilman Kenner. Motion carried.

Healthcare Committee

Vice-Chairman Creech said the Healthcare Committee and Safety Committee met for a joint meeting on September 8. He said there had been some problems with Allendale County Hospital not accepting Barnwell County patients from Medshore. He said Phil Clarke is working out a protocol between Allendale County Hospital and Medshore as to which patients can be transported to the Allendale County Hospital and which patients will need to be transported to other hospitals. He said the main problem is that Allendale County does not have the facility to care for some patients, so they were rejecting them. He said there is no reason to take a heart patient to Allendale County, because it is only delaying time to get the patient to a facility that can treat him or her. He said the CEO of the Allendale County Hospital and the Emergency Room doctor joined the Zoom meeting, and he felt they had a good meeting, which is a plus for the Allendale County Hospital, Barnwell County, and Medshore.

Vice-Chairman Creech said we have some problems with Orangeburg Regional Hospital as well. He said he did not want to discuss them tonight, but he will bring council up to date at the October meeting after he gets more information.

Safety Committee

Councilman Harper said as council had heard, there was joint meeting of Healthcare and Safety, and COVID is again a big issue, and has come back with a vengeance. He said the other part of that meeting was concerning courtroom security, and they also had Sheriff Griffith in on this. He said right now with what he is looking at, he thinks this needs to be tabled until a later date until he can get more information.

Barnwell County Clerk of Court Rhonda McElveen asked Councilman Harper about the \$5,000 to tie the elevator into the alarm system. She said Councilman Harper had said in the Safety meeting that he would bring this up at the council meeting. She said she was fixing to be through with Johnson Security, and they had said they could upgrade the courthouse elevator so that it could be combined with the alarm system. Councilman Harper said he would like to talk to these people and see what they are proposing. Ms. McElveen said this may end up costing the County more money for Johnson Control to come back.

Chairman Buckman said what council can do is once Councilman Harper has the discussion, then council can be polled to see if they approve it.

Economic Development Corporation

Councilman Harper reported that the project at the Airport is complete, and the \$600,000 project had been signed off on.

Services Committee

Councilman Kinlaw said the Services Committee met on September 8, and there was a discussion concerning a DHEC Landfill report. He asked Administrator Bennett to report on this. Administrator Bennett said each year the County is required to give an annual report to DHEC that reports on the operations at the Landfill. He said the County is also required to publish the report in the local newspaper, and County staff believes the questions that are asked do not produce answers that accurately reflect what is actually happening at the Landfill. He said what he was going to do with the Committee's permission is to go ahead and do the report, send it to DHEC, but when it is published in the newspaper, there will be notes at the bottom that give additional answers to the questions. He said this will be beneficial to the public to let them know what is actually happening at the Landfill. He said he spoke to DHEC last year, and they said it is a format that they have inherited, and it is pushed forward every year. He said it was not their fault that it was structured that way, but he believes we need to add additional information to accurately reflect what the operations are at the Landfill.

Councilman Kinlaw said the Services Committee is recommending that the County reimburse a motorist for damage to her vehicle, which allegedly occurred on White Oak Drive and Sanders Lane. He said she turned in an estimate of the damage along with pictures of the damages, and he made a motion that she be reimbursed for her damage. Councilman Kenner seconded the motion. Councilman Houston asked that the motion be restated, and Councilman Kinlaw said it was to reimburse a motorist for damage to her vehicle which occurred when the County was doing work on Sanders Lane and White Oak Drive before they were paved. Motion carried.

Councilman Kinlaw said the Services Committee also discussed the cemetery, and they would recommend issuing a bid for a new groundskeeping contract and also recommend that the County rewrite the Cemetery Ordinance to better address ongoing issues. He said the committee would recommend that in April, the County implement a plan to apply retardant to kill weeds, and also the County needs to explore building a new road to access plots on the outer ring of the cemetery. Chairman Buckmon asked if this was an annual thing where we would put the groundskeeping out for bid. Councilman Kinlaw said this was just done for the first year, and he asked Administrator Bennett to comment. Administrator Bennett said this was the first year, and this has been a learning process. He said the county went out for bid to outsource the groundskeeping at the cemetery, and the first year we have learned a lot, and we want to go back and issue a new contract with a new scope. He said this one will be more comprehensive than the first one. He said the best way to go is to do this annually.

Chairman Buckman asked if Councilman Kinlaw was making a motion to put the groundskeeping at the cemetery back out for bids to which he replied that it was, seconded by Councilman Kenner. Motion carried.

Councilman Kinlaw said Public Works received a request to go out and pave at Denmark Tech, and that was done. He said it cost the County \$1,750 to fill potholes.

Councilman Kinlaw said the shelter group met last Friday, but he was unable to attend. He said he had received a call saying that on FaceBook, it was announced that we were closing the Animal Shelter for an indefinite period, and this come after two weeks ago shutting it for four days. He said he would like to know about these decisions before they are made rather than someone calling him and telling him about it. He said there are issues there, but the Animal Shelter has got to stay open, and it has to function. He said we need to determine how we are going to do that.

Chairman Buckmon asked whose decision it was to close it, and Councilman Kinlaw said he thought the recommendation came from Administrator Bennett, and that he signed off on it. Administrator Bennett said this is a very complicated issue at the Animal Shelter. He said the staff there is doing its best to keep it open, but they are overwhelmed. He said he supports the current director's efforts to keep the Shelter operational under the constraints she is working under, and yes, he did support her making that move. He said this is a very fluid situation, and yes, we can certainly call a special meeting of the Services Committee or the Judicial Committee, whichever oversees the Shelter.

Administrator Bennett said as council knows, this is further complicated by an investigation going by an outside investigator looking at the relationship between the Board and the Shelter staff. He said his goal has been to support the employees, and keep the shelter open as much as possible amidst all the issues that are swirling around the Animal Shelter at this time.

Councilman Kinlaw said he heard the Board tell the Manager, if you need help, let us know. Administrator Bennett said he would respond to that by saying it is not that simple. He said he thinks this is a potential legal matter, and it is best to keep the conversation about it to a minimum because of the ongoing investigation. Councilman Kenner said he would agree with that.

Councilman Kinlaw asked how many on council has ever visited the Animal Shelter. Several raised their hands, and Chairman Buckmon said he had visited quite a few times. Councilman Kinlaw asked Chairman Buckmon when was the last time he was there, and Chairman Buckmon said about two weeks ago. Councilman Kinlaw said he would encourage everyone to visit.

Recreation Commission

Vice-Chairman Creech said the RFQ for the pool was put out Monday, and the Recreation Committee will meet at 6:00 p.m. on September 30 to go over the bids received. He said they plan to have a groundbreaking, if the Legislative Delegation can work it into their schedules, on the first Wednesday in November, which is November 6. He said the Heritage Corridor group will tour Barnwell County on September 27 and 28 to check out what assets Barnwell County has and how we can better them. He said he thinks they have a bank roll to go towards improvements for Barnwell County. He said Gibby Sanders and the drafting students at the Career Center are drawing up the plans for the bathhouse for the pool. He said there was a lot going on, and everything is going well. He said there is enough money to build the pool, and they hope to get some more in to make more improvements on it, but as far as the pool is concerned, they do have enough money committed to build the pool. Chairman Buckmon said that sounds good.

Old Business

Emergency Ordinance and Resolution to Declare a Local State of Emergency in Barnwell County

Administrator Bennett said there was an Emergency Ordinance and Resolution to Declare a Local State of Emergency in Barnwell County in front of them to put back in place for 60 days basically aimed at allowing electronic meetings to take place, such as what council is doing tonight, for not only County Council but for committee meetings as well. He said as part of that, we hope by October to be able to fold FaceBook into Zoom, and we are looking into other improvements to allow us to better operate under these conditions. He said also within the Ordinance is a recommendation, not a requirement, but a recommendation, that County employees and people entering the County Administration Building wear a mask. Councilman Creech made a motion to approve the Emergency Ordinance and Resolution, seconded by Councilman Houston. Motion carried.

New Business

Resolution of Recognition / Charles Lowell Jowers, Sr.

Vice-Chairman Creech read the Resolution of Recognition of Charles Lowell Jowers, Sr. into the record, and it was made a part of the minutes of this meeting. Motion to approve by Councilman Houston, seconded by Vice-Chairman Creech. Motion carried.

Barnwell County Website / Redesign

Administrator Bennett reported that an RFQ to redesign the County Website was in Council's packets, and he believes the County can justify the source of revenue to be the American Rescue Plan because it increases communication in a better way out to the public. He said it makes the website more user friendly, and it allows the County to pass on more information in a better way. He said their intent is, if it is approved tonight, to put it on the street tomorrow (Wednesday, September 15) and to seek bids to redesign the website. Councilman Alexander made a motion that council approve the RFQ submission for the Barnwell County website, seconded by Vice-Chairman Creech.

Under discussion, Councilman Houston asked who was going to maintain the website. Administrator Bennett said part of the RFQ is training of staff. He said staff received a full-scale briefing from a website designer to get more familiar with the process, but part of the process is to design it in such a way that it is user friendly for staff to manage it. He said this is number 1 and is a big advantage when we judge these particular products. He said it needs to be easy enough for staff to maintain it ourselves. He said we would assign particular department heads certain parameters to update their pages, but we would be the ones to update it. Motion carried.

First Reading by title only of an Ordinance to Amend Ordinance No. 2010-08-262 (Ordinance of Barnwell, South Carolina, to Update and Establish Animal Control and Update the Animal Shelter Board)

Chairman Buckmon read the title for the record.

Adjourn

Motion was made by Councilman Houston to adjourn, seconded by Councilman Alexander. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.



ATTEST:

Elaine S. Ferguson

Elaine S. Ferguson, Clerk to Council

Approved: 10/12/21

BARNWELL COUNTY COUNCIL

Harold Buckmon

By: Harold Buckmon, Chairman