

Minutes

City of West Columbia, SC

Council Work Session

August 16, 2010 at 4 p.m.

Members Present:

Bobby E. Horton, Mayor
Tommy G. Parler, Mayor Pro-Tem
Eric L. Fowler
L. Dale Harley
Jack L. Harmon
Boyd J. Jones
Cathy Shannon
B. J. Unthank

Members Absent:

Marsha Moore, ill

Others Present:

Jenny Cunningham, City Administrator
Myron Corley, Deputy City Administrator
Mardi Valentino, City Clerk
Donna Smith, Director of Economic Development
Sid Varn, Director of Planning and Engineering
Brian Carter, Director of Planning & Zoning
Members of the Public and Press

Rick Hodge, City Treasurer
Joe Owens, Utilities Director
Wyatt Coleman, Fire Chief
Charles Garren, Public Works Director
Dennis Tyndall, Police Chief
Stuart Jones, Building Official

Mayor Horton called the work session to order at 4 p.m. *The State*, the *Free Times*, the *Lexington County Chronicle*, the *Cayce-West Columbia News* and *The Columbia Star* were notified of the work session by e-mail on August 13, 2010.

Mayor Horton recognized City Treasurer Rick Hodge who advised Council that Lexington County has given the city information on updated property assessments to determine the final millage for Fiscal Year 2010-2011. He said the operating millage is 55.279 and the bond debt millage is 6.60 for a total of 61.879 mills. He requested Council to consider approving the final millage at the next council meeting.

Mayor Horton recognized City Administrator Jenny Cunningham who gave an update on the Transportation Work Group, which is studying service provided by the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority (CMRTA). The group is composed of representatives from City of Cayce, City of West Columbia, Town of Springdale, Lexington County, Lexington Medical Center, Columbia Metropolitan Airport and Midland Technical College. The group is working with CMRTA to determine the cost of providing bus service to Lexington County from October 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011. She said \$53,181.36 in funding would extend the service nine months to allow the Transportation Work Group to study future funding such as increasing ridership fares to \$2.00 per trip. DART paratransit service would be included within a ¾ mile radius of the two fixed bus routes. She said funding the \$53,181.36 to continue CMRTA service until June 30, 2011 is being considered as follows:

County of Lexington	\$20,740.73	39.00 %
City of Cayce	\$9,838.55	18.50 %
City of West Columbia	\$9,838.55	18.50 %
Town of Springdale	\$3,190.88	6.00 %
Lexington Medical Center	\$3,190.88	6.00 %
Columbia Metropolitan Airport	\$3,190.88	6.00 %
Midlands Technical College	\$3,190.88	6.00 %

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Mrs. Cunningham distributed a final draft revision to the current West Columbia Employee Handbook. She explained the original handbook was published in the early 1990s and periodically amended through the years. She said the revision incorporates all amended policies and several new policies. The city's labor attorneys, Gignilliat, Savitz and Bettis, PA, reviewed the revision to ensure it complies with current employment laws and regulations. She said the revised handbook was reviewed for practical application and numerous language changes were made for clarification purposes.

Mrs. Cunningham highlighted existing policies that were consolidated into the handbook as follows:

1. Family Medical Leave Act – applies to employees with 12 or more months of service: pages 13-16.
2. Physical Disability and Personal Leave – policy applies only to employees having less than 12 months of service: page 12
3. Retire Group Health Plan: page 23
4. Employee Substance Abuse and Testing Policy: pages 29-36
5. Anti-Harassment Policy – policy updated with a more recent version and moved to the front of the handbook: pages 4,5

Other changes to existing policies and new policies that have been added include:

6. On the cover page, the labor attorney advises to boldly display that the handbook is not a contract of employment.
7. The Statement of Personnel Policy in the old handbook has been replaced with an Equal Employment Opportunity Policy. This is a language change.
8. The previous policies on disciplinary action could be construed as progressive discipline policies and were removed entirely from the handbook. They were replaced, as recommended by the labor attorney, with a new policy that only contains examples of conduct warranting disciplinary action.
9. The section on compensatory (comp) time was removed from the handbook. Comp time has been avoided for many years due to potential long term liability on the city's books.
10. Work Place Privacy and Computer/Internet Policies have been added. These are model policies recommended by the labor attorney.
11. The Cell Phone Policy is new and outlines procedures for the issuance and employee use of city cell phones.
12. The Smoke-Free Environment Policy has been added and prohibits smoking on city property (except in designated areas) and in city vehicles.
13. The Retiree Re-employment Program guidelines are new and require retiring employees to submit formal requests for re-employment, which is considered on a case-by-case basis.

Mrs. Cunningham stated that once Council approves the revised handbook it will be published in booklet form and distributed to all city employees. Council will consider approval at its next meeting.

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Mayor Horton recognized Economic Development Director Donna Smith who presented an annexation study on West Columbia. She explained that the city is interested in taking a more aggressive approach to annexation to expand the city's tax base in order to spread the tax burden over a more diverse group of property owners. Two major commercial corridors, Sunset Boulevard (U.S. Highway 378) and August Road (U.S. Highway 1) were determined to be the highest priority for annexation. She pointed out several constraints to annexation such as: previously extending water and sewer service without requiring annexation if the properties were ever to become contiguous to city limits; the physical boundaries of the city being bounded on two sides by water and on a third side by another municipality that only allows growth in one direction; contractual boundaries for water service established between the City of West Columbia and the Town of Lexington; private water and sewer providers in the growth area; and fringe areas along the city's boundaries that already are developed giving the city limited ability to induce annexation. She said financial constraints include properties that could create negative net revenues such as older residential areas and infrastructure costs for providing sewer service. She said legal constraints include the antiquated annexation laws presently enacted, and the difficulty of obtaining the minimum required signatures from 75 percent of property owners who own 75 percent of the assessed value of in any area being considered for annexation. Another constraint is the public's perception of annexation that it will cost more money in taxes and add another layer of government.

Ms. Smith noted that the city has been relatively successful in annexing properties. From 2006 through August 2010, the city annexed 87 parcels including 61 residential, 17 commercial, and nine undeveloped properties. She said the city adopted the use of annexation agreements in 2007, which states that the property owner agrees to annex the property once the city gives notice that the property is contiguous.

Ms. Smith identified four commercial corridors as annexation priorities: Sunset Boulevard, Chris Drive, Augusta Road and Leaphart Road. She listed current enclaves ("donut holes") as: Westland Square and Sunset Court shopping centers, Sum-Mor Drive area, Wade Street/Leaphart Road area, Carlin Drive area, Double Branch/Greenwood Road area, Saluda Trail/Laurel Crest Drive area, Dreher Road/Huckabee Road area, Taylor Street/Crapps Avenue area, Sewanee Drive/ Riviera Drive/ Cofield Drive/ Terrace View Drive area, South Woodside/Beverly Drive area and L Avenue/Alex Street area. She explained the advantages and disadvantages with each potential annexation.

Ms. Smith offered several questions for the Council to consider regarding the city's future annexations: 1) Does Council want to move forward with its current annexation policies? 2) Does Council want to establish a procedure for discontinuing utility service until an annexation petition is signed? 3) Does Council want to establish a new policy to all outside users stating that properties must be annexed when notified of contiguity, otherwise service will be discontinued?

Mayor Horton recognized Planning and Zoning Director Brian Carter who presented the West Columbia Beautification Plan. Mr. Carter said the purpose of the Beautification Plan was to be a comprehensive long-rang plan to guide the beautification of public and private properties in West Columbia.

Mr. Carter stated that the presentation answers four basic questions: 1) Where is West Columbia now in terms of beautification efforts? 2) How did West Columbia get there? 3) Where does West Columbia want to go in terms of beautification efforts. 4) How does West Columbia get there? Mr. Carter explained that the cost of labor to maintain the plantings and landscaped areas includes city personnel, landscape contractors, city personnel contracted on private property, revocable easements and recognizing landscape contractors.

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Mr. Carter displayed a map indicating primary and secondary corridors where beautification projects have been completed or are being considered for future beautification projects. Primary corridors include: Sunset Boulevard, Meeting Street/Augusta Road, Jarvis Klapman Boulevard, Platt Springs Road, Airport Boulevard and Charleston Highway. Secondary corridors include Charleston Highway (100 block to 1200 block), Williams Street, Dreher Road, 12th Street, State Street, 9th Street, Hook Avenue, Glenn Street and Leaphart Road. He explained that some considerations for beautification projects are: location on high visibility traffic corridors, feasibility for potential sites to sustain healthy growth, location of water for irrigation needs, cost of the project for its potential impact, and financial support through grants, municipal funds and private donations. Mr. Carter discussed public participation through social media, recognition plaques, dedication trees and adoption of landscaped areas. He identified 12 potential projects that would provide seamless continuity as people drive through the city. He said the major focus will be Sunset Boulevard from the new entrance sign at the Gervais Street Bridge toward the 400 block where the city's water treatment plant is located. Mr. Carter emphasized that as funds are donated from public and private sources, projects will continue to be implemented along Sunset Boulevard toward the city limits near I-26.

Mayor Horton stated that Council will be asked to adopt the West Columbia Beautification Plan at the next council meeting.

Mayor Horton advised Council that he met with Steve Mann, Executive Director of the Joint Municipal Water and Sewer Commission, and Mayor Randy Halfacre of the Town of Lexington, who also is the executive director of the Lexington Chamber of Commerce, regarding ways to encourage Delta Airlines to lower fares and increase flights in larger aircraft to the Columbia Metropolitan Airport. He said a \$750,000 federal grant is being pursued to provide funds as an incentive for Delta to offer more flights and competitive fares at Columbia. He explained that businesses and municipalities are being asked to join together to fund the 10 percent local match of \$75,000. He asked Council to consider supporting the grant by contributing to the local match.

There being no further business Mayor Horton declared the council work session adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marta M. Valentino, CMC
City Clerk