MEMBERS, OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL

Mr. Steven R. Moore, District I   Mr. Thomas S. Crumpton, Jr., District II
Rev. William S. "Bill" Rinehart, District III   Mr. Marion E. Lyles, District IV
Mr. H. Frank Ables, Jr., District V

MINUTES, OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

The Oconee County Council met Tuesday, January 17, 2006 at 7:00 pm in Council Chambers, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC with all Council Members, County Administrator Ron Rabun, Clerk to Council & Mr. Norton, County Attorney present.

Press:

Members of the press notified (via mail): Keowee Courier, Westminster News, Daily Journal, Anderson Independent, WGOG Radio, WYFF TV, WLOS TV, WSNW Radio & WIRX Radio.

Members of the press present: Dick Mangrum – WGOG Radio, Dave Williams – Anderson Independent & Andrew Pomykal – Daily Journal.

Other Organizations Notified:

Also notified were the Oconee County Tax Payers Association, Citizens for Recreation Center and the Oconee County Democratic Party.

Call to Order:

Chairman Ables called the meeting to order.

Invocation:

Mr. Rinehart gave the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance:

Mr. Norton led the pledge of allegiance to the US Flag.

Minutes:

Mr. Lyles made a motion, seconded by Mr. Rinehart, approved 5 – 0 that the minutes of the January 3, 2006 meeting be adopted as printed.

Public Comment Session:

Ms. Susie Cornelius addressed Council regarding their waiving the bid process for item #9 on the agenda, her request for a grant application, the Duke Power Company assessment and her request for an adjustment to be made on her tax notice to reflect the error in the Duke Power Company assessment. Ms. Cornelius also addressed use of the conference room by citizens who wish to comment on agenda items during the Council Meetings and Council committee meetings being held at the same time.

Mr. Berry Nichols addressed Council regarding honoring all Oconee men and women who serve in the military, old and new business on the agenda, using the commercial building on Highway 11 and the old courthouse as detention centers, agencies in the County that duplicate services and items 8 & 9 on the agenda.

Mr. B. J. Littleton addressed Council regarding the way the County flag is being displayed.

Resolutions 2006-02, 2006-03 & 2006-04:

Mr. Mack Kelly, Public Works Director, presented Resolution 2006-02, "A RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING JIMMY PAUL WHITMAN, JR." upon his retirement to Mr. Whitman.

Mr. Ables, Council Chair, presented Resolution 2006-03, "A RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION TO THOSE WHO DEFEND OUR NATION" recognizing James "Buck" Darby, Oconee Sheriff's Department employee to Mr. Darby.

Mr. Lyles, Council Member, District IV, presented Resolution 2006-04, "A RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION TO THOSE WHO DEFEND OUR NATION" recognizing Jason Zimmerman, Oconee Airport employee to Mr. Zimmerman.

Mr. Lyles made a motion, seconded by Mr. Crumpton, approved 5 – 0 that these resolutions be adopted on first and final reading.

Heritage Corridor Check:

Ms. Paula Reel was unable to attend the Council Meeting; therefore, presentation of the grant check in the amount of $30,000 was removed from the agenda.

Sewer Commission:

Upon recommendation of Mr. Robert Winchester, Sewer Commission Superintendent & Mr. Dewitt Martin, Sewer Commission Member, Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mr. Rinehart, approved 5 – 0 that W. K. Dickson Inc. of Charlotte, NC be retained for Phase I engineering of the four projects (I-85, Richland Creek, Martin Creek and Septage/Grease Facility) (See attached scope of services and proposed contract)

Infrastructure Strengths & Weaknesses Needs Assessment:

Mr. Lyles made a motion, seconded by Mr. Ables, approved 5 – 0 that Council adopt the recommendation of the Infrastructure Commission with a finding of fact that due to the services that Wilber Smith Associates provide being unique and needed immediately the bid procedure be waived and Wilber Smith Associates be engaged to perform a needs assessment of infrastructure strengths and weaknesses in the County at a cost not to exceed $75,000. (See attached scope of services and costs)

Capital Projects Sales Tax Commission:

Mr. Lyles made a motion, seconded by Mr. Crumpton, approved 5 – 0 that the following appointees from the Municipalities on the Capital Projects Sales Tax Commission be confirmed:

Mayor Dan Alexander	Seneca
Mayor Lamar Bailes	Walhalla
Bobby Williams	Westminster

Further, that the following County members be elected to serve:

Joel Thrift
Marty McKee
Donald Fuller

Mr. Rinehart made a motion, seconded by Mr. Crumpton, approved 5 – 0 that the following alternates be elected in the event that one of the County members is unable to serve:

John Adams
Randy Abbott

Parks, Recreation & Tourism:

Mr. Lyles made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, approved 5 – 0 that the County proceed with a request for funding through the Oconee County Delegation and the Department of Natural Resources for Water Recreational Resources Funds in the amount of $99,240 for boat docks at High Falls & South Cove Parks.

Administrator Report:

Mr. Rabun, County Administrator reported he would be out of the County on vacation January 18 – 26 and Mr. Tom Hendricks would be in charge during his absence.

Council Hospital Representative:

Mr. Ables confirmed that at the January 3, 2006 Council Meeting he appointed Mr. Rabun as the Council representative on the Hospital Board. The County Organizational Ordinance does not address this, but the agreement with the Hospital does say County Administrator or Council Member appointed by Council, therefore he withdrew Mr. Rabun's name and opened the floor for nominations for a Council representative on the Hospital Board.

Mr. Crumpton nominated Mr. Moore to serve as the Council Representative on the Hospital Board. This nomination was adopted 4 – 0 (Mr. Moore abstaining).

Fire Truck:

Mr. Ables made a motion, seconded by Mr. Moore, approved 5 – 0 that a 1964 Chevrolet Fire Truck VIN C6535B103794 be transferred to the Fair Play Fire Department.

Confirmation of Council Committees:

Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mr. Crumpton, approved 4 – 0 (Mr. Rinehart temporarily out of room) that the following Council Committee Assignments be confirmed:

BUDGET, FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION:
William S. Rinehart, Chair
Steven R. Moore
Thomas S. Crumpton
Marion E. Lyles
H. Frank Ables, Jr.

Confirmation of Council Committees Continued:

ROAD & TRANSPORTATION:
Steven R. Moore, Chair
Marion E. Lyles
H. Frank Ables, Jr.

REAL ESTATE, FACILITIES & LAND MANAGEMENT:
Marion E. Lyles, Chair
Steven R. Moore
Thomas S. Crumpton

LAW ENFORCEMENT, PUBLIC SAFETY, HEALTH & WELFARE:
Thomas S. Crumpton, Chair
Steven R. Moore
William S. Rinehart

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:
H. Frank Ables, Jr., Chair
William S. Rinehart
Marion E. Lyles

The organizational ordinance will have to be amended to reflect the change in Council Committees as stated above.

Further, that the following Vice Chairs of the Committees be confirmed:

BUDGET, FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION: Steven R. Moore, V. Chair

ROAD & TRANSPORTATION: Marion E. Lyles, V. Chair

REAL ESTATE, FACILITIES & LAND MANAGEMENT: Thomas S. Crumpton, V. Chair

LAW ENFORCEMENT, PUBLIC SAFETY, HEALTH & WELFARE: William S. Rinehart, V. Chair

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Marion E. Lyles, V. Chair

Also Mr. Rinehart be confirmed as Council Chaplain.

Reports to Council:

Mr. Lyles stated that he felt that he, as Council Representative on the SC Appalachian Council of Governments Board & Mr. Moore, as Council Representative on the Hospital Board should give regular reports to Council. Mr. Lyles also asked for a status report on the Animal Control Building and the Department of Social Services Building.

Mr. Rabun informed Council he would be meeting with staff regarding several issues including discussion regarding the Animal Control building and hoped to have reports ready to bring to Council at the February 7, 2006 Council Meeting.

Mr. Crumpton asked to be made aware of any staff meetings that involved public safety issues.

Personal Remarks by Council Rinehart:

Mr. Rinehart gave the following as his own personal remarks to Council:

As Budget and Finance Committee Chairman, I would like to challenge this Council to do more than bicker about petty issues and make some bold decisions concerning the future of the County. There are pressing and vital problems that we have been thinking about for a long time. However, there is nothing to spend, and nothing to rebate or save, or even speculate about until a check is received from Duke Power. If, in fact, it does come, we all know that there are immediate needs that must be considered.

First of all, no one seems to know what the State Legislators are going to do with regard to the so-called tax reform the General Assembly is debating. All indications are that our revenues may be substantially reduced. The impact on services to people who have enjoyed a comparatively low tax millage, at least in terms of the County portion of your tax bill, will be apocalyptic. Just wait until we have to shut down the manned convenience centers three days a week Do you think the taxpayers will be understanding, or will they resort to off-loading tons of garbage by the side of the road?

I might suggest they consider taking it to the State House just once, in the event of a major reduction in revenue to the County. As a hedge against the short term devastation of such a decision, I would strongly urge this Council to place $1,000,000 of the promised funds from Duke Power in contingency which would quadruple its current $300,000 balance. I would further urge that these funds be frozen until definite decisions are made by the General Assembly and not be drawn upon for rescuing poorly managed and planned departmental budgets or dream sheets concocted by department heads who are no doubt hearing cash register bells as I speak. It would be my desire to see those funds unfrozen only with a super majority vote of Council with all five members participating in the vote.

Personal Remarks of Mr. Rinehart Continued:

Furthermore, there are desperate situations that will not go away with any more committee meetings, strategy sessions and territorial spitting contests. My personal priorities are as follows:

If the City of Seneca will provide us with a partnership plan for the reclamation of downtown property, such as has been suggested by John Adams, I would be prepared to recommend $1,000,000 be dedicated toward the project with these stipulations:

(1) That the City match our $1,000,000 investment
(2) That the City provide the site for the project
(3) That other cultural space, such as a Heritage Center be included in the same plan
(4) That a strategy for attracting people to the downtown Seneca Cultural Center be developed along with Westminster and Walhalla to "Make a Day of It" and loop all three shop-walk opportunities in the same promotional package. Perhaps CAT might place regular routes between the cities, especially around festival events.

The Library's need and the priority list placing Seneca first have been established for years. We don't need to ponder and pray about it any more. Let's plant a million dollar seed in a practical and strategic project bringing heads in beds and real, measurable – not speculative revenue.

For a long time Rural Fire has been urging us to invest more in equipment and manpower that will bring our ISO ratings down, offsetting the initial cost of upgrades. I am ready to say: Prove it. I suggest that we grant the Fire Commission $500,000 to make sure that the heroes and heroines who risk their lives voluntarily for all of us have the equipment they need to do the job as safely as possible. The ten fire trucks bought from Crimson have be a debacle, for three years I have strongly urged legal action against them. I have no confidence that they will make good on their word. I only wish I had been there when the decision was made to buy those useless vehicles. I wasn't, but I am now, and would love to charge the Fire Commission to do its job in providing the Council with recommendations for the allocation of these funds by a strong consensus from the Commission Members, not just the interim or permanent Fire Marshal. It would be my great delight to respond to a unified commission with these funds to encourage and equip the people who save our lives and property by their sacrifice.

Personal Remarks of Mr. Rinehart Continued:

As with the Library funds, there are stipulations:

(1) The criteria for grant requests must be ratified by the County Council
(2) The disbursement of funds must be approved by the County Council

One thing I know for sure, there are no atheists in foxholes, and no tax reformists when your house is burning or the meth lab is set up on your block and an under-equipped and under-appreciated volunteer rushes to you aid.

The squalid conditions of the animal shelter are tragic. I am open to repartnering with the Humane Society, or not. I am wide open to possibilities of a fully accountable contract. I think that up to $250,000 might be well used to relieve the awful and unacceptable conditions the animals, the employees and volunteers have to deal with every day.

Four days last week the Seneca Journal blasted us with the overcrowding and understaffing at the jail. The Journal's naiveté can be overlooked. What cannot be is the monumental way that the Sheriff's Department has failed the tax payers. It is not my job to determine the needs of the Sheriff's Department. It is my job to try and fund those needs. Three years ago, as a freshman Councilman I was lobbied heavily by the Sheriff and Major Pruitt who assured me that the LEC, as it stands today, represented the department's most urgent needs. I was assured repeatedly that the plans were well conceived, including the phases, placing jail expansion somewhere down the road. No one would have thought that all the capital improvements for the next twenty years would be directed toward the Sheriff's Department alone and no one can blame them for asking for the moon. However, if the County was cited for violations concerning its prisoner population and adequate facilities prior to the beginning of construction of the LEC, then the blame must lay squarely on the desks of those charged with the responsibility of informing Council well.

Nevertheless, I would suggest that $750,000 would be an extremely generous cap on possible expansion that would bring us into minimum compliance. I would fully expect that it might be done for much less, I truly wish that you had told me of this before I voted to build your lavish office complex.

Finally, every city would benefit from monies that might be used for infrastructure projects. West Union, Walhalla and Westminster especially need to close the loop between the cities for water and sewer which would benefit those in the unincorporated areas as well.

Personal Remarks of Mr. Rinehart Continued:

Let's get busy and to the good work we were sent here to do.

Veterans' Medications:

Mr. Moore informed Council that some veterans were having problems receiving their medications and asked Mr. Rabun to meet with Jerry Dyar, Veterans Affairs Office to discuss the matter.

Adjourn:

Adjourn: 8:15 pm.

Respectfully Submitted:

Opal O. Green
Clerk to Council