



MINUTES
OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING
Workshop Meeting
July 17, 2008

MEMBERS, OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL

Mr. George Blanchard District I, Chairman
Mr. Thomas S. Crumpton, Jr., District II
Mr. Mario Suarez, District III
Mr. Marion E. Lyles, District IV
Mr. H. Frank Ables, Jr., District V

Oconee County Council met on Thursday, July 17, 2008 at 7:30 AM at Jimmy's Restaurant, 1018 By Pass 123, Seneca, SC with all Council Members [except Mr. Suarez], County Administrator Dale K. Surrett and Elizabeth G. Hulse, Clerk to Council present.

Press:

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

Member of the press present: Ray Chandler--Anderson Independent, Brett McLaughlin-Daily Journal and Dick Mangrum -- WGOG Radio.

Call to Order:

Chairman Blanchard called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

Planning Workshop / Meeting Topics:

Zoning / Zoning Enabling Ordinance [ZEO]:

Mr. Blanchard stated that the ZEO is a high priority for Council and that they will continue to move forward assisting the Planning Commission in keeping on track for approval in October 2008. Mr. Blanchard announced that as Mr. Suarez is the Planning & Economic Development Committee chairman that he is designated as the council's champion to keep the ZEO on track. He noted that Mr. Suarez will work closely with the Planning Commission, Art Holbrooks, Planning Director and Dale Surrett, County Administrator, to keep the process moving and on track.

Mr. Surrett stated that the RFP for the planning consultant has been sent out and that four responses were received. A review committee has been formed to review the responses. The committee is comprised of Planning Department staff and Planning Commission members. Mr. Surrett stated that he was hopeful that within several weeks the consultant would

be on board to assist the Planning Commission and to provide best practices to get the ZEO reading for approval by Council.

SWAG Agreement:

Mr. Blanchard noted that the City of Westminster signed the SWAG at their meeting on Tuesday, July 15, 2008. He stated that he has had talks with Greg Dietterick, City of Seneca, and Brad Norton, County Attorney, and it may be that the SWAG document signed by some of the municipalities may not be the document presented and approved by Council. Mr. Blanchard stated that he hoped to have all issues resolved and that a ceremonial document signing could be scheduled for the next council meeting to be held on August 5, 2008.

Mr. Lyles commented that it is the perception of the public that Council has held up signing of the SWAG agreement and he wanted to state clearly that this was not the case. The Council helped to coordinate between the County and the municipalities signing of this document.

Mr. Ables voiced concerns that one version has the county paying on the bond debt beyond the original date. Mr. Blanchard stated that the county attorney was concerned about confusing language. In addition, he stated that neither Council nor county administration had agreed to extend payments to the municipalities beyond the date in the original document.

Secure Internet for Sheriff's Department:

Mr. Blanchard stated that Dale Surrett, County Administrator, and James Singleton, Oconee County Sheriff, are working closely on this issue and will report to Council at an upcoming meeting.

Fire Safety / ISO Ratings:

Mr. Blanchard informed those presented that this issue is currently in the Procurement who are drafting an RFP to be sent out for bid for a consultant. Mr. Surrett stated that they are fine tuning the specs but that they hoped to have the RFP out very soon.

Capital Projects:

Mr. Blanchard read from a prepared brief summary [filed with these minutes] of proposed projects in no specific order to include: Road Paving, County Courthouse, County Jail, Brown Building and EMS Building. Mr. Blanchard noted also that secure fire proof storage is a concern so that we appropriately protect valuable one-of-a-kind documents currently housed in many county departments.

Courthouse: Mr. Lyles addressed concerns raised by the public regarding Council's role in problems with the Courthouse. He noted that Council identified a need for a new building, appropriately bid out design and construction of the Courthouse, and when issues arose they have worked to develop solutions. The architect has gone out of business therefore recouping any funds may be difficult. There is ongoing litigation with the intent to recover as much money as possible from the contractor and architect to cover repair/remodel costs. Council has directed the Administrator to document all ongoing work for the lawsuit.

Council has done everything within its powers to resolve issues with the Courthouse and he stated that he felt that blame for issues at the Courthouse should not be put onto Council.

Mr. Surrett outlined ongoing work related to fixing issues at the courthouse. He stated that the judges have been very helpful and are willing to work around construction schedules that would likely close entire floors for repairs. In addition, he stated that a complete redesign/construction of the parking lot may be required.

Jail: Issues at the current jail were discussed to include overcrowding of inmates, medical costs, etc. Options for an auxiliary jail building that could in the future be attached to the main jail were discussed to house the lesser charged inmates. This building could be a “dorm style” building with the understanding that many of these inmates would not be in-house 7/24. Mr. Surrett noted that many of these inmates are in for Family Court issues and that they do not pose a threat to the general public. Many of these lesser charged inmates participate in work release programs.

Mr. Lyles asked that minimum standards be obtained to help identify what specifically is required for use by any architect during the design process. Mr. Surrett noted that a Master Plan had been done for the Law Enforcement Center [LEC] approximately 10 years ago and that phase one of that plan has been completed. He also noted that increasing needs at the jail for medical issues related to mental health issues and drug addition issues.

Mr. Surrett noted that he has had contact with Mr. Black Taylor / South Carolina Department of Corrections who is helping to identify needs. Mr. Blanchard suggested that a workshop with Mr. Taylor to be scheduled in the future to bring Council and the public up to speed.

Economic Development:

Mr. Blanchard asked Mr. Surrett to address Council regarding ongoing and proposed economic development issues. Mr. Surrett read from a prepared presentation [filed with these minutes] addressing an Oconee County spec building and potential funding options for the building along with other identified capital projects. He also provided information from the bond counsel regarding bond amounts, terms and payment schedule [filed with these minutes]. Mr. Surrett was very clear that no action on bonds would take place without full disclosure to the public through three readings of an ordinance, a public hearing on the ordinance and advertisements in the paper.

Mr. Ables stated that it is important that we have a spec building to show prospective industry in an effort to continue our economic growth. Mr. Crumpton noted that money has already been set aside that could be used in construction of a new building. Mr. Surrett noted that typically spec buildings sit on the market 36 months, however, our last building was sold within 22 months and that the company has already doubled the size of the building and provided additional jobs for Oconee County citizens.

Discussion also took place regarding moving forward with sewer at the Golden Corner Commerce Park. Mr. Surrett noted that site work is under way at the park with grading and sign work underway. Mr. Blanchard reminded those present of the upcoming workshop with the Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority scheduled for Tuesday, August 5, 2008 at 5:00 p.m. in Council Chambers.

PRIORITY FOR CAPITAL PROJECTS:

After lengthy discussion by Council members the Courthouse and Jail were identified as top priorities for capital projects moving forward. There are concerns that the Federal Government will force the County to make repairs to the Courthouse and/or build a new jail. These would be done to their specifications and with their contractors without the County having a say. It is imperative that Council be proactive and identify appropriate solutions for the Courthouse and overcrowding at the Jail before we are forced to do so by a federal agency.

SUMMARY:

Mr. Blanchard summarized the lengthy discussions noting that it was the consensus of Council that the Jail and Courthouse are the #1 priorities moving forward but that work on the ZEO, SWAG Agreement, Sheriff's Internet and Fire/ISO are ongoing and should continue to move forward.

Mr. Ables made a statement noting that he was elected for a 4 year term and that he intended to continue to work up to his last day in office. He stated that there have been articles in the paper and comments by some citizens that the outgoing council members should take no further actions during the remainder of their terms. Mr. Ables clearly stated that he will continue to do the job he was elected to; to the best of his ability, and will work to keep Oconee County moving forward. Mr. Ables stated that he wants to do what is right for Oconee County and that he is looking forward to a productive last few months in office.

Mr. Blanchard thanked the public for their attendance at the meeting.

Breaks:

Council took a break between 7:45 - 7:56 a.m. to eat breakfast.

Adjourn:

Mr. Blanchard motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:20 a.m. The motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted:

Elizabeth G. Hulse
Clerk to Council