



MINUTES
OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING
Special Meeting hosted by Oconee County Delegation
Gignilliat Center, Seneca, South Carolina
June 30, 2014 ~ ~ 7:30 p.m.

MEMBERS, OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL
Mr. Joel Thrift, District IV, Council Chairman
Mr. Paul Corbeil, District I, Vice Chairman
Mr. Wayne McCall, District II, Chairman Pro Tem
Mr. Paul Cain, District III
Mr. Reg Dexter, District V

No recording of this meeting was made.

Oconee County Delegation Members Present: Senator Thomas Alexander, Representative Bill Sandifer [Delegation Chair], Representative Bill Whitmire, and Carol Baumgarner, Delegation Secretary.

Oconee County Council Members Present: All Council Members were present along with Elizabeth G. Hulse, Clerk to Council. Additionally, County Administrator Scott Moulder attended the meeting.

Press: Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting, date, time, place of meeting and agenda were posted on the bulletin board at the County Administrative Offices, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC, and the County Council website [www.oconeese.com/council]. In addition it was made available [*upon request*] to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned citizens. Members of the press present: Dick Mangrum/WGOG Radio, Ray Chandler/Anderson Independent and Norman Canada & Steven Bradley/The Daily Journal

Call to Order: Representative Sandifer called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Invocation: Senator Alexander provided the invocation for the meeting.

Pledge of Allegiance: Representative Sandifer asked Representative Whitmire to lead the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Discussion between Oconee County Delegation & Oconee County Council:

Representative Sandifer welcomed Council and all citizens in attendance. He stated that the purpose for the meeting was to open a public dialog between the Delegation members and County Council. He stated that there would not be an opportunity at this meeting for questions from citizens or the press; however, members would remain after the meeting to address individual questions/concerns.

Chairman Thrift made a brief opening statement also noting that Council is supportive of the delegation and the job they do for Oconee County. He stated that any comments made by Council were directed to the legislature as a whole and not our members specifically. Lastly, he expressed his wish and the wish of all the Council members to have meetings with the Delegation on a regular basis 2 – 3 times a year.

Senator Alexander and Representative Whitmire both expressed their continued desire to work with the Council for the benefit of the citizens of Oconee County. Representative Sandifer outlined for those present the voting ratio of each member based on the full house and senate membership.

Local Government Fund

Mr. Thrift voiced the concern of the Council regarding the underfunding of the Local Government Fund [LGF] and asked if in the near future the Delegation felt it would be restored to full funding?

Senator Alexander, Representative Sandifer and Representative Whitmire all addressed this issue highlighting the following areas: historical review and reasons for reduced funding; desire of Oconee Delegation and expressed support to restore full funding; legislatures review of entire state needs vs. individual counties; legislature seat turn over with representatives that have never fully funded the LGF; funding more from recurring monies, etc.

Duplication of Services related to IT

Mr. Corbeil asked if the state is reviewing with the goal of eliminating duplication of services and attempting to streamline services for cost reductions and improved security; specifically relating to the 100+ data centers maintained by the state?

Senator Alexander, Representative Sandifer and Representative Whitmire all addressed this issue highlighting the following areas; IT security issues currently being worked on; state vs. county budgeting processes; consolidation not always best solution *[example LLR centralized call center to cumbersome to manage and staff not adequately trained to handle incoming calls], etc.*

Tri County Technical College – Oconee County Campus

Mr. Dexter noted the desire of Oconee County to have a Tri County Technical College [TCTC] campus in Oconee County. He stated that the Council has done the needed prep work i.e., potential site location identification, curriculum identification, etc. His question was what the Delegation could do to assist with funding options?

Senator Alexander, Representative Sandifer and Representative Whitmire all addressed this issue highlighting the following areas; Delegations priority to establish a TCTC campus in Oconee County; expressed availability to continue to work with all parties to move project forward; discussion regarding Oconee County Adult Education program options, etc.

School District of Oconee County – Student Underfunding

Mr. Thrift noted that the School District of Oconee County [SDOC] continues to be underfunded by approximately \$670 per student and he asked what the Delegation plans to do to address this underfunding?

Senator Alexander, Representative Sandifer and Representative Whitmire all addressed this issue highlighting the following areas; reviewed the funding formula in place for per student costs; economy downturn reduced incoming funds; use of one time Federal Stimulus monies during shortfall; shortfall gap closing each fiscal year, etc.

Infrastructure for I85 Corridor

Mr. Thrift noted that with the growth in the southern end of Oconee County to include the Sewer South project at the Golden Corner Commerce Park [GCCP]; what role could the Delegation play to help obtain additional funding for infrastructure from the GCCP to the I85 corridor?

Senator Alexander, Representative Sandifer and Representative Whitmire all addressed this issue highlighting the following areas; continued work with the Mr. Richard Blackwell [Economic Development] to identify potential grant funding and use of the state's Closing Fund; Delegations good working relationship with Mr. Bobby Hitt, SC Dept. of Commerce Director, etc.

Roads & Bridges

Representative Sandifer noted that the state is scheduling repair to sub-standard bridges as their first priority during the next fiscal year. Some discussion took place regarding number of state roads, potential swaps between the state and counties & municipalities, reduced gas tax revenues; SC's ranking fourth largest per capita for our road system; gas tax increase possibilities; etc.

Elimination of State Income Tax

Mr. Dexter addressed the recent referendum passed by the electorate to eliminate the state's income tax. He questioned if the Delegation supported this and if so how would state funding be replaced/reorganized?

Senator Alexander, Representative Sandifer and Representative Whitmire all addressed this issue highlighting the following areas; the referendum did not originate in the legislature; the Delegation is not in support of removal of the state income tax; the Delegation does not support a flat tax in part as it would hurt the state's tourism; the state has lowered some tax brackets to lessen the burden, etc.

Elimination of LGF / SCAC Lobbing

Mr. Dexter questioned if the Legislature supported and/or would the Oconee Delegation would support getting rid of the LGF entirely?

Senator Alexander, Representative Sandifer and Representative Whitmire all addressed this issue highlighting the following areas; confirmed discussion regarding doing away with LGF as the legislature perceives that they take “the rap when LGF is not fully funded”, etc.

Additionally, Representative Sandifer stated that South Carolina Association of Counties [SCAC] sponsored “Don’t Dump on SC” TV advertisements against the legislature noting it didn’t sit well with most of the members. He alleged that Oconee County paid/pays a lobbyist that has never contacted him. Senator Alexander noted that he has met with Mr. Tim Winslow, SCAC, on several occasions to discuss the county and its needs.

Mr. Thrift stated that **Oconee County does not pay a lobbyist**; however; the county is a member in good standing of the SCAC which provides the county many services throughout the year. Lastly he noted that our tax dollars do not pay the SCAC lobbyist; that those funds are generated elsewhere by the association through services fees, corporate sponsorships, etc.

State Revenue Options

Mr. McCall questioned if the Legislature has considered or would support an increase in the cigarette tax, alcohol tax or additional surcharges on traffic fines? Secondly, he questioned if there is a possibility with the natural gas reserves off the SC coast if drilling is being considered?

Senator Alexander, Representative Sandifer and Representative Whitmire all addressed this issue highlighting the following areas; Governor opposition to increased cigarette/alcohol taxes and inability of legislature to get a 2/3 majority to override; coastal drilling is controlled by the Federal Government and leases are issued to drillers, etc.

Mr. Cain questioned if the Legislature has considered or would consider increasing license fees or related fees for heavier vehicles using SC roads?

Senator Alexander, Representative Sandifer and Representative Whitmire all addressed this issue highlighting the following areas; concern that costs would be passed to citizens for raised license fees; benefit of the legislature’s move to increase to 90,000 lbs., etc.

Distracted Driving

Senator Alexander noted that after many municipalities and a few counties; Oconee County included, that the legislature passed a state wide ban on texting in an effort to save lives across the state and standardize enforcement.

Delegation Request of Council:

Representative Sandifer asked Council to address two areas of concern that he had:

1. **Broadband:** He stated that he has issues with the Broadband project and asked to speak to members of Council separately. Additionally, he voiced concern that information on our Broadband webpage is out of date and inaccurate.
2. **Tax Comparison:** He asked that Council provide an analysis of Oconee County taxes versus two other counties of similar size to identify how Oconee “stacks up”. Mr. Moulder asked that the list of counties be provided to his office and that he would gather the information and schedule a meeting to discuss.

Additional Meetings

Chairman Thrift reiterated Council’s desire to meet regularly with the Delegation and asked that the next meeting be scheduled prior to the next legislative session. Discussion followed.

Chairman Thrift directed the Clerk to Council to work with the Delegation Secretary to identify a date for the next meeting after the Delegation receives the legislative calendar the first week of November 2014.

Adjourn

Representative Whitmire made a motion, approved unanimously to adjourn at 8:57 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Elizabeth G. Hulse
Clerk to Council