



CITY OF COLUMBIA
WORK SESSION MINUTES
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2014
CITY HALL – 1737 MAIN STREET
2nd FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM

The Columbia City Council conducted a Work Session on Tuesday, November 18, 2014 at City Hall, 1737 Main Street, Columbia, South Carolina. The Honorable Mayor Stephen K. Benjamin called the meeting to order at 2:17 p.m. The following members of Council were present: The Honorable Sam Davis, The Honorable Tameika Isaac Devine, The Honorable Brian DeQuincey Newman, The Honorable Cameron A. Runyan and The Honorable Moe Baddourah. The Honorable Leona K. Plough was absent. Also present were Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager and Ms. Erika D. Moore, City Clerk. This meeting was advertised in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

**Mayor Benjamin recognized Dr. Will Moreau Goins. He said that we've worked with Dr. Goins for several years to launch the local recognition of Native American Heritage Month.

Dr. Will Moreau Goins, Chief Executive Officer of the Cherokee Indian Tribe of South Carolina announced that it is National Native American Heritage Month and the Cherokee Indian Tribe of South Carolina worked to promote this observance in South Carolina. He announced that November 18, 2014 is Native American Awareness Day. He noted that the City of Columbia is a co-sponsor of the Native American Indian Film Festival, which is the longest running film festival of its kind. He presented a token of appreciation to the City of Columbia.

FINANCIAL UPDATE – [September 2014 Report](#) – Ms. Jan Alonso, Finance Director

Ms. Jan Alonso, Finance Director reported that the General Fund expenditures are in line for the year; the revenues in the Parking Fund are relatively even; and revenues in the Water and Sewer Fund are up and the expenses are in line.

FISCAL YEAR 2015/2016 PRIORITY PLANNING & GOALS

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager explained her effort to move forward with priority planning ahead of the budgetary cycle and in lieu of the Council retreat. She said the upcoming work sessions will include a section for the discussion of fiscal year 2015/2016 priority planning and goals with items previously provided to Council.

1. Finlay Park Master Plan Review – Mr. Jeff Caton, Director of Parks and Recreation

Mr. Jeff Caton, Director of Parks and Recreation explained that they've been involved in focus group meetings that were held in October with a variety of stakeholders as they began the preliminary process of developing the design master plan for Finlay Park.

Ms. Jenny Horne, PLA, ASLA, Senior Landscape Architect for Stantec provided an overview of the focus groups that were held on October 6-8, 2014. She said everyone considered Finlay Park to be a regionally unique destination. She reported that 634 surveys were compiled and the open space/green spaces, walking paths/trails and water features were significant; the playground was considered important as well. She reported that 77% of those surveyed enjoyed the music and festivals offered at Finlay Park. She noted that they are still absorbing and compiling the information as they move forward with the conceptual planning and schematic design for the park. She said citizens' thoughts and concerns will weigh heavily in the final plan that will be presented to City Council.

Mr. Mark Johnson, FASLA, President of Civitas, Inc. said the City of Columbia is very fortunate to have this signature park. He recalled that this park was designed by Mr. Robert Martin, a well-known architect and designer. He said they met with Mr. Howell Beech who worked with Mr. Martin on the development of this park and they learned a lot about how the park came together. He noted that there was a tremendous amount of new fill in the park that resulted in certain structural failures. He recommended that they obtain borings for the geotechnical engineer to look at before they proceed. He said they learned that: the fountain volumes were variable originally; the cascade had four (4) supplemental places where water entered; the stone work was a design build contract and it wasn't built as tightly as the rest of the park; the other retaining walls were properly constructed; the steep slope had stones in front of it, but they started coming off and the remaining stones were removed; the wall needs to be replaced with a more robust form of construction; there is an ongoing water quality problem with algae, because more water is being cycled than needed; and the pond was designed with a concrete bottom and one foot of clay resulting in leaks. He explained that the core recommendation is to rebuild the fountain, the cascades, pond and the waterfall to the current standard and improve the other areas to meet community concerns such as ADA accessibility and noise. He presented proposed drawings that included a new building, a bridge across the pond, relocating the bandstand to project sound uphill, adding an elevator, reducing the number of terraces to increase safety, adding a bike share area and an outdoor fitness area. He sought feedback from the members of Council.

Councilor Davis asked what would be done if the area is still settling.

Mr. Mark Johnson, FASLA, President of Civitas, Inc. said in the area near the large wall, you would have to excavate down to the original ground and rebuild from there so that you are not constructing on top of the unsettled material. He said the other areas would depend on what is found, but it may require wider footings and extra reinforcement essentially turning the wall into a beam so that it can't crack.

Councilor Baddourah asked if the pond can be utilized for something other than water features.

Mr. Mark Johnson, FASLA, President of Civitas, Inc. said yes; it can be used for motorized boats or remote control sail boats.

Mayor Benjamin asked where the Busted Plug is.

Mr. Jeff Caton, Director of Parks and Recreation said they looked at positioning the Busted Plug off of Taylor Street as a piece of public art, but not as a splash pad.

Mayor Benjamin asked about the extension of the Vista Greenway.

Mr. Jeff Caton, Director of Parks and Recreation said they are ready to begin the construction drawings.

Councilor Davis asked if the new design will be high or low maintenance.

Mr. Jeff Caton, Director of Parks and Recreation said it will be designed to be sustainable and durable.

Councilor Baddourah asked about the limited parking spaces.

Mr. Mark Johnson, FASLA, President of Civitas, Inc. said that parking will remain a problem. He agreed to look at parking near the post office, noting that it would allow them to open up two more sections and make the park safer.

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager asked Mr. Caton if they discussed a strategic implementation plan to include infrastructure needs as we begin the budgetary season.

Mr. Jeff Caton, Director of Parks and Recreation said they will come back in January or February to provide a final proposed design and a budget. He said they will develop a phased approach if directed to do so.

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager requested a phased in implementation approach.

2. [Water & Sewer System Initiatives](#) – Ms. Missy Gentry, P.E., Assistant City Manager for Operations

Mr. Joey Jaco, Director of Utilities and Engineering announced that all of the early action projects in the Consent Decree have been completed. He reviewed the Clean Water 2020 Program timeline and deliverables. He reported that the draft rate analysis and the Water Revenue Audit will be completed early next year. He outlined the following deliverables for 2015: training program plan, the information management system program plan, the gravity sewer system operations and maintenance program plan, and the financial analysis plan for the EPA agreement.

Councilor Baddourah asked about the rate study and efficiencies.

Mr. Jeff Palen, Assistant City Manager for Financial Services said the rate study will be updated annually and efficiencies will be worked into the budgetary rates that are needed.

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager noted that the items in the timeline will be given to the vendor to factor into the rate study.

Mr. Joey Jaco, Director of Utilities and Engineering gave an update on the water revenue audits. He said there are 16,700 billing accounts and 480 accounts are reported having deficiencies.

Councilor Davis asked if the deficiencies impacted residents.

Mr. Joey Jaco, Director of Utilities and Engineering said the residential side wasn't impacted; the commercial side was, but that can be corrected when we look at future rates. He highlighted the use of innovative technology such as the Sewer Line Rapid Assessment Tool, which is used to locate pipe blockages and Smartcover Manholes that sense high water levels.

Councilor Newman asked about the timeline for implementing this new technology for larger scale development projects.

Mr. Joey Jaco, Director of Utilities and Engineering said in the future the manholes will be used for Main Street; the department is testing the manholes. He reported that department completed a Request for Information (RFI) for potential public private partnerships and seventeen (17) responses were received. He reported that a RFI was also completed to help with the efficiencies of the water and wastewater system.

3. Implementation of the Compensation and Classification Study – Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager explained that 70% of our employees provided feedback during the compensation and classification study conducted by Evergreen Consultants. She noted that a market comparison of salaries is underway, preliminary information will be provided in December, and a compensation plan will be recommended in January along with a comprehensive evaluation system. She said training will be provided in March 2015 and discussions regarding implementation will continue with City Council. She noted that a matter needed to be discussed in Executive Session.

CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION / ACTION

4. Permanent Closure of [Oceola Street](#) – Mr. Stan Frick, Rosewood Community Resident – [Stan Frick's Letter](#) and [Rosewood Community Council's Letter](#)

Mr. Stan Frick, Rosewood Community Resident expressed concerns about the closing of the 2800 block of Oceola Street. He said four to five dozens of residents are frustrated over the closing of this local thru-street. He said they thought there would be a hearing, but there was no representation of the neighborhood. He acknowledged that Ms. Kuse came to speak with the neighborhood and no one supported the closing. He asked that the City Attorney file a Rule 60 to reopen the case. He asked why the school refuses to talk with them and consider access during the evening, summer and weekends while there is no school. He asked what kind of response did the City received.

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager said we were not a party to this and we didn't provide an official response, because it is a SCDOT street.

Councilor Baddourah said this has been a touchy subject, a meeting was scheduled and I thought we reached a happy median. He said one resident requires frequent ambulance service and that is a concern. He said a median would be keeping the street open when the school is closed and for emergency vehicles. He noted that the school planted trees in the middle of the road. He acknowledged that the school followed the requirements of SCDOT, but did not consider the concerns voiced by the neighborhood in January 2014.

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager said the City remained neutral, because there were no public safety issues. She said in the future we would bring such matters to City Council's attention for further discussion with the community. She noted that the process was followed.

Ms. Teresa Knox, Esq., City Attorney said the City could only object for public safety reasons and there were none.

Mayor Benjamin said we do have a letter from the Rosewood Community Council in support of the closure.

Mr. David Paavola, Esq., Montessori School of Columbia Board Member said the notice was posted in November 2013 and all legal procedures were followed. He said the school has taken control of the road and improved it. He said that teachers, parents and residents have all adapted to the new traffic pattern.

Councilor Baddourah asked why the gates can't be opened when the school is closed.

Mr. David Paavola, Esq., Montessori School of Columbia Board Member reported that the school board didn't consider that to be in the best interest of the students.

Mr. Charles Dibble, Esq., Montessori School of Columbia Board Member said they decided that people would continue to come through the street during school hours and the board decided that it would send the wrong message to the public regarding the proper time to come through. He noted that it is closed to vehicular traffic, not pedestrians or cyclists.

Mr. John Schmidt, Esq. said it gives him great pause that a representative of Council doesn't know that the City was a party to this. He said if the City is going to promote a position, it would be appropriate to hear from local residents; we are asking you to ask that the matter be opened so that residents can be heard by the court. He said a Rule 60 contains basis for the City to assert and a hearing is appropriate for both sides to be heard. He said people are against this for safety reasons.

Mayor Benjamin asked for clarification of Rule 60.

Mr. Michael Drennan, Montessori School of Columbia Board Chairman said the property is owned by the school and we would be liable if we opened it to vehicular traffic; it is a driveway now; we considered speed humps and making it a one-way street, but the DOT rejected those options. He said the primary issue is the safety of the 106 children that attend the school.

Ms. Emily Paavola, Esq., Montessori School of Columbia Board Member said she filed the application for the closure of the street and named the City as a party for consideration of easements for utilities. She said the City consented to the road closure and it was closed in April by a Circuit Court Judge and to file a Rule 60b motion you would have to be a party to the motion. She said there is no basis to do what Mr. Frick is requesting.

An unidentified woman said she attended a number of Rosewood Community Council meetings this year and she has never heard them officially vote in favor of this closing. She noted that there are lots of reasons why people made suggestions to the board.

Councilor Davis asked how this differs from the Pinner Road situation.

Mayor Benjamin noted that Pinner Road is a city owned road, but Oceola is a SCDOT road.

Councilor Baddourah said we passed a resolution that future closings will come before Council. He acknowledged that he doesn't know where to go from here.

Councilor Devine asked if SCDOT conveyed the road to the school before the closing.

Ms. Emily Paavola, Esq., Montessori School of Columbia Board Member said it was conveyed after the closing was approved.

Councilor Devine asked if the petition asked for ownership of the street.

Ms. Emily Paavola, Esq., Montessori School of Columbia Board Member said yes.

Mayor Benjamin said this matter should not be before this Council; we are always cognizant of neighborhood concerns and we significantly lean towards the opinion of active associations; we don't have a standing to get involved in this issue. He said there are specific times that you can apply for a Rule 60 and none of those apply here. He brought the discussion to a close and thanked everyone for coming.

5. [Update on the Middle Watershed Master Plan](#) – Mr. Erich Miarka, Program Coordinator for Gills Creek Watershed Association

Mr. Erich Miarka, Program Coordinator for Gills Creek Watershed Association said the Gills Creek Watershed is the largest in Richland County and it takes up a large portion of the eastern side of the city. He said it has a lot of issues that they are working to improve.

He said the Middle Watershed Master Plan details plans for a Greenway from Kilbourne Road to Shop Road, which is approximately 3.5 miles. He recalled that the Commercial Node Study previously conducted by the City deduced that improvements to Gill Creek underpin the success of the Devine Street/Fort Jackson commercial area as a unique destination in Columbia. He reviewed snapshots of the plan and outlined the benefits of the project, noting that they are ranked number three on the Penny Project list in the amount of \$3.5 million. He asked the City of Columbia to adopt this plan and discuss how the Association could use the city's existing easements or use city owned property. In closing, he said this project will lend itself well in the City of Columbia.

Mayor Benjamin asked Erich Miarka to move forward with the submission of the plan to staff.

6. [City Council Proposed 2015 Meeting Schedule](#) – *Consideration of this item was deferred to December 2, 2014.*

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Upon a motion made by Mr. Runyan and seconded by Mr. Newman, Council voted unanimously to enter into Executive Session at 4:17 p.m. for the discussion of **Items 7** and **11** as outlined.

7. Discussion of compensation of an employee – *This item was discussed in Executive Session. No action was taken.*
8. Receipt of legal advice which relates to a pending, threatened or potential claim – *This item was discussed in Executive Session. No action was taken.*
9. Receipt of legal advice as it relates to a matter covered by attorney-client privilege – *This item was discussed in Executive Session. No action was taken.*
10. Discussion of negotiations incident to proposed contractual arrangements – *This item was discussed in Executive Session. No action was taken.*
11. Discussion of compensation of an employee – *This item was discussed in Executive Session. No action was taken.*

- **Council adjourned the Executive Session discussion at 6:00 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Erika D. Moore
City Clerk