

**CITY OF COLUMBIA
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION MINUTES
FEBRUARY 8, 2006
9:00 AM – CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
3rd Floor City Hall - 1737 MAIN STREET**



The Columbia City Council met for a Work Session on Wednesday, February 8, 2006 in the City Hall Council Chambers located at 1737 Main Street, Columbia, South Carolina. The Honorable Mayor Robert D. Coble called the meeting to order at 9:12 a.m. The following members of City Council were present: The Honorable E.W. Cromartie, II, The Honorable Anne M. Sinclair, The Honorable Hamilton Osborne, Jr., The Honorable Sam Davis and The Honorable Tameika Isaac Devine. The Honorable Daniel J. Rickenmann was absent due to a business related trip. Also present were Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager and Ms. Whanna Bouknight, City Clerk Assistant.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager announced that Erika Salley, City Clerk is absent today due to the passing of her father-in-law.

CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION / ACTION

A. Legislative Update – Ms. Mia Butler, McLeod Butler and Company

Ms. Mia Butler of McLeod Butler and Company presented an update on the top three (3) pieces of legislation that could have the biggest impact on the City of Columbia. Those issues are property taxes, the cable franchise bill and imminent domain. House Bill 4449 puts a 2% sales tax on everything except food and it eliminates 100% of the property taxes on owner occupied homes. It also changes the property tax assessment system to a point of transfer and uses 2006 as the base year for determining property values. This would elevate South Carolina to the highest sale tax rate in the nation.

Councilwoman Tameika Isaac Devine requested that Mr. G.C Robinett run the numbers and find out how this will impact the citizens of Columbia.

Ms. Mia Butler of McLeod Butler and Company stated that House Bill 4450 is the constitutional amendment that changes the reassessment of property for property tax purposes to a point of transfer system. Both Bills are set for special order and will be debated today in the House. She said that she met with the State Chamber and the Columbia Chamber in regards to the impact on businesses and tourism. Ms. Butler explained that the Cable Competitiveness Services Act or House Bill #4428 eliminates the constitutional authority of local government to regulate the rights of way for cable service providers. This bill requires the cable provider to get a franchise permit from the Secretary of State and allows them to cherry pick the communities they want to serve and it may leave others with fewer or no options for cable service. Providers would not have to serve the entire city; it changes the definition of gross revenues to eliminate many items currently considered as part of gross revenues; and it eliminates the requirement to have cable companies to build out its system in certain areas. The primary impact is that it will take control away from municipalities and reduce their revenue as well. She explained that House Bill 4502 is a joint resolution proposing amendments to the State Constitution to eliminate the authority of the counties and municipalities to exercise their power of eminent domain for slum clearance in blighted areas and 4503 would require that two thirds of the buildings must be in a blighted or dilapidated state before condemning.

Councilwoman Tameika Isaac Devine encouraged Council, the Lobbyist and staff to schedule a date to present the concerns to our Legislative Delegation.

- B. City Dreams Project (Driveway Concerns) – Mr. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services
This item was withdrawn from the agenda. No action was taken.
- C. Introduction of Mr. Jim Apple as Chairman of the City Center Partnership – Mr. Matt Kennell, Executive Director of the City Center Partnership

Mr. Mr. Matt Kennell, Executive Director of the City Center Partnership introduced Mr. Jim Apple, as the third Chairman of the City Center Partnership's Board of Directors. He said that he was elected during the annual meeting in November and began his term on January 1, 2006.

Mr. Apple is well known in this community where he serves as the Chairman of First Citizens Bank of South Carolina.

Mr. Jim Apple, Chairman of the City Center Partnership Board of Directors, recognized the City Center staff and board members. He said that they all work hard to make a difference in downtown Columbia. He said that he accepted the challenge because he believes that for the entire community to reach its full potential the heart of our City has to be strong and vibrant. He noted that the City Center Partnership is in its fifth year of providing clean and safe services. He said that they are proud of their clean team and safe guides, which have a strong relationship with the City's Public Works Department and the Columbia Police Department. He complimented Police Chief Dean Crisp on a newly formed partnership with downtown businesses and residents, resulting in a dramatic decrease in crime. Mr. Apple stated that they are working on such issues as lighting, finding shelter for recently released prisoners, homelessness and the Main Street Beautification Project. This year they will work with the City of Columbia and downtown property owners to have the current Business Improvement District (BID) reauthorized. He said that they will put emphasizes on filling up vacant storefronts and vacant properties.

Mr. Matt Kennell, Executive Director of the City Center Partnership, stated that they are working to get support letters from the downtown property owners. They are currently at 50% and will continue to collect letters. He said that they will come back in early May for consideration. The current BID expires on December 31, 2006.

- D. International Downtown Association Spring Conference Update - Mr. Matt Kennell, President and CEO and Mr. Fred Delk, Director of the Columbia Development Corporation

Mr. Matt Kennell, Executive Director of the City Center Partnership, stated that Columbia is the smallest city to ever host the International Downtown Association's Spring Conference.

Mr. Fred Delk, Director of the Columbia Development Corporation, stated that Columbia, South Carolina was selected by the International Downtown Association to host the Spring Conference on April 22 -24, 2006, because this city created a master plan and followed out a successful implementation plan; we created design guidelines that have strengthened property values; we have two (2) new towers on Main Street; our relationship with educational institutions; our involvement in technology; and the city's commitment to infrastructure.

- E. East Central City Consortium Request - Mr. Frank McBride, Chairman of the East Central City Consortium

There was a consensus of Council to direct staff to meet with Carolina First Bank to determine how the financing structure would work; to prepare any necessary documents; to evaluate any legal impediments; and bring this back to Council for consideration. *Further discussion of this item was deferred until February 15, 2006.*

- F. Update on Affordable Housing in Columbia – Ms. Dana D. Turner, Assistant City Manager for Commerce and Development and Ms. Emily Cooper, Co-Chair of the Habitat of 29203 / Affordable Housing

Ms. Dana D. Turner, Assistant City Manager for Commerce and Development, stated that the City's involvement in affordable housing has been a planned process to achieve an objective. She said that our strength is that it is a revolving fund and from that fund they have been able to sustain the programs long-term. The programs allow all income levels to purchase houses throughout the city.

Ms. Emily Cooper, Co-Chair of Habitat of 29203 stated that they are a small group of community leaders looking for ways to keep Eau Claire and North Columbia diverse as it gentrifies. She said that having an on-going supply of affordable housing is a major factor in remaining diverse. Ms. Cooper stated that there should be diversity in race, density, economics, and types of housing stock, prices, ages, gender and education. She said that the President's budget cuts funding for HUD in 2007 and no funding was proposed for several economic and community development programs. She explained that a similarly dedicated committee in New York advised that they buy the land that they can early, but Habitat 29203 isn't funded to do that. She suggested that the City of Columbia purchase a few trouble spots and hold them for five to twenty years, they could guarantee the availability of affordable housing for three (3) decades; hence, community land trusts could be established and thus empower the community to determine the lands use. She said that the committee has met with school cluster experts; experienced residents of transitional neighborhoods, the City's Development Services staff, and will talk to real estate brokers at their next meeting. Ms. Cooper explained that the following issues hinder diversity: a lack of information that would help a variety of people buy homes or stay in them; all of the affordable housing in one community or on one side of the city makes you feel as if your community is the City's dumping ground; poorly designed public or low income housing that yells "low income" makes people say go away we don't want you here; code enforcement issues; and public safety concerns. In conclusion, she said that they would bring proposals back to Council for consideration.

Upon motion by Mayor Coble, seconded by Ms. Devine, Council voted unanimously to create an Affordable Housing Taskforce. Staff was directed to develop a list of goals, strategies and best practices when dealing with affordable housing. Staff recommendations should be presented to City Council within two (2) months for consideration. City Council encouraged input from the business community.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager provided an update on some recent quality of life issues. He reported on a meeting with business owners and residents of the Two Notch Road and Waites Road corridor. He said that they discussed concerns about the City installing electronic surveillance equipment and initiating a cooperative effort between the City and Richland County's law enforcement personnel. There has been an on-going dialogue with the community. He explained that there is an on-going process to tow red-tagged vehicles. He noted that code enforcement is essential in the overall process of community revitalization and development. Mr. Austin said that staff continues to look for property that can become a city impound.

Councilwoman Tameika Isaac Devine requested that the Police Department look at Richland County's online law enforcement complaint system to determine if it's something the city should aspire to do as well.

Councilman Sam Davis requested that they review the budget and determine if it is feasible to hire additional code enforcement officers to provide relief.

RESOLUTIONS

G. Resolution No.: R-2006-006 – University of South Carolina Research Campus Project

Upon motion by Mr. Osborne, seconded by Ms. Sinclair, Council voted unanimously to approve Resolution No.: R-2006-006 – University of South Carolina Research Campus Project, subject to staff reviewing the revised version.

H. Resolution No.: R-2006-007 – Authorizing Change of Signatures on Checking Accounts

Upon motion by Mr. Cromartie, seconded by Ms. Sinclair, Council voted unanimously to approve Resolution No.: R-2006-007 – Authorizing Change of Signatures on Checking Accounts.

- **Council adjourned the meeting to break at 11:15 a.m.**
- **Council reconvened the meeting at 11:26 a.m.**

I. Planning Commission Briefing – Mr. Chip Land, Annexation Coordinator

Mr. Chip Land, Annexation Coordinator, stated that the City Attorney should brief the members of Council on the designation of slots. He recommended that Council advertise the two (2) potential openings on the commission immediately and that any member that is seeking re-appointment should apply again as well. There are two (2) members eligible for re-appointment for another term.

There was a consensus of Council to advertise the vacancies noting that the two (2) incumbents are eligible for reappointment. Council reserves the right to appoint new members.

TRAFFIC CONCERNS

J. Flashing Traffic Lights – Mr. Dave Brewer, Traffic Engineer

Mr. Dave Brewer, Traffic Engineer explained that the traffic system has seven (7) locations around the University of South Carolina that flash yellow one way and red the other at night. He said that you have to consider those lights as two-way stops without the benefit of a traffic signal to assign the right of way and you have to be very careful about sight distance and parking near the intersection. He noted that they wanted to do this in low traffic areas, but determined that they would have to remove a lot of parking or have no parking enforcement. He said that on major arteries they let the lights run in free operation or non-coordination at night until a car approaches a light on a side street. Rush hour is between 7:00 a.m. until 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. and there are coordination plans tailored to those times. He explained that all signals except on Main Street and Sumter Street are operated by actuated modes where there are magnetic detectors in the pavement. The detectors do not respond to movement.

A Public Hearing is scheduled for Wednesday, March 1, 2006.

K. Quarterly Traffic and Engineering Report – Mr. Dave Brewer, Traffic Engineer

Mr. Dave Brewer, Traffic Engineer explained that the southbound right turns prohibition at Bull Street and Confederate Avenue and Victoria Street and Confederate Avenue have resulted in a substantial reduction in traffic within the residential area. He noted that they have changed the signal coordination along Bull Street to maximize the capacity, because 500 cars have been added to the Bull Street traffic flow.

Councilman Sam Davis requested that staff organize a meeting between the residents and the business owners to discuss the effects of the right turn prohibition.

Mr. Dave Brewer, Traffic Engineer, stated that the SC Department of Transportation has installed eleven (11) traffic cameras in the downtown area with plans to add twelve (12) new cameras and fiber optic communications. The new downtown signal systems will be expanded to Harbison, Garners Ferry Road and Rosewood Drive creating one large citywide traffic system. He explained that a left turn arrow would be added to the Bower Parkway and Park Terrace intersection; and two (2) additional traffic signals will be installed on Blossom Street at Bull Street and Lincoln Street. Mr. Brewer said that they are working with the Wheeler Hill Neighborhood regarding traffic in their neighborhood, because the neighborhood association has requested resurfacing and speed humps. He noted that drivers cut through the neighborhood to avoid trains.

Councilwoman Tameika Isaac Devine stated that the Yorkshire Community has traffic concerns, but she can't get a sense of who wants what. She requested a meeting with the neighborhood and Mr. Brewer.

**Councilwoman Anne M. Sinclair requested that staff take a close look at the property between Senate Street and Gervais Street to determine the feasibility of forming simple trails and adding picnic benches. She said that the City owns the property, but we need to clean it up and make it usable. She noted that Tax Increment Funding is available for the project.

APPEARANCE OF PUBLIC HAVING BUSINESS WITH CITY COUNCIL

Mr. Temple Ligon invited everybody out to the Annual Lecture of the Architecture of Michael Angelo Friday, February 10, 2006 at 6:00 p.m. on the top floor of the Senate Plaza. He encouraged the members of Council to host Architectural Design Competitions to bring in the big guns.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Upon motion by Mr. Cromartie, seconded by Ms. Sinclair, Council voted unanimously to go into Executive Session at 12:14 a.m. for the discussion of **Item L.** and **M.** as amended.

- L. Receipt of legal advice, which relates to matter covered by attorney-client privilege - Jim Meggs, City Attorney
 - Planning Commission Designated SeatsThis matter was discussed in Executive Session. No action was taken.

- M. **Discussion of negotiations incident to proposed contractual arrangements
 - State of South CarolinaThis matter was discussed in Executive Session. No action was taken.

- **Council adjourned the Work Session at 1:20 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Erika D. Salley
City Clerk