

**CITY OF COLUMBIA
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 12, 2007 – 7:00 PM
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
1737 MAIN STREET**



The Columbia City Council conducted a Special Called Meeting on Tuesday, June 12, 2007 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 7:02 p.m. The following members of Council were present: The Honorable E.W. Cromartie, II, The Honorable Anne M. Sinclair, The Honorable Sam Davis, The Honorable Tameika Isaac Devine, The Honorable Daniel J. Rickenmann and The Honorable Kirkman Finlay III. Also present were Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager and Ms. Erika D. Salley, City Clerk.

CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION / ACTION

1. Consideration of Alternative Budgets for Fiscal Year 2007/2008 – The Honorable Daniel J. Rickenmann and The Honorable Kirkman Finlay III

Councilor Rickenmann explained that his amendment included a \$1.5 mil increase instead of the proposed 3.5 mil increase bringing the budget to \$98,815,922. The second amendment would reallocate funds within the budget to Public Safety, Parks and Recreation and Public Works. It proposes a 4.2% growth in the budget instead of the proposed 4.9% growth. The reallocation would impact less than 2% of the budget. He noted that the budget process has moved rapidly since April. He said that we do need an increase to keep up with times. A 1.5 mil increase adds approximately \$500,000 to the budget. He thinks that the City of Columbia will benefit the most from the new local option sales tax.

Councilor Finlay distributed a spreadsheet outlining his proposed amendments. He concurred with Mr. Rickenmann, noting that he is hard pressed to impose the highest mil increase just because we can. He said that the City Council's role is to allocate resources on a fund line basis and to spend less time on individual line items. His proposal is a compilation that takes the fiscal year 2005/2006 budget and the fiscal year 2006/2007 and provides percentage changes on the line items. He noted that over time several individual offices within the city have moved back and forth among the general line items making it hard to compare apples to apples. He then listed the fiscal year 2007/2008 budget as presented by staff without indicating the percentage changes from fiscal year 2006/2007. The most dramatic deviation is that Public Services would be funded at a much higher level. He suggested that the Police Department gain approximately \$1.4 million; Public Works gain approximately \$380,000; and Parks and Recreation gain \$90,000 as compared to the fiscal year 2006/2007 budget. These suggestions are based upon the theory that Public Safety was going to grow at .5%. It is incumbent upon us to fund these areas after reading the Citizens Surveys, seeing the Federal Bureau of Investigation's numbers on crime and understanding that new fire stations are being built. The citizen's survey indicated concerns about our streets, public works and sanitation. Public Works was going to grow at 1%, but he recommended that it be increased to 3%. Parks and Recreation has two (2) new parks and was proposed to grow at 0%. The proposed \$90,000 increase would fund the new parks and the maintenance of the new fountain in Five Points. More resources are being allocated to the priority basic services realizing that other department's budgets will not grow as quickly as projected. He stated that there are no cuts included in his proposal. There would be a .7% cut to taxes. He asked for an explanation on how debt service has grown 32%. These amendments would not impact Development Services or debt service, but would allow General Government, Community Promotions and non-Department Other to grow by 5%.

Mayor Coble asked who would decide as to what to remove from the proposed City Manager's budget. Is the City Manager being asked to do this or has that already been done?

Councilor Rickenmann stated that we would have to vote on the adjusted millage rate so it could be on the agenda tomorrow. He said that there are a lot of options when considering the reallocations.

Councilor Finlay suggested that they not move beyond a line item adjustment since that is the City Manager's territory. He said that Department Heads and Agency Heads should be able to make those cuts by realigning their budgets in a sensible manner.

Councilor Davis congratulated his two (2) colleagues for their efforts to help us along by taking a long hard look at where we are with the budgeting process. He shares their concerns about funding Public Safety. He asked where the City is with hiring the proposed number of Officers and how that is being matched against the ongoing vacancy list.

Councilor Finlay said that was a part of the basis of his concerns. He distributed copies of the staffing levels within the Police Department. At the end of 2001 we had 345 Officers and today we have 346 Officers.

Councilor Devine stated that it might not be Council's purview to say what should be cut, but it is a simplistic view to say that those three (3) departments are the only basic services whereas general government includes the City Manager, staff, Human Resources and Finance. She said that it is hard to decide without knowing the overall impact of the dollars and cents we are talking about. She is also concerned about reducing departmental services, because she hears a lot about our ability to enforce codes and other issues. She said that the numbers are misleading, noting that we have struggled with Community Promotions over the years and while it looks like it is being increased, it is also having organizations and groups added to that fund. She asked for some possibilities of what could be cut or reallocated and what this would mean for us.

Mayor Coble said that \$2.6 million would be cut out of the City Manager's budget. He requested that staff identify the areas funded through General Government, Community Promotions and non-Department other.

Councilor Sinclair said that they are trying to tell staff how to do their jobs; because the City Manager and his staff presented a budget that we have been reviewing line by line for months.

Councilor Rickenmann disagreed with Councilor Sinclair and referred to the cuts already made by the City Manager. He noted that staff, up until June 6, 2007, changed the numbers.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager explained that *General Government* is comprised of the following: Council expenses, support staff, operating expenses and supplies; under Administration is the City Manager, Assistant City Managers, support staff, Office of Budget Management, operating expenses; Governmental Affairs and Community Relations is comprised of 311 staff, operations, the Director and staff; The Legal Department includes the City Attorney, staff and operating expenses; the Finance Department consists of Accounting, Business License staff, expenses, audit contracts and professional services contracts; General Services consists of our public buildings, staff responsible for maintenance of those buildings, HVAC, janitorial services, pest control and elevators; Information Technology includes staff, operating expenses, city-wide computer roll out, system maintenance and support contracts; and the Planning Department.

Non-Departmental and Others includes the following: the contract with the Solicitor's Office which provides support with the Teen Court, Drug Court, public nuisance cases and warrant review for Police Officers; general insurance premiums and retiree benefits; employee cost of living increases and merit program; capital improvements takes in general projects for city owned facilities and structures; Council Contingency account; the Homeless Commission; security cameras; integrated software; and the Anti-Gang Assessment.

Community Promotions include the Capital Senior Center, Columbia Council of Neighborhoods, Columbia Urban League, Communities and Schools of the Midlands, Community Mediation Center, Ebony Dance Theater, Epilepsy Foundation of South Carolina, Fast Forward, Free Medical Clinic, Inc., Greater Columbia Community Relations Council, KOBAN, Inc., New Life Community Center, Inc., Partners in Education, River Alliance, Senior Resources, Inc., Sexual Trauma Services of the Midlands, Sistercare Inc., South Carolina Shakespeare Company, Trinity House, Inc., Volunteers of America of the Carolinas, Disability Action Center, Junior Achievement of Central South Carolina, Richland County CASA and the Eau Claire Cooperative Health Center.

Councilor Cromartie asked for clarification on the total dollar amount of the reduction. He asked if the reduction is \$2.6 million. He would not be willing to vote for this without knowing where the cuts are.

Councilor Finlay stated that \$1.9 million is being moved to those three (3) departments.

Mayor Coble said that those areas total \$17.1 million and would be reduced by \$2.6 million. This is a 15% cut to those entities. He needs to understand where those cuts are going to be.

Councilor Davis asked if there were something else they would consider. He has accepted the City Manager's budget and the original cuts that were made. He said that the Council should be commended for not having any sacred cows this year. He has a humanistic interest in the fact that they agreed to look at the people not making the highest salaries, so the cost of living is something that he doesn't want to cut.

Councilor Finlay reiterated that the areas being reduced are still growing at 5% from last year.

Councilor Cromartie stated that Community Promotions use to be funded at \$2.5 million and they could be just as responsible and get things done for the City, but now we find ourselves funding it at \$598,000. He is in support of the City Manager's budget.

Councilor Devine said that it would be helpful for the Council to know what was in the General Government budget last year; what the City Manager's rationale was for proposing the percentage increase in his budget; and what that increase does to the budget.

Councilor Rickenmann said that Council needed to decide if they want to vote on the mil increase, because that needs to be on tomorrow's agenda. The other proposed amendments can be done within first reading of the Ordinance. He asked the City Attorney if the mil should be voted on now.

Mayor Coble explained that according to Mr. Jim Meggs, City Attorney we would be okay if we decide to go below 3.5 mills, but we can't vote on what the millage is if we can't vote on what the budget is.

Councilor Finlay had requested in the past that the Budget Director provide a 5-year horizon and true it up, apples to apples, and provide the growth rate of the various departments over the past five (5) years.

Councilor Rickenmann requested that they include debt service, surplus and all things that are key to the discussion.

Councilor Cromartie requested that those individuals directly impacted by the proposed reductions be informed through our Public Relations Department.

Councilor Devine requested further details on what would be done with the proposed increases if approved.

Councilor Davis concurred with Ms. Devine's sentiments, because it would be to his advantage to understand what the impact would be. He tried to explain why the increases were being proposed at a neighborhood meeting last night. He said that citizens understood, but they do have expectations.

Councilor Sinclair clarified that City Council has had discussions about these departments, but they need to know where each department falls within the budget. They have talked about every one of these departments over the last two months, what has been shifted where and the percentage of growth.

Upon motion by Mayor Coble, seconded by Ms. Sinclair, Council voted unanimously to conduct a Work Session immediately following tomorrow's City Council meeting; to remove first reading consideration of the budget and water and sewer rate ordinances; to schedule first reading consideration of the ordinances for Wednesday, June 20, 2007; to schedule a Public Hearing for June 20, 2007; to schedule second reading for June 27, 2007 keeping in mind that we can not change the budget after June 20, 2007; and to schedule as many Work Sessions as needed. He asked the City Manager to start with General Government, Community Promotions and Non-Departmental Other so that they fully understand what's included in those areas.

- **Council adjourned the meeting at 8:14 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Erika D. Salley
City Clerk