

**CITY OF COLUMBIA  
CITY COUNCIL RETREAT MINUTES  
MARCH 7, 2008 – 8:30 A.M.  
COLUMBIA METROPOLITAN CONVENTION CENTER  
1101 LINCOLN STREET – HALL OF FAME ROOM**

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The Columbia City Council conducted a Retreat on Friday, March 7, 2008 at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center, Hall of Fame Room, 1101 Lincoln Street, Columbia, South Carolina. The Honorable Mayor Robert D. Coble called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.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**

A. Team Building

The members of Council viewed the “Good to Great” video by Mr. Jim Collins.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager, said that he sees his job as a call to service not as an honor or privilege. He urged the Council to proceed with discussions regarding the four (4) broad goals and how we can bring about collaboration among City Council, the City Manager and Executive Staff. It would be a general discussion as it relates to building collaboration and synchronizing all parts so that they move in a common direction, towards a common mission.

B. Discussion of Four (4) Broad Goals

1. To enhance the quality of life in the City of Columbia for all citizens, customers and visitors.

There was a consensus of Council to establish the following Policy Direction as it relates to enhancing the quality of life in the City of Columbia for all citizens, customers and visitors: Establish priorities, timeframes, measures and resources.

- **Council recessed at 12:23 p.m. for lunch.**
- **Council reconvened at 1:06 p.m.**

2. To enhance and protect our natural and built infrastructure.

There was a consensus of Council to establish the following Policy Directions as it relates to enhancing and protecting our natural and built infrastructure: **1)** Determine the amount of funds to be transferred to the General Fund from the Water & Sewer Fund on an annual basis and **2)** Consider on going operations and maintenance cost for new projects.

3. To enhance Columbia's future role as the flagship municipality in South Carolina through the use of best practices for local government operations.

There was a consensus of Council to establish the following Policy Directions as it relates to enhancing Columbia's future role as the flagship municipality in South Carolina through the use of best practices for local government operations: **1)** Identify and nurture relationships that are essential to the City; **2)** Consider the option of Joint Planning; and **3)** Establish the COC University with a curriculum focused on succession planning.

- **Council recessed at 2:41 p.m.**

- **Council reconvened at 3:02 p.m.**

4. To grow the City's tax base by facilitating opportunities for citizens and future generations to reach their full economic, social, and cultural potential.

There was a consensus of Council to establish the following Policy Directions as it relates to growing the City's tax base by facilitating opportunities for citizens and future generations to reach their full economic, social and cultural potential: **1)** Develop Cost Recovery based on impact studies; **2)** Consider Fees in Lieu of Taxes for non-profit entities; and **3)** Determine fee schedules for services provided to non-city residents and commercial businesses.

- **Council recessed at 4:03 p.m.**

- **Council reconvened at 4:39 p.m.**

C. Citywide Strategic Operational Plan

1. Providing quality customer service

Councilor Finlay encouraged staff to inform the Council of measures that cannot be used at the end of the process.

Councilor Devine asked that we look at other opportunities to have people appear as secret shoppers to report on how staff is doing.

Mayor Coble said that he gets complaints about water policies, such as citizens paying their bills, but the city won't restore water service until the next day. He stated that this is a good policy for habitual offenders. He talked about weekend customer service and how citizens get an answering machine, but they have no way of knowing where they are in the pecking order.

Mr. Rickenmann said that he gets complaints about phone calls, but he never gets complaints about employees in the field.

Mr. Steven Gantt, Sr., Senior Assistant City Manager for Operations explained that for the next fiscal year they have budgeted for recording devices; hiring more people; and putting people on duty during weekends.

Councilor Devine recommended that we see how electronic meter reading works for SCANA.

Councilor Finlay said that it would be helpful to have one person as the resource to direct people to without jamming up a lot of senior management's time with these issues. The person should be nice, knowledgeable, on time and do what they say they will do.

Councilor Rickenmann recommended that staff be trained to listen without being defensive.

2. Improving internal and external communications

▪ **Councilor Finlay left the meeting at 5:17 p.m.**

Councilor Cromartie asked how Arsenal Hill could link to the Columbia Council of Neighborhoods (CCN) website. He would like for Public Relations to have televised shows and a studio.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager stated that he is looking for space that is conducive to setting up a studio, noting that the logistics won't work at City Hall or Lady Street.

Councilor Devine stated that other cities have their mission and vision statement on their websites. She suggested that we do the same. She recommended that we look at Mobile's (Alabama) site as a good example. Our site should contain more information on City Council members to include their biographies.

Councilor Rickenmann stated that all of our partners should have links on the city's website.

Councilor Devine suggested that we share studio space with another entity or use space that we already own, such as the North Main Plaza.

Councilor Sinclair requested that following measure be added to this strategic issue: The number of 311 calls successfully handled. She is concerned that calls get lost into the twilight.

Councilor Rickenmann asked for the volume of 311 calls received.

Councilor Davis asked if there is a peak time wherein the volume of calls increases.

Councilor Cromartie would like to see a printout of complaints by district, the caller, the nature of the complaint and how it was resolved.

Ms. Missy Caughman, Budget Director asked the Council if 311 services is a funding priority.

Councilor Sinclair requested an assessment of 311 to see if it's working. If it's not working, she suggested that the system be replaced by an individual to answer the calls.

Ms. Leshia Utsey, Director of Public Relations asked if all Council members wanted their biographies and photos on the website.

Councilor Devine replied yes, but asked that each Council member approve the items before they are placed on the website.

3. Providing resources to improve and maintain infrastructure

Councilor Rickenmann requested that the following measure be added to this strategic issue: Each department should develop a 1 / 3 / 5 / 10 year plan.

4. Securing adequate tools and resources to support our employees in performing their duties

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager stated that he would provide a report on the number of employees completing the Get SET Program, the number of employees using the tuition reimbursement program and those that remain employed with the city.

Councilor Sinclair asked how we allow Police Officers to leave the city after training, but we can keep those who use tuition reimbursement for one year. What's the difference?

Mr. Ken Gaines, City Attorney, said that he spoke with the city's Labor Attorney and staff will prepare information for review as it relates to Officers leaving the city after training.

Councilor Devine stated that it is expensive to send an individual to training. She suggested that it be set up where the trainer comes to the department to train the entire staff at one time versus spending a lot of money to train one person.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager stated that this would be encompassed in the COC University.

Councilor Rickenmann said that he has received complaints about the Grievance Committee and asked if we have addressed the issue of department heads being handcuffed.

Councilor Cromartie requested a copy of the Employee Handbook and Polices and Procedures Manual.

Councilor Devine stressed the need for policies to be applied consistently.

5. Maximizing revenue opportunities

No comments were made relating to this strategic issue.

6. Building stronger partnerships between City Council and staff

No comments were made relating to this strategic issue.

7. Enhance leadership and resources to grow the economic base of the City of Columbia

No comments were made relating to this strategic issue.

### **CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION / ACTION**

- C1. Proposals to Fund Three (3) Housing and Loan Programs

Mayor Coble distributed a memo that staff prepared as a follow up to the Affordable Housing Taskforce recommendations made to City Council. The first recommendation is to fully fund the City Living Loan Program, which has been very successful. He said this needs to be funded at \$5 million, if there is a surplus.

Ms. Dana Turner, Assistant City Manager for Commerce and Development explained that there are two funds within the City Living Loan Program; one is federally funded and one is not. We struggle the most with the one that's not federally funded and the bulk of the loans are for 80% to 150% of median income. This account balance is approximately \$400,000 and a big portion of that is being spent to move and renovate two (2) church houses. When the program was created City Council committed to funding it at \$1 million per year. Over seven (7) years this program has been funded at \$2.6 million total. The \$5 million would keep the fund going through the end of the second phase or beyond that. The program was initially established for ten (10) years and has three (3) years remaining.

Councilor Devine suggested that staff prepare a Request for Proposals seeking banks to partner with the city as it relates to the loan programs.

Ms. Dana Turner, Assistant City Manager for Commerce and Development agreed with Ms. Devine, noting that it would be a good idea once this commitment ends. At the end of the second five year commitment a bid will be issued to get the banks that will be the best partners for us.

Councilor Rickenmann noted that there is a huge stock of housing that fits the criteria for affordable housing and asked how we move forward to get people to buy the existing stock instead of over populating or killing the market. He added that the city's loan programs were not listed in places like Celia Saxon and other developments.

Ms. Dana Turner, Assistant City Manager for Commerce and Development explained that this is a loan program and it is not money we would use to build new housing. She said that the city is making loans on whatever is out there in the market. She is not sure why the programs are not being advertised through the Housing Authority or other partners.

Councilor Cromartie said that he could have talked with the Housing Authority Commissioners to remedy that problem immediately. He said that his constituents are concerned about Main Street to the Congaree River becoming homes for the rich without low and moderate income families. There needs to be a loan program for those making around \$100,000 to purchase homes at CanalSide.

Councilor Davis said that if we are sponsoring folks they have a responsibility to tell about our loan programs. He still has problems with the definition of affordable. The demographics of this city are changing. We need to be creative of financing folks with income challenges. He stated that there is a negative perception about living in the city.

Ms. Dana Turner, Assistant City Manager for Commerce and Development stated that homebuyers make their decisions based upon the size of the house they get for the money in Northeast Columbia and the schools.

Councilor Devine would like to see the city develop a pool of money for loans for people who partner with us to buy some of the dilapidated houses, fix them up and then sell them as affordable for homeownership. There are people doing this already and it would relieve the Development Corporations.

Ms. Dana Turner, Assistant City Manager for Commerce and Development said that is a good idea, but it's all a question of funding. She proceeded with the second recommendation to put

\$1 million into the Housing Trust Fund to address the needs of low-income households, including the special needs populations like the homeless.

Councilor Rickenmann suggested that as a long-term plan we issue bonds like it was done in Charlotte. He suggested that we require developers that request assistance from the city to have mixed use developments that are affordable.

Councilor Davis concurred with Mr. Rickenmann, stating that we need to see how other cities are doing this. He noted that federal funding comes with a lot of restrictions, so we must come up with a way to put money into the pot.

Mayor Coble presented the third recommendation as an idea stemming from the deal with Mr. Tom Pioreschi that did not work out. He suggested that we have a general loan pool that would be applicable to what Mr. Pioreschi was doing and anybody else. Staff has developed a proposal for a new Workforce Housing Developer's Loan Program that has not been funded, but could be funded out of surplus.

Councilor Cromartie stated that this city has a huge influx of the older generation and we should figure out a way to help them sell their house and use a transitional loan to get into a condo. We constantly talk about building new houses, but we need to consider the elderly.

Mayor Coble continued to explain that this new program would go to a developer or the city's Development Corporations and would fund affordable housing units.

Ms. Dana Turner, Assistant City Manager for Commerce and Development further explained that the program would consist of housing in the 80% to 150% median income bracket. Affordable is characterized as 80% and below and this program would target that upper income bracket being served by the City Living II Loan Program. These funds would be a loan for the developer to help them cover up front project cost. It would be a short-term loan.

Councilor Cromartie stated that it is also important to create a niche for higher income levels. The Hyatt Street Project was done to bring higher income individuals back into the City of Columbia.

Mayor Coble asked Ms. Turner to explain how the city would be repaid.

Ms. Dana Turner, Assistant City Manager for Commerce and Development explained that the city would be either repaid by the developer as the units are sold or the city could reduce the sales price of the units and then make the loan to the purchaser for repayment.

Councilor Devine stated that she is supportive of having a loan pool for developers that would completely renovate dilapidated homes and then sell them for homeownership.

Councilor Sinclair concurs with Ms. Devine's recommendation, because a lot of young people look at old houses and don't want to be bothered with the renovations. She asked about the city's foreclosure rate.

Mayor Coble suggested that they incorporate the Workforce Housing Developer's Loan Program with Ms. Devine's idea on the loan pool for developers who repair dilapidated housing.

Ms. Dana Turner, Assistant City Manager for Commerce and Development stated that the

city's foreclosure rate is below 1%, because staff does an excellent job of counseling on the front end.

Mayor Coble prioritized the recommendations as follows: The City Living Program, Workforce Housing Developer's Loan Program as amended by Ms. Devine and the Housing Trust Fund.

Councilor Sinclair agrees with the concept of a Housing Trust Fund, but has concerns about who would make the decisions and control the fund. The practical reality is that there are non-profits that serve the homeless and are able to get grant money. She would make the Housing Trust Fund a lower priority.

There was a consensus of Council to direct staff to massage the three (3) recommendations based on the directives given by City Council.

- **Council recessed at 6:44 p.m. for dinner.**
- **Council reconvened the meeting at 8:13 p.m.**

D. Proposed Fiscal Year 2008/2009 Funding for Outside Organizations

Councilor Devine presented a proposed listing of organizations to be funded during fiscal year 2008/2009 from the Liquor Rebate, Accommodations Tax Surplus, Hospitality Tax Surplus, Community Promotions and Fiscal Year 2008/2009 Hospitality Tax Funds. She noted that the Liquor Rebate Fund could only be used for historic preservation and storm water projects and the Monteith School needs \$86,000 and the Renaissance Foundation needs \$100,000 to finish the windows and other items. There is an Accommodations Tax Fund surplus from last year and she proposed funding the Conventions and Visitors Bureau (CVB) in the amount of \$100,000 to cover a deficit from last year.

Councilor Sinclair continued with the proposal to fund outside organizations. She stated that there is a surplus in the Hospitality Tax Fund, because a big ticket item in Hospitality Tax was paying off the bond; last year that was paid twice leaving \$1.7 million to carry forward in that fund. When we started the Hospitality Tax Fund we took out two payments so we would always have a payment in the background and that payment is still there. They are suggesting that \$500,000 goes to the State Museum almost giving them what they requested; \$450,000 for the Skate Park to complete the project; \$250,000 for the Hospitality Tax Advisory Committee's contingency to be set aside and spent over the course of the year; and \$25,000 for the Auntie Karen Foundation for their children's educational programs. She noted that there was a lot of discussion about the Community Promotions Fund last year and that some groups are important to the City of Columbia, because the city helped to get them started or they are valued partners. The recommendation is that the following organizations stay outside of the committee process: Fast Forward (\$125,000), Capitol Senior Center (\$40,000), Greater Columbia Community Relations Council (\$100,000), Urban League (\$125,000), River Alliance (\$51,000) and Koban (\$100,000).

Councilor Devine said that the Council feels strongly about the extraordinary relationships that exist between the city and the above-mentioned organizations. She explained that it was a policy decision to pull these organizations out to ensure that they are funded.

Councilor Sinclair began discussing the fiscal year 2008-2009 Hospitality Tax Fund. She recalled when the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee Chair suggested to Council that the Accommodations Tax Funds be used for the Conventions and Visitors Bureau (CVB) and for Lake Murray Country with the caveat that the Hospitality Tax Committee receives \$2.5 million to distribute. The organizations ordinarily funded by Accommodations Tax would now be funded from the Hospitality Tax Fund. The remaining items would be funded from the fiscal year 2008-2009 Hospitality Tax Fund: Debt Service (\$1.7 million), Museum of Art (\$675,000), EdVenture (\$495,000), Historic Columbia Foundation (\$451,000), Columbia Music Festival Association (\$225,000), Allen University (\$250,000), Columbia College (\$250,000), and General Fund (\$800,000). This is a 1% increase in funding for the Museum of Art and EdVenture. She reminded them that the Historic Columbia Foundation's funding was increased last year when they began managing the Modjeska Simpkins House.

Councilor Devine explained that the Columbia Music Festival Association was created by State Legislation and that prohibits the organization from soliciting money, because it was created to help promote the arts.

Councilor Sinclair stated that Richland County included EdVenture, the Museum of Art and the Historic Columbia Foundation in an Ordinance so they would get a certain percentage of the Hospitality Tax Fund each year. She suggested that the city draft a similar Ordinance. The organizations would still be required to submit a proposal on how the money is to be spent and to provide the appropriate back up information so that we can be sure that the money is used properly.

Councilor Cromartie requested that the funding for Allen University be approved, but not disbursed until Allen University provides the necessary back up to show how the previous funding allocation was spent and how the new allocation would be spent.

Councilor Sinclair explained that the \$800,000 allocation to the General Fund would be for the Park Rangers.

Councilor Cromartie noted that the partnership with the City of Columbia and Allen University, Benedict College and Columbia College is extraordinary and that these institutions should place a marker on their campus grounds to memorialize the economic development support provided by the City of Columbia. The markers should list the current Mayor, Council members and the City Manager.

Councilor Davis is supportive of having these organizations in the city's budget as line items, but he is concerned about giving them any more of a guarantee than other organizations. He asked if the Council would reserve the right to decrease the funding allocations.

Councilor Sinclair reminded the Council that the city owns the building that the Museum occupies, Boyd Plaza and the building that's occupied by EdVenture.

Ms. Libby Gober, Ombudsman, stated that neither Allen University nor Columbia College have provided back up for the \$750,000 that has been allocated.

Councilor Cromartie stated that the motion to approve the funding was crafted so that the funding would go to a 501 (c) (3); to ensure that back up information was provided; and to ensure that the funding was used pursuant to state law. Make sure that things were done as they were supposed to be done prior to releasing the remaining \$250,000. This information should be provided to the members of Council for review.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager stated that he would send a letter to representatives of both institutions requesting the necessary information and indicating that we cannot release the next round of funding until we get the back up.

Councilor Sinclair continued to explain that the funding would still be voted on each year and that the funding for each organization would increase based on the total increase in Hospitality Taxes collected.

Councilor Cromartie requested that the Greater Columbia Community Relations Council and the Columbia Urban League be added to the Ordinance.

E. Discussion of Council District Issues

Councilor Sinclair asked that the "From Good to Great" initiative be funded in the amount of \$100,000 from the Economic Development Fund.

Councilor Devine asked that staff strategically review a mechanism for funding the Development Corporations.

Councilor Rickenmann requested that the Eau Claire Development Corporation be looked at.

Councilor Cromartie requested that staff do something about the Bethel Bishop Apartments, because there is a problem with a tremendous amount of poor people living together. He suggested that a mixed-use environment with diverse income levels would improve the quality of life.

Councilor Davis urged staff to find the owners of Ames Manor, because the problems there are worse than those at Gable Oaks. He described it as a dump with people living there and stated that the owners needed to be accountable for derelict apartments. He asked about what's hampering staff from handling code enforcement issues in Eau Claire and Northeast Columbia. He complained about properties still being boarded up.

Councilor Devine explained that the Eau Claire Development Corporation is carrying the financial burden of North Main Plaza, because tenants can't pay their mortgages. She urged the city to consider forming a 501 (c) (3) to take over that property.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

F. Discussion of the employment of an employee  
*This item was withdrawn from the agenda.*

▪ **Council adjourned the meeting at 9:01 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Erika D. Salley  
City Clerk