



We Are Columbia

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 14, 2015

Contact: Michael Wukela, Office of the Mayor @ 803-413-5052

Council adopts Mayor Benjamin's revenue plan

Proposal reduces water/sewer rate increase, secures public safety funding and cuts taxes

Columbia, SC – Columbia City Council voted 5-2 to adopt Mayor Steve Benjamin's comprehensive proposal to secure funding for public safety, reduce the proposed Water/Sewer rate increase and cut city property taxes by more fairly spreading the cost of city government among tax exempt properties which benefit from city services without sharing in the costs during budget discussions at a Council Work Session earlier today.

"Right now our taxpayers shoulder a disproportionate burden because so much of our property in our city isn't on the tax rolls," said Mayor Benjamin. "If we're going to truly move forward, then everybody has to pay their fair share. This proposal is a major step in that direction while promoting fiscal responsibility, accountability and transparency and I'm proud this Council supports it."

Passed by a vote of five to two, Mayor Benjamin's proposal:

- Provides relief to city taxpayers and more fairly distributes the cost of government among tax exempt properties which benefit from city services without sharing in the costs by raising the SCANA Franchise Fee from 3% to 5% with a corresponding a two mill city property tax rollback for city taxpayers.
- Reduces a proposed 12.1% Water/Sewer rate increase to 9.5% by eliminating \$1.6 million in Water/Sewer operations costs currently used to fund the City's Office of Business Opportunities and Development Corporations and absorbing those costs into the General Fund.
- Promotes fiscal responsibility, transparency and increased funding for Public Safety by eliminating the open-ended \$4 million General Fund Transfer from Water and Sewer revenues and instituting instead a dedicated 2% Public Safety Transfer the necessity of which will be reevaluated annually.

"Public safety has and continues to be our top priority and that's why we've increased our General Fund budgets for public safety by more than \$11.6 million over the past five years," said Mayor Benjamin. "In fact, last year alone our police, fire and 911 budgets grew by a combined \$3.3 million while all other General Fund spending decreased by \$500,000."

"This is a dedicated and transparent revenue stream that can only be used to fund the men and women that keep our citizens safe without further burdening our taxpayers."

In addition, in order to protect low-income and elderly residents from potential cost increases, Mayor Benjamin's proposal calls on the City to aggressively promote its Maintenance Assistance Program which helps those residents who need it most pay for weatherization and energy efficiency improvements significantly lowering their power bills and offsetting any additional costs.

For more information, contact Michael Wukela via email at mcwukela@columbiasc.net.

Full motion as made by Mayor Steve Benjamin on April 14, 2015

(Adopted by Columbia City Council by a vote of 5 to 2):

In keeping with our strong commitment to fiscal responsibility and public safety, we direct the City Manager and Staff to bring back a proposal that:

- *Removes the appearance that Water and Sewer funds will ever be used for “pet projects” or anything that isn’t a true priority for our city and region by eliminating the \$4 million General Fund Transfer from Water and Sewer.*
- *Recognizes the fact that this Council has increased Public Safety funding for our Police, Fire and 911 services by more than \$11.6 million over the past five years and that last year alone we increased to Public Safety funding \$3.3 million dollars outpacing total General Fund growth by roughly half a million dollars demonstrating this Councils strong commitment to Public Safety and its impact both to our city and to our region and – in keeping with that commitment - institutes a designated 2% Public Safety Transfer from Water and Sewer the necessity of which will be reevaluated annually.*
- *Brings the proposed Water/Sewer rate increase down from 12.1% to 9.5% by eliminating the roughly \$1.6 million combined Development Corporations and OBO budgets from our Water/Sewer Operations and Maintenance budget and absorbing those costs in our General Fund.*
- *Provides relief to our city taxpayers and more fairly distributes the cost of government among tax exempt properties which benefit from city services without sharing in the costs by raising the SCANA Franchise Fee from 3% to 5% and instituting a two mill city property tax rollback FOR OUR CITY TAXPAYERS.*
- *Aggressively promotes Community Development’s Maintenance Assistance Program, launched earlier this month, providing a total \$500,000 in grants for a variety of maintenance costs including weatherization and can be utilized by low-income and elderly citizens to offset any potential cost increases resulting from the franchise fee increase.*

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