

**LEE COUNTY COUNCIL
PUBLIC HEARING
FEBRUARY 8, 2022, 9:30 A.M.
MAIN COURT ROOM – SECOND FLOOR OF THE COURTHOUSE**

Members present were Travis Windham, Chairman; Gordon Eckley, Vice-Chairman; Charles A. Beasley, member; Jackie Josey, member; Johnette Caughman, member; Ron Fountain, member. Alexander Boyd was absent. Staff present were Alan Watkins, Administrator; Julie Stokes, Assistant Administrator/Clerk to Council; Jason Prater, Tim DuBose. Others present were Thompson Issac, Gee Whetsel, Randy and Shirley Dixon, Dayton Riddle and representative from Soltage, Areatha Clark.

FOIA

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, all individuals requesting notifications were so notified.

PUBLIC HEARING

A. AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING PURSUANT TO TITLE 12, CHAPTER 44 OF THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA 1976, AS AMENDED, THE EXECUTION AND DELIVERY OF FEE-IN-LIEU OF AD VALOREM TAXES AGREEMENT BY AND BETWEEN THE COUNTY AND A COMPANY, IDENTIFIED FOR THE TIME BEING AS PROJECT WAVE, TO PROVIDE FOR FEE-IN-LIEU OF AD VALOREM TAXES INCENTIVES AND SPECIAL SOURCE REVENUE CREDITS; TO MODIFY A JOINT COUNTY INDUSTRIAL AND BUSINESS PARK OF LEE AND SUMTER COUNTIES AS TO ENLARGE THE PARK; AND OTHER RELATED MATTERS

The public hearing was opened at 9:31 a.m. on a motion made by Councilman Beasley, seconded by Vice-Chairman Eckley. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

Mr. Watkins said that Project Wave was a solar development of 2 megawatts and a \$2.8 million investment, which will be located at the intersection of Highway 341 and 401, Tax Map Parcel #053-00-00-009-000. He said the property is owned by Tommy Gosski. Mr. Watkins said this is a very large parcel of over 570 acres, but only a portion of the parcel of land will be used for solar. He said the fee per Mega Watt generated would be \$3500, which would equate to \$7000 per year. He said that this would be a large increase in taxes being paid over what is currently paid now at Agriculture use, and even though no jobs created, would definitely increase taxation for the County.

Stephanie, with Soltage, said that the solar farm would be 15 acres, but they were leasing 20 acres. Chairman Windham asked about the vegetation at the solar farm. Mr. Watkins said that the agreement addressed the vegetation which said that anything 300 feet from the road front had be maintained at a higher standard. Chairman Windham said the maintenance of the vegetation is critical to make sure it looks attractive from the road.

Public Comment

Councilperson Josey said she was concerned about keeping up the site and maintaining well because the other one got so bad, even though it's better now.

Chairman Windham said there was a penalty in place if it's not kept up in the agreement. Mr. Watkins said if the County identifies a certain number of days to bring the vegetation to a regular height stipulated in the contract, and it is not adhered to, then a penalty will be enforced.

The public hearing was closed at 9:38 a.m. on a motion made by Councilperson Josey, seconded by Councilman Beasley. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

B. PROPOSED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT CONSISTING GENERALLY OF NEEDED EQUIPMENT FOR PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENTS AND THE PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

The public hearing opened at 9:39 a.m. on a motion made by Councilman Beasley, seconded by Councilperson Caughman. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

Mr. Watkins said that funds are available in the Department of Agriculture to improve county infrastructure and equipment. He said that the public hearing for this project will be in March and the grant would be complete, if received, by April.

Mr. Watkins said that the County will be doing a series of grants up to a max of \$50,000 or 75% of the cost of equipment. He said that it would be \$65,000-70,000 per grant and County would be applying for 4-5 grants and would be working with USDA of Walterboro.

Tim DuBose was present and went over the description of the items that EMS was asking for in the grant. (detailed list is attached). Mr. Watkins said that after dividing into different grants, the balance would be paid for with the GO Bond in July to make up the difference.

Mr. Watkins said that two new ambulances were coming in March and the County was planning to purchase some of this equipment anyway.

Mr. Watkins said that in regards to Public Works, the County had purchased five compactors in the last five years and they need four more. He also said that were applying for 10 roll off containers to haul limb debris, etc. He said the ones they County has are damaged and old. They were also asking for 10 bigger roll off containers. Mr. Watkins said they are applying for four individual grants of up to \$50,000, or 75% of cost of equipment. He said the ARPA money and GO Bond will make up the difference. (public works equipment needs is attached)

Chairman Windham said the number one responsibility is public safety. He said we are very fortunate to have the money to address these needs.

Public comment

Randy Dixon asked what the County was doing with the old vehicles. Mr. Watkins said the County sells them at auction or GovDeals.com where people bid on them online and come and pick them up.

Mr. Watkins said if they do not sell, the County may move them to another department if there is a need.

Mr. Dixon wanted to know if the money goes back to that department when it's sold. Mr. Watkins said the money is rolled back into the department.

The public hearing was closed at 9:52 a.m. on a motion made by Vice-Chairman Eckley, seconded by Councilman Beasley. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

**REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
MAIN COURT ROOM – SECOND FLOOR OF THE COURTHOUSE
FEBRUARY 8, 2022**

OPEN MEETING, INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

Chairman Windham welcomed everyone to the meeting. Vice-Chairman Eckley gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

REQUEST FOR MOTION ON ADOPTION OF RECOMMENDED AGENDA

Councilperson Josey made the motion to approve the agenda as mailed. Councilman Beasley seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

REQUEST FOR MOTION ON ADOPTION OF MINUTES FROM REGULAR MEETING OF JANUARY 11, 2022 AND PUBLIC HEARING OF JANUARY 25, 2022

Councilman Beasley made the motion to approve the minutes as mailed. Vice-Chairman Eckley seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

A. MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN LEE COUNTY AND MARTECH RESEARCH FOR THE SALE OF BUILDING AND PROPERTY IN JAMES INDUSTRIAL PARK

Mr. Watkins said that Martech Research wanted to purchase two acres of land and a 5,000 square foot building owned by the County. The building and land are located on Industrial Boulevard and Myrtle Drive, directly behind Martech. He said this purchase would allow them the flexibility in their operations and be able to store their raw materials.

Mr. Watkins said the building is 20 plus years old and has been used for storage.

Chairman Windham hopes this will assist them to produce more jobs.

Councilperson Caughman made the motion to approve for third reading approval of ordinance. Councilperson Josey seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

B. REDISTRICTING OF THE COUNCIL DISTRICT LINES

Mr. Watkins referred to the old and new maps and said there were seven adjustments made to current districts. (The sheet listing the changes is attached). He said there had been several meetings and two public hearings on this matter. He said the new map has been forwarded to the state and the moves that were made do meet the requirements as outlined by the State.

Mr. Watkins said the local election board will work with the state election commission. Any person's district that has changed will receive a new voter registration card. He said any change will not change the precinct where they vote. He also said that a copy of the map is on the website.

He thanked Planning, Taxes & Personnel Committee for their job in working with all seven councilmembers to achieve these new lines.

Chairman Windham said the school board has the option to draw their own lines or use the new map.

Chairman Windham thanked Mr. Watkins and the Planning, Taxes & Personnel Committee for their work in working with the council in getting these lines drawn.

Councilman Beasley did point out that this committee did not draw the lines. He said that he understood there had been some talk about this, and he wanted to state that his committee worked with all of the Council in drawing the lines.

Councilman Beasley made the motion to approve the redistricting of the Council District lines for third and final reading. Vice-Chairman Eckley seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE AN EASEMENT TO REPOSITION UTILITY POLES ALONG EASY STREET

Mr. Watkins said this was a request from Duke Progress Energy about some electrical poles on a county road that comes off of Highway 15. He said that they cut diagonally through a farm field and they wanted to reposition those poles. He said they got permission from the property owner but wanted to get county's permission.

Councilman Fountain made the motion to approve the resolution to approve an easement to reposition utility poles along Easy Street. Councilperson Josey seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE

No report

B. PLANNING, TAXES & PERSONNEL

No report. Councilman Beasley thanked his committee for their work in working with council on redistricting the council lines.

C. BUILDINGS, LAND & PROPERTY

Vice-Chairman Eckley said as Chairman of The Link, the County is seeing a lot of activity on Browntown Road. He also commented that they have very positive leads on the spec building. He also said that there was a photo shoot with the City at the old Railroad Depot, which is being redone as a result of funding through Representative Wheeler and The Link.

He said that what you see when you come through Bishopville is very important and this project will help beautify Bishopville.

Vice-Chairman Eckley said that the County had secured funding for side walk along Highway 15 to the exit to Highway 15 and lighting on interchange and sidewalk. He said that Progress Energy is putting up poles.

D. PUBLIC SAFETY

No report. Councilperson Caughman thanked and commended our EMS for the great job they do in trying to save the county money and keep citizens safe. She also thanked Jason Prater for the good job at Public Works and said they keep our county looking good.

Tim DuBose thanked Council for supporting Public Safety and for the equipment the Council is helping to purchase.

E. RECREATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Chairman Windham said that Councilman Boyd had a conflict and was not able to attend the meeting

Mr. Watkins said that he met with representative about playground equipment upgrades and that representative plans to meet with each councilmember in their district. He said that the County is planning to spend around \$800,000 in the next six months, with funding from capital penny sales tax and ARPA funding. These funds should be able to give the current playgrounds a nice face lift.

Mr. Watkins said that county is finishing basketball. He said that the baseball registration starts today for ages 5-12. He said they are excited to start spring sports.

Chairman Windham said the County has spent about \$6 million in recreation in the last 20 years.

F. WAYS AND MEANS

No meetings

G. ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

He said the COVID numbers have decreased and said that in October, the County had less than 100 cases, and in January, there were 518 active cases on one particular day. Mr. Watkins said that as of yesterday, the County had 73 active cases.

He also commented that several council members were working with Rev. Willie Wilson. He said that DHEC is also providing vaccines to homebound people.

Mr. Watkins said the County did an Emergency Ordinance but this ordinance does not have any mandates associated with it. He said that the County had one office closed for a week due to COVID, but as of now, all county office are open and operating.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Randy Dixon said that City came out with mask mandate and said they are charging citizens \$25 if they are caught not wearing a mask. He asked if this applied to government buildings located in Lee County. He then said that the Councilmembers are appointed individuals and were not wearing a mask and they were violating their own rules.

Chairman Windham thanked him for his question.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A. COUNCIL WILL ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION ON A LEGAL MATTER

Council entered Executive Session at 10:17 a.m. on a motion made by Vice-Chairman Eckley, seconded by Councilperson Josey.

Page 7, Lee County Public Hearing and County Council Minutes, February 8, 2022

Council came out of Executive Session at 10:28 a.m. on a motion made by Vice-Chairman, seconded by Councilman Beasley. Chairman Windham said no votes were taken.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 a.m. on a motion made by Councilperson Josey, seconded by Vice-Chairman Eckley.

CHAIRMAN

VICE-CHAIRMAN

CLERK TO COUNCIL

MINUTES APPROVED

2/8/22 - Letter

Randy Dixon said that City came out with mask mandate and said they are charging citizens \$25 if they are caught not wearing a mask. He asked if this applied to government buildings located in Lee County. He then said that the Councilmembers are appointed individuals and were not wearing a mask and they were violating their own rules.

The County does not have a mask mandate, but the Courthouse does fall under a mask requirement put forth in a Judicial Order from SC Supreme Court Chief Justice Donald Beatty that anyone entering a courthouse was to wear a mask and have their temperature checked. As the Main Courthouse in Lee County also has a number of non-judicial or administrative offices; the County developed a policy requiring everyone entering the building to wear a mask and have their temperature checked but also allowed for masks to be removed in office areas where social distancing was possible or wear shields have been erected to protect employees.

This policy has been followed by all employees, including Council Members, and masks are worn during movements throughout the building but are often removed inside offices and during meetings when it may be difficult for the public to understand what is being said if a mask is worn.

As to the City's mandate for masks, I am not aware of a single fine being assessed for failure to wear a mask inside the city limits. This action was primarily done to strongly encourage the use of masks, but has not been strictly enforced by the City of Bishopville.