

**LEE COUNTY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 11, 2023
FAMILY 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. Councilmember Keel Addison was absent. Staff present were Alan Watkins, Administrator; Julie Stokes, Clerk to Council/Assistant Administrator; Paul Fata, Tim DuBose, Michael Davis. Others present were Pat Carter, Luke Giddings, Suzette Robinson, Carrie Gass, Shirley and Roy Dixon, Mattie Mack, Naomi Price, Nathaniel Best, Damon and Bridget Kirkland, Catherine Welch, Brenda Brisbon, Andre Laws, Edward and Celestine Boone, Edward Byrd, Lisa Annity, Jessica Dowling, Meoceania Wells Lewis, Kelly Curran.

FOIA

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

OPEN MEETING, INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

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

REQUEST FOR MOTION ON ADOPTION OF RECOMMENDED AGENDA

Chairman Windham said there was a correction to the agenda. He said that #8 for the approval of bid contract on roof for Lee County EMS should be deleted and add approval for April to be proclaimed as Fair Housing Month.

Councilman Beasley made the motion to approve the agenda with the revisions. Vice-Chairman Eckley 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 MARCH 14, 2023

Councilperson Caughman made the motion to approve the minutes from regular council meeting of March 14, 2023. Councilman Beasley seconded the motion. Chairman Beasley called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

REQUEST FOR MOTION ON FIRST READING APPROVAL OF ORDINANCE

- A. AN ORDINANCE (1) AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION AND DELIVERY OF AN AMENDMENT TO THE FEE AGREEMENT, DATED AS OF FEBRUARY 28, 2017, BY AND BETWEEN LEE COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA, AND SOUTH ATLANTIC CANNERS, INC. TO PROVIDE FOR AN EXTENSION OF THE INVESTMENT PERIOD AND A MODIFICATION OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE CREDIT; (2) PROVIDING FOR OTHER RELATED MATTERS.**

Mr. Watkins said that the County is amending the fee agreement that was done in 2017. He said that fee agreements assist businesses to develop. He said that South Atlantic Canners is investing a significant amount of money to upgrade equipment and wants to extend the fee agreement by three years.

Councilman Beasley made the motion to approve for first reading of ordinance. Vice-Chairman Eckley seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

REQUEST FOR MOTION ON THIRD READING APPROVAL OF ORDINANCE

- A. PURCHASE OF PROPERTY FOR CONSTRUCTION OF VOLUNTEER FIRE STATION IN DISTRICT 6**

Mr. Watkins said that the County was purchasing one acre of land for \$5000 from Unionville AMEC Church, located on Swimming Pen Road and Raccoon Road, and this was a recommendation from the Fire Department.

Chairman Windham said the fire protection would go from Class 10 to Class 5. Chairman Windham said this was good for the citizens in the St. Charles Community.

Councilman Beasley made the motion to approve for third and final reading of this ordinance. Councilman Fountain seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

BRIDGET KIRKLAND WILL ADDRESS COUNCIL REGARDING THE LEE COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER

Ms. Kirkland was present and said that she was with the Lee County Animal Shelter for 6 ½ years and at that time, the shelter was considered a “no kill” shelter where no healthy animals were euthanized. She said that since she left in September, there has been no director and the day-to-day operations have been under Alan Watkins. She said the success of the shelter has depended on rescues and various programs. Ms. Kirkland said that all of the shelters around us are doing everything they can to avoid euthanasia. She said the County is going back to basics not doing what we can. She also commented that she had talked to a couple of councilmembers at different times and they did not appear to know anything about the status of the shelter.

Chairman Windham said that after he talked with Ms. Kirkland, he called and talked with Mr. Watkins.

Mr. Watkins said when Ms. Kirkland left in September, the shelter was at a crisis point with over 50 animals. He said the budget for the Animal Shelter was \$36,000 in 2011 and now is a separate department with its own budget of \$145,700. Mr. Watkins commented that the County was able to construct the shelter with capital penny funding as well as bond funding. He said the animal shelter currently has 24 kennels. He said there are two main jobs at the shelter: day to day care for the animals and management of the facilities and rescues and adoptions. He said that a new policy had been put into place that said euthanasia “may” be used if the number of animals start trending upward. He said that no animals have been euthanized at this time due to lack of space at the facility. He said that the Shelter has a volunteer that is very involved in moving animals and rescues. He said that he is actively looking for the right person to be the director, but until he finds that person, he will continue to manage the Animal Shelter.

Mr. Watkins reiterated that there has to be a limit to the number of animals at the shelter. He said that you can’t take on an unknowable number of dogs. He said that the 24 that is referred to in the new policy is based on the number of kennels there are at the shelter.

He said there were 28 dogs and 15 puppies as of yesterday. Mr. Watkins said that 111 hours of staff time is paid under the budget. He said that Animal Control is still accepting calls. He said they continue to accept owner surrender and reiterated they have not euthanized at this point for space.

Chairman Windham said that when he has visited the Shelter, he was impressed with how clean it was.

Chairman Windham thanked Ms. Kirkland for coming and thanked her for her comments.

PROCLAMATION FOR LEE COUNTY CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION AND AWARENESS

Vice-Chairman Eckley read the proclamation and made the motion to approve April as the Lee County Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness month. Councilman Fountain seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

APPOINTMENT OF NICOLE SIMON TO THE LEE COUNTY DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS BOARD TO FILL THE UNEXPIRED TERM OF MARY CALDWELL, WHICH WILL EXPIRE IN JUNE 2024

Councilman Beasley made the motion to approve the appointment of Nicole Simon to the Lee County Disabilities and Special Needs Board. Councilperson Caughman seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE APRIL AS FAIR HOUSING MONTH

Mr. Watkins read the resolution proclaiming April as Fair Housing Month, Councilperson Josey made the motion to approve April as Fair Housing Month. Vice-Chairman Eckley seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

APPROVAL OF APPOINTMENTS TO THE LEE COUNTY 250 COMMITTEE

Chairman Windham said this was a part of a state wide program about education of Revolutionary War. He said that the list of appointments had been contacted and agreed to serve on the 250 Committee.

Councilperson Josey made the motion to approve the appointments to the Lee County 250 Committee. Councilperson Caughman seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE

Councilperson Josey said that First Steps was hosting an Early Childhood Summit Carnival of Reading on April 20, 2023 from 3:30 – 6:30 at the Bishopville High School Gym.

She also said the Magnolia Festival was scheduled for May 6 at 12 :00 in Lynchburg.

B. PLANNING, TAXES & PERSONNEL

Councilman Beasley said he had no meetings this month, but would be having some budget meetings in the upcoming months.

C. BUILDINGS, LAND & PROPERTY

Vice-Chairman Eckley said that the Link is continuing to work with prospect on the spec building. He also reported that playground equipment for the parks is nearly complete.

D. PUBLIC SAFETY

Councilperson Caughman said she had no meetings. She said she was very proud of how far our public safety has come. She said the County has great people who work there and has great management.

She said that the Springhill Community Mayfest is scheduled for May 20 and they will be having BBQ and encouraged everyone to attend.

E. RECREATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Councilman Addison not present. Mr. Watkins said that baseball is currently going on and games will be played through May. He said there are over 100 kids participating in baseball this year.

F. WAYS AND MEANS

Councilman Fountain said his committee would be starting the budget process with meetings very soon.

G. ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Mr. Watkins said the Fire Department replaced 100 road signs and repaired 25. He said they need to do 100 more.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Kelley Curran – said she was a volunteer transporter and said the County was piecing together a director. She said the Animal Shelter needed a director and asked if one was being advertised. She said the Shelter has had a high turnover rate due to poor management. She said the shelter did not have a bathtub. She said she emailed Mr. Watkins about that and she never got a response. She asked if the shelter was doing everything it could not to have to euthanize.

Roy Dixon- Congratulated Brenda Brisbon on her retirement. He said he wanted to piggyback on what Ms. Kirkland previously said about hiring family member. He said that if the County advertised for the position, the best person will get the job and no one can say anything about giving it to a family member. He said that no one could say anything to Mr. Watkins.

Luke Giddings – He thanked all who spoke. He said so many things factor in to define the odds to make euthanasia low. He said the County needs to look into hiring a director who is competent and the Animal Shelter deserves a director, not Alan Watkins.

Lisa Annity – she said she has transported and worked at the Shelter. She said she had paid for vetting when it was not being done at the shelter. She paid for other things out of her pocket. She said the Shelter had lack of leadership. Ms. Annity questioned how donations were being used. She said that those funds should be used to make animals more adoptable and not be used for facilities improvements. She said that igloos had been purchased through a fundraiser and said they were not at the shelter. Ms. Annity said that the animals were being moved by Bridget. She said the hiring procedure needs to be reviewed. She said she agrees with and supports everything Ms. Kirkland said.

Meoceania Lewis – thanked the County Council for having the confidence in her and placing her on the Library Board to fill the seat of Ms. Carrie Gass.

Page 6, Lee County Council Minutes, April 11, 2023

She said the timing of the County Council meetings at 9:30 is hard to attend. She asked the County Council to consider the individuals that work and consider meeting in the evenings.

Ms. Wells also asked if there was a tax hike because the taxes on her building went up from \$1600 to \$2200. She did not understand why her taxes went up and did not understand why she has to pay city and county taxes.

Mr. Watkins said he would look into the matter and get back with her.

Mattie Mack – thanked the Fire Department for putting her road sign back up. She wanted to know about a curve near Elizabethtown Baptist Church where people drive too fast and it's dangerous. Chairman Windham referred her to SCDOT.

Alexis Stover – gave some specific data on number of dogs at surrounding counties.

Carrie Gass – Salkahatchie program will run from June 25- June 30. She said that anyone could contact her or the BUMC for applications.

Andre Laws – He said the Magnolia Fest was scheduled for May 6 with the parade starting at 12.

Celestine Boone, of Lynchburg, said she wanted to have a family gathering some time in June or July and wanted to reserve the park in Lynchburg and wanted to know if she had to pay to reserve the park. She said she also noticed groups hanging around the park and wanted to know if she did reserve the park for her function, would those groups be hanging around during that time.

Mayor Andre Laws said she did not have to pay to reserve the park and the groups would not be hanging around during her function.

Lisa Anny commented there should not be any retaliation against any employee of the Animal Shelter that spoke at the meeting today. Chairman Windham said there would not be any retaliation.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Council entered into Executive Session on a contractual matter at 10:47 a.m. on a motion made by Vice-Chairman Eckley, seconded by Councilman Beasley.

The Council came out at 11:07 a.m. on a motion made by Councilman Beasley, seconded by Vice-Chairman Eckley. There was discussion on a contractual matter and no votes were taken.

Page 7, Lee County Council Minutes, April 11, 2023

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 11:08 a.m. on a motion made by Vice-Chairman Eckley, seconded by Councilman Beasley.

CHAIRMAN

VICE-CHAIRMAN

CLERK TO COUNCIL

MINUTES APPROVED