

**LEE COUNTY COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING  
JUNE 14, 2022  
MAIN COURT ROOM – SECOND FLOOR OF THE COURTHOUSE**

Members present were Travis Windham, Chairman; Gordon Eckley, Vice-Chairman; Alexander Boyd, member; Charles A. Beasley, member; Jackie Josey, member; Johnette Caughman, member; Ron Fountain, member. Staff present were Alan Watkins, Administrator; Julie Stokes, Assistant Administrator/Clerk to Council, Chase Iseman, Sheriff Danny Simon, Michael Davis. Others present were Shareka Anderson, Bernard McDaniel, Queenie Boyd, Nathaniel Brunson, Sylvia Scott, Echo Belvin, Luke Giddings.

**FOIA**

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

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**A. LEE COUNTY BUDGET FY 23**

The public hearing was opened at 5:31 p.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 at the first reading in May, the County budget had a deficit of over \$500,000. He said the Ways and Means Committee met several times and worked to propose a balanced budget of \$14,653,183, with no tax increase.

He said that the County will be phasing in funds of an additional \$50,000 for a total of \$150,000 from the City for fire protection. He said the Committee was proposing a 1.5% Cost of Living raise for employees. Mr. Watkins also said that the Committee also approved a second round of ARPA bonuses for employees, in which full-time employees would receive \$1200 and part-time would receive \$600 as a one-time bonus. He said there were stipulations in place to be eligible to receive bonus. He said that you must be a current employee as of 6/28 and if you retire prior to July 1, you would not be eligible. Mr. Watkins also said that anyone making over \$90,000 would not receive the bonus. He said basically an employee would need to be employed between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022 to receive the full bonus. He said the Ways and Means Committee thought this would be a way to address inflation and add to the cost-of-living adjustment.

Page 2, Lee County Council Meeting and Public Hearing, June 14, 2022

Mr. Watkins said there were mandatory increases, such as health, pension and property insurance, along with rising fuel costs, that accounted for a large percentage of the funding for the new budget.

He said that outside agencies presented over \$200,000 in requests, and the Ways and Means Committee were able to do some of those requests.

On the revenue side, Mr. Watkins said that the County had some major revenue adjustments of \$756,000. He said that taxes, fees and state funding came to \$500,000. He said that the county has seen delinquent property go down in the past year. However, he said that if inflation continues to rise, the County could see an uptick in delinquent taxes.

He said that the County saw an increase from the City of \$50,000 for fire protection. He also said that the County had seen an increase in landfill tipping fees. He said that every five years, the County calculates the contract, and he said that it has increased by 12.5% for the next five years. He said the County collected over \$1 million last year and the County should see an increase of approximately \$125,000.

Mr. Watkins wanted to mention three things that could affect the county budget over the next year.

The first thing he mentioned was the litigation with Farmers Telephone. He said this was a major tax exemption to Farmers, and the County was originally going to have to refund Farmers Telephone. He said that the County appealed in a lawsuit and had been working to finalize the lawsuit. Mr. Watkins said that the state has given the exemption to FTC and hopefully the County will not have to pay back the money. He said that we do not currently collect any money for FTC.

The second thing he wanted to mention was the lawsuit that initiated in Greenville County regards to the road maintenance fees. He said that attorneys have worked with legislature to fix language to be able to collect the fees. Mr. Watkins said that the lawsuit could possibly be repealed and this would allow fee collection of \$220,000 per year to continue for the County.

The third thing he wanted to mention was the proposed total exemption on ag use buildings in South Carolina. He said that this could affect the County's budget by \$150,000 and the County will not know anything until the end of the legislative session.

Chairman Windham said the Landfill is very volatile based on economy and could very easily turn the other way.

Councilman Beasley said that he is glad to have a balanced budget with no tax increase. Chairman Windham thanked the Committee for their hard work in balancing the budget.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no public comments from the audience.

The public hearing was closed at 6:00 p.m. on a motion made by Councilman Fountain, seconded by Councilperson Josey. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

**B. LEE COUNTY SCHOOL BUDGET FY 23**

Mr. Watkins said that he had received the budget and the budget request from the school. He said the local share mainly comes from ad valorem taxes. He said they were requesting the maximum tax increase of 4.7%, when added to the current mills would create a new total of 150 mills for the schools.

Bernard McDaniel, the school superintendent, said their budget is balanced with the budget request. He said the school has not asked for an increase over the past several years.

Shareka Anderson said there was an increase of \$435,991 needed to balance the budget.

Chairman Windham asked if the Department of Education announced funding for Lee County. Bernard McDaniel said that they have announced that the school will receive funding for new elementary schools in the amount of \$38,000,000.

Chairman Windham also said that the Legislature had discussed adding funding for oppressed counties and asked Mr. McDaniel it is was true. Mr. McDaniel said it was true and they had received \$922,000. He said the student count was around 1557.

Chairman Windham thanked the School Board and staff for coming.

The public hearing was closed at 6:10 p.m. on a motion made by Councilperson Caughman, seconded by Councilman Beasley. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

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**LEE COUNTY COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING  
JUNE 14, 2022**

**OPEN MEETING, INVOCATION AND PLEGE 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**

Chairman Windham said that an agenda needed to be revised to include Item 6B County to accept proposal to order playground equipment. Councilman Beasley made the motion to approve the agenda with the revision. 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 MINUTES OF MAY 10, 2022**

Councilman Boyd made the motion to approve the minutes of regular meeting of May 10, 2022 as written. Councilperson Caughman seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

**REQUEST FOR MOTION ON SECOND READING APPROVAL OF ORDINANCE**

**A. LEE COUNTY BUDGET FY 23**

Mr. Watkins said the Council is presenting a balanced budget of \$14,653,183 with no tax increase. He said that it does include a cost of living for employees of 1.5% and does include a one-time ARPA bonus of \$1200 for full time employees and \$600 for part time employees.

Councilperson Caughman made the motion to approve the Lee County Budget FY 23 for second reading. Councilman Beasley seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

**B. LEE COUNTY SCHOOL BUDGET FY 23**

Councilman Boyd abstained from voting on this matter because his wife is on school board.

Mr. Watkins said the millage rate for the school from last year was 143.3 and the school had requested 6.7 additional mills, which is the new total of 150 mills.

Councilperson Josey made the motion to approve the Lee County School Budget FY 23 with the millage rate from last year of 143.3 plus the 6.7 additional mills requested. Councilperson Caughman seconded the motion.

Vice-Chairman Eckley said he was concerned about the 6.7 mill increase. He said that the County wanted to do everything we can to help the schools, but he had a hard time accepting going up that many mills.

Councilman Fountain said that the Council needed to do some more research before making a decision because they are just getting this information and have not had time to study it.

Chairman Windham said the Council was scheduled to have third reading next Tuesday.

Page 5, Lee County Council Minutes, June 14, 2022

Chairman Windham asked Councilperson Josey if she wanted to change her motion and she said her motion stands as is. Councilperson Caughman said that it would be good to help the schools if we could.

Councilman Beasley said that perhaps the County could meet with Mr. McDaniel to see if we would work something out.

Chairman Windham called for the vote. He said the motion on the table is a 6.7 mill tax increase for second reading. Councilman Beasley, Vice-Chairman Eckley, Councilman Fountain voted down Councilperson Josey's motion, so it was a 3-2 vote, with one abstain.

Vice-Chairman Eckley said that a meeting could be held with the Superintendent to discuss the millage increase request.

Councilman Fountain seconded Vice-Chairman Eckley's motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and all were in favor except Councilperson Josey. She opposed.

#### **RESOLUTION UPDATING ADA COMPLIANCE POLICY AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES**

Mr. Watkins said that the County has to update this periodically and the County does have a current policy in place and this authorized us to update it. He said that this will be on display downstairs in the glass front cabinet.

Councilperson Josey made the motion to approve the Resolution updating ADA compliance policy and Grievance procedures. Councilperson Caughman seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

#### **RESOLUTION IDENTIFYING THE CAPITAL PROJECTS AS PART OF A PROGRAM OF GENERAL OBLIGATION BORROWING; AND OTHER RELATED MATTERS**

Mr. Watkins said that a bond is issued every two years, and this one is approximately \$ 1million in issuance, but the list of projects is approximately \$970,000. A list of projects for this bond is attached. He thanked the Sheriff for his work on this project.

Councilman Beasley made the motion to approve the resolution identifying the capital projects as part of a program of general obligation borrowing. Vice-Chairman Eckley seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

#### **COUNTY TO ACCEPT PROPOSAL TO ORDER PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT**

Mr. Watkins said that he met with Recreation Committee about park improvements and ordering playground equipment. He said that the playground equipment would be ordered from Bliss Products on state contract. The complete list of equipment and improvements is attached. He said the new playground equipment was \$243,878 and the fall safety material was \$200,049, with the total for all is \$443,927.

He said this was a combination of Capital penny sales tax and ARPA funds. He said the resolution would allow the County to move forward with this project.

Councilman Boyd made the motion to approve the resolution to accept proposal to order playground equipment. Councilperson Caughman seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

Chairman Windham thanked Councilman Boyd and his committee for their hard work.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **A. HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE**

Councilperson Josey had no report.

### **B. PLANNING, TAXES & PERSONNEL**

Councilman Beasley said that Mr. Watkins had already went over everything.

### **C. BUILDINGS, LAND & PROPERTY**

Vice-Chairman Eckley said that hopefully the County would have an announcement within two months of a new industry locating here.

D. **PUBLIC SAFETY** – Councilperson Caughman had no meetings.

E. **RECREATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS** – Councilman Boyd said that his committee met on approval of the playground project and thanked the Administrator for his help with this project. He said that he was glad that Churchwood area is getting a playground.

### **F. WAYS AND MEANS**

Councilman Fountain said that the budget has been covered by Councilman Beasley, Councilperson Josey and the Administrator.

### **G. ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT**

Mr. Watkins said that we have seen an uptick in COVID cases here in the County, however, Lee County was not one of the highlighted counties in the state with a rise in cases.

He mentioned that Duke Energy and CareSouth was sponsoring an event on June 16 with music and giveaways along with assistance with utility bills at Chappell Park from 4:30 – 6:30 p.m.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Bernard McDaniel said that he looked forward to meeting with the Committee on the millage. He said that in doing research, the school has only received 3.47 mills in the last five years. He said that the school was asking for 6.47 mill increase, which would equate to 1.68 mills per year over the next six years. He said he really wants the Council to consider the increase because the school has not asked for any increases in the last five years. He said he was disappointed in how the Council reacted to the millage increase request from the school.

Shareka Anderson said that their budget contained a 3% cost of living for non-teacher positions and she asked that Council really consider funding their millage increase request.

Luke Giddings said that he echoed what Mr. McDaniel said and he urged the Council to consider the school's request.

He went on to say that the vote process was very chaotic and said the vote changed and it looked suspicious. He said that, as a concerned citizen, he wanted Council to look back at the motion.

Mrs. Celestine Boone, of Mailbox Lane, was present and thanked the County for making the bridge and installing the sewer pipe on their road to help with drainage. She also asked that the County consider doing some additional improvements to their road.

Sylvia Scott echoed what Mr. McDaniel said. She said the school has not asked for anything for the past several years. She said those additional funds the school is receiving are earmarked. She said she is asking Council to consider their request and give the school district what they deserve.

Queenie Boyd said the school has not asked for anything in the past several years and asked that the Council consider the request.

Mrs. Celestine Boone asked that the Council consider the school request.

## **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

### **A. COUNCIL WILL ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION ON AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTER REGARDING PROJECT GRAPEFRUIT**

The Council entered Executive Session at 6:51 p.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.

Council came out of Executive Session at 7:04 p.m. on a motion made by Councilman Boyd, seconded by Vice-Chairman Eckley.

## **ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m. on a motion made by Councilman Fountain, seconded by Councilperson Caughman.

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**CHAIRMAN**

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**VICE-CHAIRMAN**

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**CLERK TO COUNCIL**

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**MINUTES APPROVED**

