

**LEE COUNTY COUNCIL
PUBLIC HEARING
JANUARY 11, 2022
FAMILY 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; Paul Fata, Danny Simon, Randy and Shirley Dixon, Marc Wood, Thompson Issac, Gee Whetsel, Kareem Wilson, Creighton Segars, Lisa Baker, Wayne Capell.

FOIA

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

PUBLIC HEARING

A. OPEN PUBLIC HEARING

A. SALE OF COUNTY PROPERTY IN JAMES INDUSTRIAL PARK TO MARTECH RESEARCH

The public hearing was opened at 9:31 a.m. on a motion made by Vice-Chairman Eckley, seconded by Councilman Boyd.

Mr. Watkins said that Martech Research is a company that makes food additives and cleaning products and sells to other companies. He said they are interested in purchasing the small building that is located behind their large building. It is a two acre parcel with Tax Map No. 038-00-00-088-000 with a 5,000 square foot building. He said the County has had this building for 15-20 years and has used it for storage. He said the County agreed to a selling price of \$95,000.

Mr. Watkins said that Martech plans to use the building for storage of raw materials needed in their operation so their productivity is not interrupted.

There were no questions from the audience.

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The public hearing was closed at 9:35 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.

**LEE COUNTY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 11, 2022
FAMILY COURT ROOM – SECOND FLOOR OF THE COURTHOUSE**

OPEN MEETING, INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

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

REQUEST FOR MOTION ON ADOPTION OF RECOMMENDED AGENDA

Mr. Watkins said that Item 4A should be added to agenda to include Council authorization for the Administrator to accept a grant from Department of Commerce.

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 OF DECEMBER 14, 2021

Councilman Beasley made the motion to approve the minutes from regular meeting of December 14, 2021. Councilman Fountain seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

HANCOCK, SHEHEEN & GODWIN WILL PRESENT THE FY 21 AUDIT FOR LEE COUNTY

Mr. Marc Wood presented the County Audit FY 21 and said that Lee County has done a good job in managing its finances and received the highest opinion given in governmental accounting practices for this audit.

He reviewed the highlights of the audit and said that the County has a fund balance of \$12,782,236. Mr. Wood said the County had operating revenue of \$16,540,261 and had operating expenditures of \$15,378,699 for this past fiscal year.

He thanked the County staff for their help in putting the audit together.

Mr. Watkins referred to Unrestricted Funds of \$8,227,909 and said that a large portion of these funds can only be used for specific purposes. He said that the county should have 3-6 months of yearly operational funds on hand as an emergency fund.

Mr. Watkins also said that the County has seen an increase in taxes collected which in an increase in revenue but no additional taxes were levied. He said the reason for this is that additional money has been available to people that have received federal assistance during the pandemic. Therefore, the county has seen a decline in delinquent tax assessments.

Chairman Windham said that the County has got to be prepared. He said the County has a team that works together.

Councilman Beasley asked if the auditors found anything in the departments that need to be corrected. Marc Wood said that they did not find any issues with internal controls.

ACCEPTANCE OF GRANT AWARD FROM DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND AUTHORIZE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR TO SIGN ON BEHALF OF COUNTY

Mr. Watkins said that the County will be working with the City on this grant, which will actually be a pass through grant. It will be used for wastewater improvements and water capacity to the Industrial park. He said the County applied through Department of Commerce for this grant and it will be used to make some upgrades and add some larger lines and upgrade the pump station. He said this will add several hundred thousand of gallon capacity each day to the park.

Mr. Watkins said the grant is for \$2,050,000, and the total project is for \$2.5 million. He said the City is responsible for the remaining \$450,000.

Vice-Chairman Eckley made the motion to approve the acceptance of this grant and authorize the County Administrator to sign on behalf of county. Councilman Boyd seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

REQUEST FOR MOTION ON ADOPTION OF FIRST READING APPROVAL OF ORDINANCE

A. 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 AND TO MODIFY A JOINT COUNTY INDUSTRIAL AND BUSINESS PARK OF LEE AND SUMTER COUNTIES SO AS TO ENLARGE THE PARK

Mr. Watkins said this was another solar farm with a two mega watt capacity. He said the public hearing will be next month with second reading. He said this was similar to the fee package for our other solar projects. He said that normal acreage is 30-75 for these type of farms.

Councilperson Caughman made the motion to approve for first reading. Councilman Boyd seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

REQUEST FOR MOTION ON ADOPTION OF SECOND READING APPROVAL OF ORDINANCE

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

Chairman Windham said the public hearing on this matter was just done.

Councilman Boyd made the motion to approve the Memorandum of Agreement between Lee County and Martech Research for the sale of building and property in James Industrial Park. Vice-Chairman Eckley seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

B. REDISTRICTING OF THE COUNCIL DISTRICT LINES

Chairman Windham said Council has a public hearing scheduled on January 25.

Mr. Watkins said there has been general discussion on the redistricting of the council district lines and said he was planning to have a committee meeting late next week. He said that he hoped to have a final map at the public hearing on January 25. He said that third reading would be February meeting.

REQUEST FOR MOTION ON ADOPTION OF THIRD READING APPROVAL OF ORDINANCE

A. AMEND SCHOOL DISTRICT FY 22 BUDGET

Mr. Watkins said there was a mistake made when we looked at current millage number of 145.3, but it should have been 143.3. He said the error did not result in any decrease than the year before.

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

B. APPROVAL OF AUTOMATIC AID AGREEMENT FOR STRUCTURE FIRE PROTECTION

Mr. Watkins said that a fire station was recently added in the Lucknow community. He said if you live outside five miles of this station, your insurance would be higher. He said the insurance company will not give you lower insurance rate unless you have this automatic fire aid agreement. He said this was only for structure fires. Mr. Watkins said this an agreement between Lee County and Kershaw counties.

Councilman Boyd made the motion to approve the automatic aid agreement for structure fire protection between Lee and Kershaw counties. Councilman Beasley seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

RESOLUTION IDENTIFYING “PROJECT WAVE” AS A PROPOSED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT TO BE LOCATED IN THE COUNTY

Mr. Watkins said this is the same project that was addressed in the FILO between Lee and Sumter Counties earlier in the meeting. He said that in summarization, this would be an investment of up to \$2.8 million in solar facility of two mega watts.

Councilman Beasley made the motion to approve the Resolution identifying Project Wave as a proposed economic development project. Vice-Chairman Eckley seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

IMPLEMENTATION OF REVISED COVID EMERGENCY ORDINANCE

Mr. Watkins said there has been a recent surge in COVID cases. He said that in January, 2021, there were 230 active cases. He said there were 433 active cases as of January 10, 2022. He said this Emergency Ordinance does not put in any mandates but gives the Administrator and Chairman the authority to adjust operations and give some flexibility. He said that around eight employees have recently tested positive. He said this Ordinance would remain in effect for 60 days.

Councilman Fountain made the motion to approve the implementation of the revised COVID Emergency Ordinance. Councilperson Caughman seconded the motion. Chairman Windham called for the vote, and motion carried. All voted in favor.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE

Councilperson Josey said that there was a demonstration at Sumter High Schools in which Santee Lynches acquired a grant to install lights on school buses to kill viruses such as COVID. All Lee County buses now have this new technology.

She also encouraged everyone to continue social distancing, wearing masks and be vaccinated.

B. PLANNING, TAXES & PERSONNEL

Councilman Beasley said that his committee had been appointed to work on redistricting of the lines. He said that the committee was letting each council member work on their individual county lines. He said that after each council member works on their lines, the committee will meet again to come up with a final map.

C. BUILDINGS, LAND & PROPERTY

Vice-Chairman Eckley said that the County had been working on the getting the grant for the improvements to the industrial park for a couple of years. He said that Lee County has received several inquiries on the spec building and has also received inquiries on the site ready pads.

D. PUBLIC SAFETY

Councilperson Caughman had no meetings.

Sheriff Simon was present and gave a report. He said that the Sheriff's Department was awarded a grant through the government for resource officers. He said this grant would allow resource officers to be placed at Dennis Elementary and Lee Central Vocational School. He said the grant was for \$81,000 that would cover the months of January – June and then you would reapply for the grant. He also plans to apply for another grant in June for a resource officer to be placed at the Charter School and, if received, all schools in Lee County will have a resource officer.

Sheriff Simon said that he is still trying to hire officers and is still having difficulty finding qualified people.

Councilperson Caughman said that she was sorry about Red McDuffie's passing and said he was a fine gentleman and will be missed.

E. RECREATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Councilman Boyd said that Red McDuffie was a large part of recreation in Lee County and wanted to acknowledge him and said he will be missed.

F. WAYS AND MEANS

No meetings

G. ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Mr. Watkins said that work was continuing on maps for redistricting and hopes to have a final map in the next couple of weeks.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Randy Dixon said that Red McDuffie was going to be missed.

Mr. Dixon presented a number of questions to Council. See the attached questions and answers to Mr. Dixon.

Thompson Issac asked about the solar farm fees and asked if the FILO is more in taxes than agriculture. Mr. Watkins said that the fees are negotiated.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 10:29 a.m. on a motion made by Vice-Chairman Eckley, seconded by Councilman Boyd.

CHAIRMAN

VICE-CHAIRMAN

CLERK TO COUNCIL

MINUTES APPROVED

Public Comment Questions from January 11, 2022 Council Meeting:

Randy Dixon

Mr. Dixon referenced the question from the last meeting that had to do with the school, city and the county meeting together. He then asked why Lee County can't get some businesses that other counties get. He then said that we need to get the school up to par and we have problems with security.

The question from Mr. Dixon regarding the County working with the School Board and the City of Bishopville was addressed from comments at a previous County Council Meeting.

The County Council approves the millage rate for the operational portion of the Lee County School District's Budget. County Council does not have the authority to direct the School Board as to how to utilize this, or any other funding which makes up their yearly budget.

Mr. Dixon said that he rides by the Sheriff's Dept and sees vehicles in the parking lot and wanted to know is it because we do not have enough people working. He said that he doesn't feel safe.

The Sheriff attended this particular Council Meeting and addressed the current staffing issues faced by his Office, as well as Law Enforcement agencies throughout SC and the nation, just prior to Mr. Dixon raising this question during Public Comment. There is a shortage of officers in Lee and surrounding counties; and the Sheriff commented that it is not necessarily an issue of pay that is the major problem with the shortage of personnel. County Council has worked with the Sheriff to increase the starting pay of deputies from \$28,000 per year to approximately \$36,000 per year over the past 6 years. This starting salary is in line with the pay for deputies in counties near Lee and similar in size to Lee County throughout SC.

Mr. Dixon asked if we have upgraded security on Highway 15 where McDonalds and Waffle House, etc. is located. He said that maybe the County could install security cameras. He said that the County has restricted money that they're not using and it's not doing any good not being used. He said it could be going towards personnel.

The County Administrator, Lee County Sheriff, Bishopville City Administrator and Bishopville Chief of Police recently met with companies to review possible costs associated with installing cameras near the Interstate Interchanges and main intersections in Bishopville and Lynchburg. These cameras could be remotely monitored by law enforcement to locate suspects involved in criminal activity.

The County Administrator discussed the fund balance of the County during the Audit Report presented at this same Council Meeting. The County needs to maintain a fund balance of 3-6

months of the yearly operational budget; approximately \$3.5-\$7 million in reserves is considered a healthy fund balance. While the county audit reflects a fund balance which meets this requirement, it is important to note, not all of the funds reflected as unrestricted in the fund balance can be used for salaries. Some of these funds include revenues such as road funding- which can only be used for road repairs, hospitality taxes- which can only be used for specific purposes related to tourism, 911 Funding- which can only be used for emergency communications; etc. Funding which is unrestricted does not mean it can be used for any purpose, the use must be in line with the type of funding.

Mr. Dixon asked if the County has an ordinance in place that orders property owners to clean up their lots so that trash, etc. will not be blowing into other people's yards.

The County does not have the authority to require property owners to maintain their property. Municipalities such as the City of Bishopville do have such authority under state law and have hired a Code Enforcement Officer and put a contract in place with a part-time magistrate to enforce property codes within the city limits of Bishopville. If a city resident has a complaint about a specific property owner, that individual should contact City Hall.

Mr. Dixon asked if there was a directory so if he wanted to call the courthouse on a specific matter, he would know who to call and the number.

A copy of the phone extensions for all county offices and departments is available and can be provided upon request. This information is also available at the county's website; leecountysc.org