

EDGEFIELD COUNTY COUNCIL

September 5, 2023

6:00 PM

County Council Chambers

The Edgefield County Council held its regular meeting at 6:00 P.M. Tuesday, September 5, 2023, in the County Council Chambers, 225 Jeter Street, Edgefield, SC. Notice of this meeting was provided to The Edgefield Advertiser and others as requested.

Members Present

Dean Campbell, Chairman
Albert Talbert, Vice Chairman
Tiffani Ireland, Councilwoman
Dr. Jackie Kennion, Councilwoman
Jerry Moody, Councilman

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Others Present

David Caddell, Administrator
Taz Potts, County Finance Director
Aretha Eubanks, Clerk to Council
Hart Doc Clark, Building and Planning Director
Andrew Marine, County Attorney

Chairman Campbell called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. The invocation was given by Minister Aretha Eubanks, Chalk Hill Baptist Church.

Approval of Agenda

Chairman Campbell asked that we move the first item of New Business, which is a resolution, to after the minutes. There were no other changes. Councilman Talbert made the motion, and Councilwoman Ireland seconded to approve the agenda as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Campbell asked for approval of the August 8, 2023, Regular Meeting minutes. Councilwoman Kennion made the motion, and Councilman Moody seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Resolution

Chairman Campbell read resolution 21-23-1168, honoring Dr. Myrtis Brightharp-Walker for her long and distinguished career in education. After reading the resolution, Chairman Campbell asked the Council for a motion to approve this resolution. Councilwoman Kennion made the motion, and Councilwoman Ireland seconded. Motion passed unanimously. Council presented the resolution to Dr. Myrtis Brightharp-Walker and a picture was taken.

Comments from the Public

There being no comments from the public during this comment period, Chairman Campbell closed this public comment period.

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Reports

Chairman Campbell asked the Council if they had any questions or comments on the reports. There were none.

Public Hearing

Chairman Campbell opened the Public Hearing on Ordinance 21-23-799, to modify sections III, IV, XIV, XV, and XVIII of the Fire Services Contact. No one spoke from the public. Chairman Campbell closed the Public Hearing.

Old Business

1. Consideration of approval of the second reading of Ordinance 21-23-799, to modify sections III, XIV, XV, and XVIII of the Fire Services Contact.

Chairman Campbell: I will ask Administrator Caddell if there is anything new, we need to consider tonight.

Administrator Caddell: There is no new information.

Chairman Campbell asked the Council if they had any questions or comments. Hearing none, Councilman Moody made the motion and Councilman Talbert seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

New Business

1. Consideration of approval of Resolution 21-23-1168, recognizing Dr. Myrtis Brightharp-Walker, was moved to earlier on the agenda.

2. Consideration of approval of the Tax Millage Rate for FY 2023-2024.

Chairman Campbell: County Auditor Bill Gilchrist is here tonight to walk us through this.

Auditor Gilchrist: Obviously, this year looks like the value of the mill at this point from last year is just a little up over seven percent. This is probably the biggest gain in many years. I think that is probably going to continue. Most of that is real property. Vehicle utilities are starting to make big strides, which comes with the residential growth. Hopefully, there is going to be more commercial growth on the horizon because that is what we need. We are just over seven percent going in, so hopefully, when we get to June 30, 2024, it will be more than seven percent. The new value is \$100,750. We had a couple of new investments this year with manufacturers that were finalized last year that were not Fee In Lieu Of. This may sound like crazy talk to you with the agreements that the Council has dealt with for the last several years. The reason for that was a state law passed three years ago entitles current manufacturers to break as their values come in every year that shifts into a reimbursement column that comes back to the county. This puts the state on a level playing field with the current manufacturing base in this county and the whole state. That is huge because it kind of gets manufacturers looking at just doing a regular manufacturing return instead of a Fee In Lieu Of agreement. That added to the tax base or it is going to add to the tax base this year too. There was no new fee that came on this year. The Fee In Lieu Of that I am talking about now obviously, we had a little increase in the investment with

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Aiken Co-Op, and the fiber optic lines serving all the unserved areas with internet, which is huge for the county will continue. Just a little bit about Fee In Lieu Of. This year it will bring about \$300,000 into the County's budget and around \$900,000 to the rest of the tax base. A few citizens think that these manufacturing companies are going to leave after all their tax incentives are gone. After speaking with a few people who have concerns about companies leaving after their incentives are gone, I compiled a number that basically this year, the whole tax base will be receiving about \$1.2 million plus dollars in the Fee In Lieu Of payments. That includes the county, schools, and towns where it applies. If these agreements are not in place, then, obviously it would be about \$2 million to the whole tax base. If that was not in place, you don't get them. A lot of people do not realize that the first full year on tap as a Fee In Lieu Of agreement you finished last, your investment does not come on the tax rolls until this year. Then you get into the infrastructure credits. Then, the biggest thing is the jobs. I think all manufacturers right now are doing well and moving right along. The Road User Fee started back this past January after being gone for 12 months. At this point, the collections are about \$550,000, we get to around December 31st, it will probably be around \$800,00. This is due to residential growth comes vehicle growth which gets into the fees. The millage rate on which the Council will be voting tonight has no change on the total at 108.49. The County's debt service millage has been 4.36. With the payments that are due this year and what they have in escrow or in reserve bond account. The Council is going to decide if it is best to come down on the millage rate to pump a little into a couple of entities that need the help based on what I have been talking to Administrator Caddell about. Going into the tonight, the millage is 4.36. The debt service will drop to 2.06. Emergency Management Services will pick up basically 1.3 mills of that and the fire districts will pick up 1.0 mill. There is no change in the total County millage rate. All you are doing is shifting what you are going to be voting on.

Chairman Campbell: I would think in South Carolina, other counties would be envious of this increase.

Auditor Gilchrist: Yes, I would think so, but I look at things in a little different way. In the last 25 or 30 years, South Aiken and North Aiken have grown. But, in the last 15 years, behind USC and all the way down to Graniteville, up to Highway 25 towards Ascauga Lake Road, North Augusta all the way over into Columbia County. Who is left in this area? Edgefield County. Now it is hitting unbelievably. What is going on right now, you would obviously like to see more growth in the commercial area. I think that may be coming especially on Highway 25 where the zoning is in place in Edgefield County to support that. Hopefully, some businesses can get over the hurdles because the homes are definitely coming. I think growth is everywhere in the state and what is so different to me about this is that the state right now with the way it is growing and then you have inflation which is kind of weird. What is going on is people leave other areas of the country for different reasons. With this growth away from the tax bills, the state money that comes in flows right into the county and town's budget. That money is growing. In the last couple of years, you can see steady growth, and inflations have a lot to do with that as well as growth. With inflation, everyone is struggling with that, but in some areas, it just does not seem to be getting in the way. This is my opinion. Yes, some counties are very envious of us right now.

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Councilman Talbert: I definitely appreciate the work you and your staff have done. You have done an outstanding job.

Auditor Gilchrist: Thank you for that. We appreciate the Council. I know the girls in the office talked about what the Council did a couple of months ago in feeding the employees and the end of last year. A couple of years ago, it was better when you all handed out the envelopes.

Chairman Campbell: I will ask Administrator Caddell if there is anything else we need to hear about this before we take a vote.

Administrator Caddell: I think Auditor Gilchrist explained the debt service change very well, but I do want to reemphasize that we have very little debt remaining so we are recommending to reduce the debt service millage from 4.36 to 2.06 and reallocate the 2.3 to increase the fire millage by 1 mill and the EMS millage by 1.3. No tax increase, just a reallocation.

Chairman Campbell: Taxpayers will not see a tax increase because there is none. We are just sort of moving millage around. Is that correct?

Administrator Caddell: That is correct.

Chairman Campbell: Do we have anything else from the Council? Hearing none. Is there a motion to approve the millage rates as we have discussed? Councilwoman Ireland made the motion and Councilman Talbert seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Consideration of Approval to allocate \$11,666 to the Town of Edgefield from American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds under our Town Grant program approved by Council in 2021.

Chairman Campbell: I will ask Administrator Caddell if he would like to explain.

Administrator Caddell: Last year Council approved utilizing \$500,000 of our American Rescue Plan funds for grants to the towns which would come to about \$166,666 each. The Town of Edgefield has previously requested \$155,000 and has now requested the remaining \$11,666 for its business façade improvement program. Staff recommends approval.

Chairman Campbell: Questions or comments from the Council.

Councilwoman Ireland: I will ask Mayor Durham since he is in attendance. How many businesses have taken advantage of this so far?

Mayor Durham: It has helped those who filled out the application paperwork correctly and met the requirements. He was unsure of the exact number.

Councilwoman Ireland: So, this will just go to helping more be able to apply?

Mayor Durham: Yes, if they meet the requirements. You can already see the results in the building in the square.

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Councilwoman Ireland: But everybody who needed it has gotten some? You would say it has been equal and feel like everybody had a chance?

Mayor Durham: Yes, for those who met the requirements. Three more applicants were recently approved.

Chairman Campbell: Any other questions or comments from the Council? Hearing none, Councilwoman Kennion made the motion and Councilman Moody seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

4. Consideration of Approval to allocate \$16,666 to the Town of Johnston from American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds under our Town Grant program approved by Council in 2021.

Chairman Campbell: I will ask Administrator Caddell if would he like to give us an explanation of this one.

Administrator Caddell: As with the previous item, The Town of Johnston is requesting \$16,666 for their warehouse conversion project as they have already received \$150,000. Staff recommends approval.

Chairman Campbell: It looks to me like what we are saying is even though the Town of Edgefield and the Town of Johnston have two different numbers because the Town of Edgefield got more money earlier and this just makes it all even at the end.

Administrator Caddell: Correct.

Chairman Campbell: Questions or comments from the Council.

Councilwoman Ireland: Is this for their library?

Chairman Campbell: Correct.

Councilwoman Ireland: They are going to do something else within?

Chairman Campbell: Yes, they are.

Chairman Campbell: Hearing no more questions or comments from the Council. Councilwoman Ireland made the motion and Chairman Campbell seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

5. Consideration of Approval to utilize the federal General Services Administration (GSA) per diem standard rate for meals and mileage for travel expenses.

Chairman Campbell: I will ask Administrator Caddell to walk us through some of these details.

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Administrator Caddell: Edgefield County has not adjusted their per diem travel rates for meals in a very long time. As staff were recognizing the need to update these rates, we discovered that the Federal General Services Administration develops rates for each state, updated every October. These rates seem reasonable and over half the counties surveyed use these rates. Staff recommends that Council approve indexing to the Federal rate which is currently \$59 per day.

Chairman Campbell: Questions or comments from the Council. Hearing none, Councilman Talbert made the motion and Councilman Moody seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

6. Consideration of Approval to permit the County Administrator or the County Attorney to negotiate a contract to purchase two parcels (174-00-00-088-000 & 174-00-00-077-000) totaling 15.59 acres for the preset rate of \$15,000 based on the Industrial Park Development agreement amended in 2019.

Chairman Campbell: I will Administrator Caddell to help us with some details.

Administrator Caddell: The Council approved funding during budget approval from ARP funds to purchase this property. The sale price is set by the industrial park agreement. The new owner is objecting to the sale and the agreement, but the County will take action to ensure that the agreement and pricing are honored if this item is approved by the Council. By this vote, we are asking the Council to authorize the Administrator and County Attorney to negotiate and/or pursue legal means to ensure the purchase may proceed.

Chairman Campbell: I will say that if you heard what Administrator Caddell said this is a legally binding agreement that the landowner has decided not to honor. I am deeply disappointed in the landowner. We have had this agreement in place for almost 25 years. Are there any questions or comments from the Council? Hearing none, Councilman Talbert made the motion and Councilwoman Ireland seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Comments from the Public

John Hudson: He spoke about his concerns for the land in this county, how it should be led, and the direction of which development.

Report By County Council Members

Councilwoman Ireland: I will make a report on behalf of me and Dr. Kennion. We are the liaisons with the broadband and we wanted to bring you an update. I had the opportunity to speak to Mr. Gary Stooksbury, CEO of Aiken Cooperative with good news. They will be done with all the underserved and no-service customers to be served by the end of December. They had initially projected to be complete in 2024. But they are ahead of schedule and we are excited. Kudos to them for doing a great job. They had doubled their workforce and cut it back to more of a normal point now. Currently, they are working on two substations. One is at the west county line where they are splicing now which is the last thing to happen before going live. They are expecting this area to open for marketing by October. People in that area should start hearing

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something via email or according to how you asked to be contacted in October. The other location is at County line. All of the fiber has been hung and all of the underground work is complete. They are just waiting on splicers to move into that area. Once they are moved in, they will complete the splicing and then that area will be open for market a month or so afterward. Mr. Stooksbury also said that Aiken Cooperative has applied for grants to see how they can help, if possible, service other areas in the county. He does not have any word yet on the grants they have applied for. Maybe we will hear something toward the end of the year. Another item I would like to talk about is recreation which is one of our top priorities. I want you all to know that again, Mr. Hudson donated tens of thousands of dollars' worth of material to get the soccer field looking great. This season may be our biggest season ever. We have 149 children playing soccer this season. We are so excited to service those children. I think this is a testament to the growth that Auditor Gilchrist spoke about was coming of which we see in our recreation department. We are going to have to address this so just to put you on notice. These are good growing pains for the county.

Councilwoman Kennion: Bettis Academy recreational football has 102 football players who are full of energy and ready to let it go. Then we have 80 cheerleaders. We have never had over 30 to 40 cheerleaders, but now we have 80. On October 16, 2023, they will be at Strom Thurmond ready to run the field. That is the game night that Strom Thurmond will play Saluda High School. We are asking everyone to come out and support our youth. The youth are not going to cheer or play football, but they will be recognized. This is something that used to happen in the past that we are bringing back into place for our youth. A couple of parents from Governors Landing who just moved into the area asked about the recreation department and had a fifth and second grader who wanted to get involved in sports. We are looking forward to them participating next year in recreational soccer and football. As we all see, and Auditor Gilchrist stated, growth is coming down Highway 25, District Four. Especially with the industry like Bondex who just added on to their facility. But District Four is really growing. I would like to announce that I will have my first Community Awareness Meeting this coming Saturday at Old Macedonia Baptist Church. The date is September 9, 2023, 11:00 A.M. until 12:30 P.M. On the program to speak are Sheriff Jody Rowland, Tucker Miller from Aiken Cooperative, and his guest speaker, Marshal Myers, who will discuss WIFI with the citizens. The majority of District Four is serviced by Dominion Energy for electricity and they want to know how they can get connected to Carolina Connect. We have so many students who are not going to college physically but attending college online. Also attending the meeting as my very own backup plan, Administrator Caddell, who will be able to answer questions that I might not be able to answer. I invite everyone to attend, but I am targeting District Four.

Councilwoman Ireland: One more thing about recreation. I just wanted to point out that softball started a fall league for this season. This is the first time and they are matching the numbers of what they typically see in the spring. Someone asked me where are all of these kids coming from. I do not know if it is growth or kids that have always been here. But we are having an influx of children into our programs. Thank you all for your commitment to the recreation department. We are excited about where we are going.

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County Administrator's Report

1. I am happy to report that we have a new Veterans Affairs Director, Dewayne Tager, who started last Monday. This is such an important position and we encourage veterans to touch base with Dewayne as needed for benefits assistance.
2. The Animal Care and Control Facility is going strong. Most of the kennels are being utilized. I can tell you that the staff is excellent and they are providing great care.
3. The Law Enforcement Center is about 35% complete and on schedule. The Sheriff is going through the process with two different groups to identify required staffing for the new detention center and exploring ways to help fund it.
4. The Boy Scout Hut has a new roof, most of the concrete floor has been replaced, and the project is about 50% complete. We are requesting sealed bids for the shelter.
5. We have begun obtaining bids for the renovations to Bettis Park. Our Roads and Bridges Department demolished the old bleachers and fencing on the baseball field in preparation for reconstruction. A new scoreboard has been ordered for the football field. We are soliciting bids for chain link fencing and baseball infield reconstruction. We have identified playground equipment under state contract to order.

Comments by County Council Chairman

Sometimes, County Council has a fairly quick meeting since the agenda doesn't go on for pages. And I know everyone is thankful for that.

However, I want to point out that many of the items we addressed tonight really speak to the future of Edgefield County. From economic development to recreation to the fire contract to helping our towns are the kinds of actions our citizens ask us to pursue with vigor.

I also want to point out that others have as well that many of the items we cover can also be traced by to our Strategic Plan that we finalized earlier this year.

My message is that we continue to be on the right path for the future of Edgefield County. I appreciate all the people who are working to make that happen.

Adjourn

Chairman Campbell: Council, that's all I have. Since we have no other business to conduct, I'd entertain a motion to adjourn. Councilwoman Ireland made the motion and Councilwoman Kennion seconded. Motion passed unanimously. The County Council meeting adjourned at 6:48 P.M.

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Dean Campbell, Council Chairman

ATTEST



Aretha Eubanks, Clerk to Council