

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, agendas for the following meeting were mailed to all members of Council, County Attorney Richard Ness, Lower Savannah COG, *The Bamberg Leader*, *The Times and Democrat*, SouthernCarolina Regional Alliance, Bamberg County Library, Bamberg County Website, Bamberg County Courthouse Annex and a copy posted on the bulletin board in the main hallway of the County Courthouse.

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In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bamberg County Council met 6:00 p.m., December 6, 2021 in Council Chambers with limited seating for the public alongside livestreaming of the meeting provided for public view. **Present:** Chairman Larry Haynes, Councilwoman Sharon Hammond, Councilmen Evert Comer, Jr., Spencer Donaldson, Phil Myers, Jr., Clint Carter and Dr. Jonathan Goodman, II. **Others Present:** Joey R. Preston, T.M. Thomas, Richard Ness, Alice Johnson, Gina Smith, Chip Maier, Garrett Dragano, Donald Kirby, Sh'Kur Francis, Norris Williams, Kay Clary, Patricia Harley, Miriam Beard, Booker Patrick and Joey Opperman.

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Bamberg County Council meeting was called to order by Chairman Larry Haynes at 6:00 p.m. Invocation was rendered by Councilwoman Sharon Hammond, followed with the pledge of allegiance led by Councilman Spencer Donaldson.

On motion by Councilman Carter, seconded by Dr. Goodman, council approved the minutes from the November 1, 2021 meeting and the November 18, 2021 special called meeting, with necessary corrections should there be any.

On motion by Dr. Goodman, seconded by Councilman Comer, the agenda was approved as submitted.

Public hearing was given to a proposed ordinance to adopt a redistricting plan for Bamberg County, South Carolina, following and based on the 2020 Census; and other matters related thereto. All were informed that the redistricting plan had been previously posted on the Bamberg County's Website and Facebook for public view. Chairman Haynes extended an invitation to the public for comments concerning the redistricting plan. No public comments were made.

### **COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS:**

#### **SouthernCarolina Alliance - Monthly Report**

SouthernCarolina Alliance Project Manager Garrett Dragano reported 2021, SCA have 124 active projects with 18 announcements, totaling \$121 million in capital investment, alongside the creation of 615 jobs. Mr. Dragano went on to say that South Carolina Oak to Barrel LLC has had a minor setback, but they are expecting to be operational in January 2022. Some of the equipment in the building will have to have some repairs and some with need to be replaced. Also, SCA was awarded a grant to fund a Palmetto Pride litter coordinator. More information will be posted on SCA's website pertaining to the litter coordinator. Council thanked Mr. Dragano for his appearance and enlightening them on business activities involving Bamberg County.

#### **Bamberg County Treasurer - Monthly Report**

Bamberg County Treasurer Alice Johnson reported for the month of October. The county had \$1,036,066.77 in income and the expenditures were \$1,067,016.72 leaving a negative balance of \$30,949.95. After adding the negative bank balance at the end of September (\$146,702.82) was added, the county's regular account stood at a negative \$177,652.77. Councilman Carter inquired what individuals can do who are challenging their property tax bills. Treasurer Johnson advised that individuals should contact the auditor, assessor or treasurer's office. This report was received as information.

**Bamberg County Finance - Monthly Report**

Finance Director T.M. Thomas reported the general fund had year-to-date revenues of \$1,297,260, at the end of October. Expenditures stood at \$2,532,385, for a negative general fund balance of \$1,235,125. Mr. Thomas said all departments are continuing to operate within their budgets. This report was received as information.

**Bamberg County Controller - Monthly Report**

Controller Gina Smith expounded on Treasurer Alice Johnson's report saying her report was only the cash balance for one of the many county's bank accounts. Again, this is not unusual to have negative balances in the regular account for the first six months of the year. The county has other bank accounts with money in them and Bamberg County is not short on cash because of the other bank accounts have money in them. At the end of October, the property tax rollback account had a total of \$67,070 in it. Controller Smith elaborated a little more on checks being written against the regular bank account for the county and sometimes checks being held. Based on cash flow and availability of funds, we mail the ones that we need to, and we hold the others until funds are accessible. If the funds are not available at the time the check(s) are written, we wait until funds are in the bank, otherwise checks will bounce and that will not be allowed to happen. The books may be showing a negative balance, in actuality it is not a negative balance at any of the banks that we use. This scenario was used to better help everyone understand the dynamics of how financial government functions.

**Bamberg County Administrator – Monthly Report**

Administrator Preston reported on the COVID-19 figures for the county. Bamberg County has reported that 58.3 percent of Bamberg County residents have had at least one COVID-19 vaccination, and 52 percent have had their second vaccine. Seventy-eight percent of the Bamberg County employees have been vaccinated. Administrator Preston shared a report received from Bamberg County DSS Director Mellinda Tyler, regarding that department. Mr. Preston commented that this was the first time during his employment with Bamberg County that a report had been received from DSS. Ms. Tyler was complimented for the fine job being performed. A progress report was given on the broadband expansion service for the county. Phase 1 of the work being done by Palmetto Rural Telephone Co-Op includes Hadwin Road (103 homes), Orange Grove Road (151 homes), and the Clear Pond Community (187 homes). Hadwin Road site is scheduled to be complete in February 2022, Clear Pond Community to be complete March 2022 and Orange Grove Road to be complete April 2022. Phase 2 comprises of the Lodge community (80 homes) – work to be complete June 2022, and Pocketville Road (106 homes) – work is scheduled to be complete July 2022. Ashton Road (106 homes) and Rivers Bridge Road (66 homes) is scheduled for completion July 2022. Work in Ehrhardt is scheduled to be complete mid-October 2022 (379 homes). Administrator Preston said that he would continue moving forward with working with the state to try to get broadband throughout Bamberg County. Mr. Preston's report was received as information.

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On motion by Councilman Comer, seconded by Councilwoman Hammond, council gave third reading to a proposed ordinance to adopt a redistricting plan for Bamberg County, South Carolina, following and based on the 2020 Census; and other matters related thereto. Administrator Preston said, at this point the ordinance will be sent to the state. The county has re-drawn council districts to reflect changes in population, as indicated in the last U.S. Census. The county's population dropped from 15,987 in 2010 to 13,311 in 2020. Those councilmembers voting in favor of the ordinance: Councilwoman Hammond, Councilmen Haynes, Myers, Donaldson, Goodman, Comer and Carter. Attorney Joey Opperman was present to explain and/or answer questions and help clarify that the county's redistricting plan no longer has to go through the U.S. Justice Department for preclearance, which once had been a requirement under the federal Voting Rights Act. Mr. Opperman continued by saying according to the law, they have been very careful to ensure that the map that's been presented to council and adopted is compliant with Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

December 6, 2021.....continued

On motion by Councilman Comer, seconded by Councilwoman Hammond, council approved a resolution of Bamberg County, South Carolina with regard to U.S. Route 601 and the disgraceful, unsightly and unsafe condition of certain real property along U.S. Route 601; to inform the Legislative Delegation of Bamberg County, the Governor of South Carolina, the state General Assembly, and appropriate South Carolina agencies as to the current and continuing state of the real property; to recognize the negative impact of the current and continuing state of the real property upon Bamberg County and the region; to request that the State of South Carolina enforce the Junkyard Control Act and applicable environmental laws; to authorize the Bamberg County Administrator to take all necessary actions to inform and assist the State of South Carolina and other local governments and to take all necessary actions to address, correct, and resolve the issues with the real property and to beautify the U.S. Route 601 Corridor; and other matters related thereto. Resolution #J-21-20. Those councilmembers voting in favor of the ordinance: Councilwoman Hammond, Councilmen Haynes, Myers, Donaldson, Goodman, Comer and Carter. Administrator Preston noted that the City of Bamberg passed its own resolution on November 8, 2021, requesting that the property be brought into compliance with the Junkyard Control Act. A letter from county resident Mr. Phil Tomlinson was received and shared with the council, stating his discontentment of the non-compliant junkyard.

**Calendar of Events:**

After adding the December 8<sup>th</sup> Legislative Breakfast to the calendar of events, council unanimously approved the calendar as amended.

Chairman Haynes called for public comments. Administrator Preston read an emailed comment from county resident Sue Clayton. 1) Ms. Clayton was concerned about the junkyard property that was an agenda item for the December 6<sup>th</sup> council meeting. A question was raised regarding local zoning ordinances that the county might have regarding the junkyard.

Administrator Preston read an emailed comment from county resident Kenneth Ahlin. 2) Mr. Ahlin was displeased with not being able to give public comment in person rather than having to email them before noon on the day of the meeting. Asked that council consider not restraining the public from verbal communication. 3) County resident Miriam Beard voiced that she wanted to be able to sign in to comment at the meeting. Chairman Haynes noted that we don't use the sign-in sheet for comments since COVID-19. An ordinance was passed, and you've got to email it in. Council asked that Ms. Beard be allowed to make her comments. Ms. Beard was concerned about animal control and that we need an updated pound. She further stated that the county establish flexible tax payments so that people will be able to keep their homes.

During comments from council, the following statements were pointed out: 1) thanks to the staff for their hard work; 2) requested that all stay safe and continue wearing their masks; 3) reminded everyone to get their COVID-19 vaccines; 4) please look into the animal problem; 5) continue to pray; 6) and Merry Christmas to all.

On motion by Councilwoman Hammond, seconded by Councilman Myers, council voted to adjourn at 7:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rose R. Shepherd, Clerk to Council