

MINUTES OF BAMBERG COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING

- February 5, 2024

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, agendas for the following meeting were delivered to all members of Council, County Attorney Richard Ness, Lower Savannah COG, *The Bamberg Leader*, *The Times and Democrat*, Southern Carolina Regional Alliance, Bamberg County Library, Bamberg County Website and Bamberg County Courthouse Annex.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bamberg County Council met 6:00 p.m., February 5, 2024 in Council Chambers with limited seating for the public alongside live streaming of the meeting provided for public view. **Present:** Chairman Evert Comer, Jr., Councilwoman Sharon Hammond, Councilmen Phil Myers, Jr., Clint Carter, Larry Haynes, Dr. Jonathan Goodman, II, and Spencer Donaldson. **Others Present:** Joey R. Preston, Richard Ness, T.M. Thomas, Gina Smith, Alice Johnson, Chip Maier, Alisha Moore, Kenneth Bamberg, Joshua Urwick, Moses Cheatham, Candace Fralix, William Molnar, Will Walls and Sarah Bias.

Bamberg County Council meeting was called to order by Chairman Evert Comer, Jr., at 6:00 p.m. Invocation was rendered by Dr. Goodman, II, followed with the pledge of allegiance led by Councilwoman Sharon Hammond.

On motion by Councilman Haynes, seconded by Councilwoman Hammond, council approved the minutes from the January 8, 2024 regular meeting and the January 22, 2024 special called meeting with necessary corrections should there be any.

Controller/CPA Gina Smith and Audit Manager/CPA Will Walls of Love, Bailey, and Associates presented the Fiscal Year 2023 Bamberg County Audit Report. It was announced that Bamberg County has once again earned an unmodified (clean) audit opinion. This demonstrates good fiscal stewardship and is the most important measure of financial stability. Appropriate procedures issued by the Financial Accounting Standards Board and the Governmental Accounting Standards Board are followed by the financial team. Audit Manager Will Walls praised Controller Smith and the Bamberg County Financial Staff for accomplishing what they do with the limited available means. Mr. Walls expressed that receiving an unmodified opinion, that's the best opinion that can be received. The single significant deficiency dealt with the untimely reconciliation of funds collected in the magistrates' office. He continued by saying that being timely is a huge thing with the bank reconciliations and there's clearly no fraud that they are aware, or did they find during the audit. The county finance staff prepared an annual summary of activity for each of the magistrates' accounts and also reconciled the bank statements at the end of the year. The finance staff will continue to work with the chief magistrate to resolve the issue. Controller Smith said this was talked about last year and it continued this year. Councilwoman Hammond asked if there is any way that the county can mechanize that process because this has been the third or fourth year this has happened. Controller Smith replied that the process of reconciliation is a manual process that must be completed at the end of every month. The audit's financial highlights include the county having a total positive net position of \$18,121,209. The county's total assets came in at \$49,494,889, with liabilities standing at \$32,475,997. The general fund had a fund balance of \$5,966,089. Also, the county's governmental fund balance sheet reported a combined ending fund balance of \$24,158,349. Referencing the 2023 audit Chairman Comer stated, Job well done! A clean audit enables Bamberg County to continue to do business everyday while still growing the County economically.

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Public hearing was given to an ordinance authorizing the execution and delivery of a special source revenue credit agreement by and between Bamberg County, South Carolina and Rockberg, LLC with respect to certain economic development property in the county, whereby such property will receive certain special source revenue credits in respect of investment in infrastructure. No public comments were made.

COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS:

Southern Carolina Regional Development Alliance - Monthly Report

Southern Carolina Regional Development Alliance Project Director Joshua Urwick reported that SC Oak Barrel, LLC was hit by a tornado in January, he is working to find temporary warehouse space for them to store their equipment. In addition, SCA is also working to land an industry at the spec building located in the CrossRhodes Industrial Park and hopefully they will soon have some good news. Council thanked Mr. Urwick for his report.

Bamberg County Budget - Monthly Report

Finance Director T.M. Thomas reported the general fund had year-to-date revenues of \$4,325,123, as of the end of December. Expenditures stood at \$4,627,048, for a negative general fund balance of \$301,925. The county departments are continuing to operate within their budgets. This report was received as information.

Bamberg County Administrator - Monthly Report

Administrator Preston reported to council on: 1) Assistance is still being sought toward assistance from the tornado; 2) The county received 26 pallets of pet supplies and food to assist the elderly in feeding their pets. Ms. Ruthie Rish, Executive Director of MAMAS and Animal Control Officer Virginia Mitchell applied for a grant last year that was successful 3) Received plat for Veterans Cemetery; 4) Reminder of Ethics Filing for council members that are planning to run during this coming election; 5) Gave update to Councilman Donaldson for fire department located in the Holman's Bridge area and an update of Circle Lane; 6) LSCOG Board will meet in Barnwell on Thursday, February 8th at 6 p.m.; 7) Helicopter Pad at the law enforcement complex is in need of a windsock and light; and 8) The county did not meet the state's public assistance threshold of \$9.4 million (regarding EF-2 tornado). The estimated public costs as a result of the tornado totaled \$3.9 million. SCAC President Roy Costner, III wrote a letter to the other 45 counties in the state requesting their assistance for Bamberg County with whatever they could do to assist Bamberg County as a result of the Category EF-2 tornado. Governor McMaster also wrote a letter to U.S. President Joe Biden requesting individual assistance, including Community Disaster Loan programs, following the January 9 tornado. If the request is approved, individuals in the county could apply for grants up to \$40,000 to repair their homes. If individuals had any loss of income, they can also apply for up to \$40,000 if they had to pay for childcare, or whatever problems the storm may have caused them to spend money that they didn't have; 9) A list of state roads that the C-Fund Committee approved for paving was distributed (Farrells Road, located northeast of Ehrhardt down to Hunter's Chapel Road; North Street from the county multi-complex site down to Suzanne Street and McGee Street down to Red Raider Drive). Money was also approved for the sidewalks from Red Raider Drive to McGee Street and then on Zig Zag Road. There will be sidewalks installed on the other side of the street to connect the existing sidewalk. This report was accepted as information.

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On motion by Councilman Carter, seconded by Councilwoman Hammond, council gave third reading to an ordinance authorizing the execution and delivery of a special source revenue credit agreement by and between Bamberg County, South Carolina and Rockberg, LLC with respect to certain economic development property in the county, whereby such property will receive certain special source revenue credits in respect of investment in infrastructure.

On motion by Councilwoman Hammond, seconded by Councilman Donaldson, council approved the calendar of events as submitted.

On motion by Councilman Haynes, seconded by Councilman Donaldson, council approved the following council member standing committee appointments for 2024: **Administrative/Finance** - Chairman Evert Comer, Jr., Spencer Donaldson and Dr. Jonathan Goodman, II; **Personnel/Education, Recreation, Health and Welfare/Intergovernmental Relations** - Chairman Sharon Hammond, Evert Comer, Jr. and Larry Haynes; **Public Service/County Planning** - Chairman Dr. Jonathan Goodman, II, Phil Myers and Evert Comer, Jr.; **Justice and Public Safety** - Chairman Clint Carter, Phil Myers and Spencer Donaldson; **Solid Waste/Recycling** - Chairman Larry Haynes, Clint Carter and Dr. Jonathan Goodman, II.

On motion by Councilman Haynes, seconded by Councilwoman Hammond, council approved the request of SCA President and CEO Danny Black for reappointment of Councilman Evert Comer, Jr., to the Southern Carolina Alliance Board of Directors for a three-year term, to be filled by April 1, 2024.

Ms. Sara Bias of 92 Beaver Street in Denmark addressed council about the condition of her road. She explained that when it rains it is awful getting in and out and if they would have an emergency when the road gets boggy and wet the EMS would have problems reaching the homes. Chairman Comer, Jr. assured Ms. Bias that the situation will be assessed.

Chairman Comer, Jr. called for comments from council. All visitors present were thanked for their attendance, employees were thanked for their hard work, appreciation was given to Administrator Preston and staff and all were wished to have a Happy Valentine's Day.

There being no further business for discussion, on motion by Councilman Haynes, seconded by Councilwoman Hammond, the meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rose R. Shepherd, Clerk to Council