

MINUTES OF BAMBERG COUNTY COUNCIL VIRTUAL MEETING - May 3, 2021

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.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bamberg County Council met 6:00 p.m., May 3, 2021 in several locations within the Bamberg County Courthouse Annex and some participated by way of teleconference. The public joined the meeting by various means of technology. **Present:** Chairman Larry Haynes, Councilwoman Sharon Hammond, Councilmen Evert Comer, Jr., Spencer Donaldson, Phil Myers, Jr., and Dr. Jonathan Goodman, II. **Absent:** Councilman Clint Carter. **Others Present:** Joey R. Preston, T.M. Thomas, Richard Ness, Alice Johnson, Gina Smith, Chip Maier, Mary Tilton, Danny Black, William Molnar, Harold Shepherd, Gary Bailey, Walt Inabinet, Ruthie Brown, Dionne Gleaton, Candace Fralix, Mellinda Tyler, Adrienne Blume and two additional callers.

Bamberg County Council Virtual meeting was called to order by Chairman Larry Haynes at 6:00 p.m. Invocation was rendered by Dr. Jonathan Goodman, II, followed with the pledge of allegiance led by Councilman Phil Myers, Jr.

On motion by Councilman Comer, seconded by Councilman Donaldson, council approved the minutes from the April 5, 2021 meeting.

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

Dr. William Molnar, Executive Director of Lower Savannah Council of Governments, gave a review on the yearly activities and events provided to the citizens of Bamberg County by the COG. There were 51,401 home delivered meals to senior citizens in Bamberg County from January 2020 through December 2020. In addition, the agency provided and delivered 2,692 meals to 83 seniors at other assembled meal sites. With COVID-19 being a factor, social distancing and other safety precautions were practiced while providing meals at the assembled sites. Through the LSCOG Guide share program, \$5.1 million in transportation projects are presently planned for Bamberg County. Namely, the widening of U.S. Highway 78 between Bamberg and Denmark, generating wider shoulders on the passageway for more pedestrian protection. It was further stated by Dr. Molnar that federal earmark funding is being pursued for additional projects. The county passed a comprehensive plan last year and there are other items that are still being worked on, such as the land development regulations and the zoning ordinance. One of the most successful programs provided by the COG is the Summer Jumpstart Program. This program focuses on rising high school seniors with little or no work experience and gives them a job over the summer. Additional federal funding is expected for the Regional Housing Consortium to provide more affordable housing within the region. Dr. Molnar is expecting to receive increased funding with the American Rescue Plan and the council will be informed when further details are received. Council thanked Dr. Molnar his in depth review of activities provided through the Lower Savannah Council of Governments.

During this time, Chairman Haynes opened the floor for public hearing comments on Ordinance #6-21-14, to authorize the leasing of certain Bamberg County airport real property, space improvements, and facilities (Crosswind Aviation, LLC Project); the granting of certain privileges to limited fix-based

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operations; the sale of aviation fuel at bulk rates; the ratification of certain other leases and grants of rights at the airport; and other matters related thereto. There were no comments received from the public.

Committee and Staff Reports;

Bamberg County Treasurer Alice Johnson reported the March financial information, noting that the county had income of \$254,019.74. Expenses came in at \$749,694.47, leaving a negative balance of \$495,674.73. Joined with a positive bank balance of \$623,015.60 at the end of February, the positive balance equaled \$127,340.87. This report was received by council as information.

Finance Director T.M. Thomas reported the county's general fund generated \$6,668,784 at the end of March. Expenses came in at \$5,630,765, resulting in a positive general fund balance of \$1,038,019. Finance Director Thomas confirmed all departments are continuing to operate within their budgets. This report was received as information.

Controller Gina Smith gave an overall report of the financial status for the county. Various accounts were compared from March 2019 through March 2021. The operating account balance for 2019 was \$3,151,482; 2020 operating account balance was \$3,377,344 and 2021 operating account balance was \$3,780,911. Making a comparison from March 2020 through March 2021, there was an increase of \$403,567. Council received this report as positive information for the county.

Administrator Preston reported that more than 4,251 residents have received at least one COVID-19 vaccination and encouraged others to be vaccinated as well. Mr. Preston continued to report that Crosswind Aviation has agreed to work with Denmark Technical College to provide some sort of training to teach pilot lessons at the college and to utilize the county airport. A \$150,000 potential grant could be received from the FAA to be used toward airport improvements. Administrator Preston said, "It's not necessarily promised to the county, but the activity and what's being done has put the county at the point to where they have agreed to provide that money to us." Also, it was reported that the C-Fund Committee will possibly be meeting within the next 30 days to discuss pending and upcoming matters. The newly formed EMS Committee will be meeting soon and the date submitted by the fire coordinator was Wednesday, May 12th at 6 p.m. Administrator Preston's report was accepted as information.

On motion by Councilman Comer, seconded by Councilman Haynes, council voted and approved third reading, of Ordinance #6-21-14, to authorize the leasing of certain Bamberg County airport real property, space, improvements, and facilities (Crosswind Aviation, LLC Project); the granting of certain privileges to limited fixed-based operators; the sale of aviation fuel at bulk rates; the ratification of certain other leases and grants of rights at the airport; and other matters related thereto. Voting in favor: Councilmen Myers, Donaldson, Goodman, Comer and Haynes. Voting not in favor: Councilwoman Hammond. Absent: Councilman Carter.

On motion by Councilman Comer, seconded by Councilwoman Hammond, council approved first reading of Ordinance #2-21-2, adopting and enacting a new code of ordinance for the county of Bamberg, South Carolina; providing for the repeal of certain ordinances not included therein; providing a penalty for the violation thereof; providing for the manner of amending such code; and providing when such code and this ordinance shall become effective. Voting in favor: Councilmen Myers, Donaldson, Goodman, Comer and Haynes. Voting not in favor: Councilwoman Hammond. Absent: Councilman Carter.

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On motion by Councilman Carter, seconded by Councilwoman Hammond, the calendar of events was approved as presented.

At this point, Chairman Haynes called for comments from the public. Administrator Preston read an emailed letter from Ms. Sue Clayton, chairperson of the Concerned Citizens of Bamberg County. Some listed concerns from Ms. Clayton were:

- Where does the county stand on the AT&T lawsuit?
- Where does the Medshore/EMT issue stand?
- Why isn't SCA held responsible for a return on investment of the annual fee received from the county?
- Why can't we get a rolling balance sheet on all accounts held by the county?
- Exactly how many lawyers/firms do we have on the payroll, either directly or as consultants?
- Not having access to the council meeting.

Still questioning the fact of face-to-face meetings for the public and answering questions for the citizens.

The council members were asked by Chairman Haynes, for their comments regarding reopening the council meetings to the public possibly beginning in August. Chairman Haynes reminded the council that the pandemic is still present and we still have got to be safe and continue to practice being safe. Some of the concerns were that when we get back to face-to-face meetings, those in attendance must be required to wear face masks and social distancing be practiced. It was also suggested that partitions be used in council chambers to separate the council members from each other. When we are reopened for public meetings, for safety measures, there will be limited people allowed to be in attendance. Administrator Preston reminded council that the public can pretty much say or ask whatever questions they would like, but must stay under the rules established by council. Several comments were made by council relating to face-to-face meetings and giving the option to attend virtually. All mothers were wished a Happy Mother's Day. Everyone was thanked for their attendance and hard work. It was requested that we encourage the public to please get the COVID-19 Vaccine and continue to wear your mask.

There being no further business for discussion, on motion by Councilwoman Hammond, seconded by Councilman Donaldson, the meeting was adjourned at 9:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rose R. Shepherd, CCC