

**MINUTES OF CALHOUN COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**REGULAR MEETING**  
**June 12, 2023**  
**5:30 P.M.**

Calhoun County Council held its regular meeting on Monday, June 12, 2023.

The following were present:

Chairman James E. Haigler, who presided  
Vice-Chairman Ken Westbury  
Councilwoman Rebecca Bonnette  
Councilman Cecil Thornton  
Administrator John McLaughlin  
Deputy Administrator Richard Hall  
Clerk to Council Shayla Jenkins

Absent: Councilman Richard Carson  
Human Resources Director Brandy Roberson

The following press was notified of the meeting by mail, electronic mail, or by fax in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act: The Calhoun Times Leader, The Times and Democrat, and Sandy Run News. An Agenda was also posted on Calhoun County's website calhouncounty.sc.gov.

**Call to Order**

Chairman Haigler called the meeting to order.

**Invocation**

Invocation was offered by Councilwoman Rebecca Bonnette.

**Approval of Agenda**

Vice-Chairman Westbury made the motion to approve May 22, 2023 meeting agenda as outlined and was seconded by Councilman Carson. The motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comments**

Randy Stabler, county firefighter, appeared to speak on the agenda item, approval for two fire trucks for the CCRFD. He read a letter from Nick Stabler of Caw Caw Fire Department regarding how the fire trucks will be paid for and that there has not been a vote on ordering the trucks. He asked that Council hold off on approving fire trucks purchase until questions have been answered.

Gary Geiger also spoke regarding the fire trucks, noting the time it takes to set specifications for the trucks, asking if Council was following protocol, and the necessary equipment to run the trucks. He asked that Council table the discussion until necessary questions have been answered.

Tris Waystack spoke regarding the fire trucks as well, speaking on behalf of Station 7. He referenced an email from the Fire Commission Chairman and told that there is a need for the trucks, not

just for two stations. He told that trucks are available to buy used for \$250,000-\$300,000 from larger cities. Instead of two new trucks, he advised there could be four trucks purchased if they were bought used. He told that no station had enough calls for two brand new trucks. He asked that Council vote no and not approve the new trucks.

### **Public Hearings**

Chairman Haigler opened a Public Hearing on **ORDINANCE 2023-6 AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING (1) THE EXECUTION AND DELIVERY OF A FEE IN LIEU OF TAX AGREEMENT BY AND BETWEEN CALHOUN COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA (THE "COUNTY") AND PROJECT GOLD, ACTING FOR ITSELF, ONE OR MORE AFFILIATES AND/OR OTHER PROJECT SPONSORS (THE "COMPANY"), PURSUANT TO WHICH THE COUNTY SHALL COVENANT TO ACCEPT CERTAIN NEGOTIATED FEES IN LIEU OF AD VALOREM TAXES WITH RESPECT TO THE ESTABLISHMENT AND/OR EXPANSION OF CERTAIN FACILITIES IN THE COUNTY (THE "PROJECT"); (2) THE INCLUSION OF THE PROJECT IN A MULTI-COUNTY BUSINESS PARK, IF NOT SO ALREADY INCLUDED; (3) THE APPROVAL OF PROVIDING CERTAIN SPECIAL SOURCE REVENUE CREDITS; AND (4) OTHER MATTERS RELATING THERETO.**

Gail Gressette inquired about the "Matters Relating Thereto" in the Ordinance Title, and Administrator McLaughlin offered explanation.

Todd Ward with Red Rock commented that one speculative building is complete in Sandy Run and there is a second one planned. He thanked the County and staff. Administrator McLaughlin thanked him for investing in Calhoun County. There were no other questions or comments, and the Hearing was closed.

**Third Reading of Ordinance 2023-6.** Vice-Chairman Westbury made a motion to pass Third Reading of Ordinance 2023-3, and was seconded by Councilwoman Bonnette. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Haigler opened a Public Hearing on **ORDINANCE 2023-7 AN ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR CALHOUN COUNTY COUNCIL**

Deputy Administrator Hall offered explanation and clarification on times for public comments and appearances, as well as streamlining of Parliamentary Rules and Roberts Rules of Order. Audience members asked questions for clarification, and the Hearing was closed.

**Third Reading of Ordinance 2023-7.** Vice-Chairman Westbury made a motion to pass Third Reading of Ordinance 2023-7, and was seconded by Councilwoman Bonnette. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Minutes of the May 22, 2023 regular meeting were presented for approval. Motion was made by Councilman Thornton and seconded by Vice-Chairman Westbury to approve the minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Committee Reports**

Administrator McLaughlin told that there would be a meeting of the Natural Resources and Development subcommittee on June 22, regarding Animal Control.

### **Appointments**

Josh Rabon was appointed as an alternate to the Lower Savannah Council of Governments Board. The motion was made by Vice-Chairman Westbury and seconded by Councilwoman Bonnette. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Proclamations**

None

### **Appearances**

Solicitor David Pascoe appeared and commented that Calhoun County is fortunate to have Magistrate Judge Bloom. He thanked Calhoun County, Council and Staff for the value put into the Solicitor's Office. He also extended an invitation to an event to be held Thursday night (June 15) at OC Tech and encouraged citizens to participate in discussions regarding youth diversion programs, expungement, etc.

Judge Bloom appeared to give a quarterly Magistrate update. In this fiscal year, there has been more than 1,800 hours of litter pick up as sentencing, for an estimated value of \$30,000.00. He also spoke regarding Bond Court, and encouraged anyone with questions to call his office. Chairman Haigler thanked Judge Bloom for his work.

Gail Gressette appeared and read a statement she prepared (attached). She distributed a Wage and Salary report to members of the audience. Her concerns were regarding transparency, budget increases during a time of inflation and support of law enforcement.

### **Resolutions**

**Resolution 12-2023** A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING ENLARGEMENT OF THE BOUNDARIES OF THE JOINT COUNTY INDUSTRIAL AND BUSINESS PARK ESTABLISHED BY THAT CERTAIN AGREEMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT OF JOINT COUNTY INDUSTRIAL PARK BY AND BETWEEN CALHOUN COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA (THE "COUNTY") AND LEXINGTON COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA ("LEXINGTON COUNTY"), DATED AS OF DECEMBER 11, 1995, AS AMENDED, SUCH ENLARGEMENT AFFECTING THAT PORTION OF THE PARK GEOGRAPHICALLY LOCATED IN CALHOUN COUNTY; AND OTHER MATTERS RELATED THERETO was presented.

Vice-Chairman Westbury made a motion to approve Resolution 12-2023 and was seconded by Councilwoman Bonnette. The motion passed unanimously.

**Resolution 13-2023** AUTHORIZING AND APPROVING THE ASSIGNMENT AND ASSUMPTION OF A FEE AGREEMENT BETWEEN CALHOUN COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA AND SANDY RUN LOGISTICS, LLC was presented.

Vice-Chairman Westbury made a motion to approve Resolution 13-2023 and was seconded by Councilman Thornton. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Old Business**

None

### **New Business**

#### Approval - Utilities Department for Water/Wastewater Material and Supplies

Administrator McLaughlin explained that this approval would consist of Telemetry to monitor water tanks, portable generator and supplies to have readily available when needed for the Water Department, totaling \$145,312, to be paid for with Covid funds already dedicated to water and wastewater. Vice-Chairman Westbury made a motion to approve the purchases for the Water Department, and was seconded by councilwoman Bonnette. The motion passed unanimously.

#### Approval – 2 Fire Trucks for Calhoun County Rural Fire Department

Administrator McLaughlin offered explanation of the item, telling that the Pumper Trucks would go into the fleet, and would have a 7-10 year financing plan, with the first payment in August 2025. The group discussed ISO ratings and implications. Chairman Haigler allowed questions from the audience and discussion ensued regarding new versus used trucks, payments, funding, additional equipment needs, specific station needs and the outlook on the current trucks. Council asked for input from the Fire Commissioner, Jeff Price. He told that the project had been discussed previously at length, and specifications had been adopted as the standard for the trucks. He told that the equipment had been taken care of and if these trucks are approved, there will be six (6) identical trucks in the county fleet. Vice-Chairman Westbury made a motion to approve the purchase of the fire trucks for the CCRFD and was seconded by Councilman Thornton. The motion passed with a 2-1 vote (Westbury and Thornton in favor; Bonnette opposed).

#### Recognition - Letter of Commendation for Administrator McLaughlin

Vice-Chairman Westbury explained that at the May 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting, when Council came out of Executive Session, Administrator McLaughlin was presented a Letter of Commendation for his work and efforts in bringing Blanchard Machinery to Calhoun County.

### **Ordinances**

**Ordinance 2023-15** FIRE DISTRICT COST RECOVERY ORDINANCE was presented for Second Reading. Councilwoman Bonnette made motion to table second reading of Ordinance 2023-15.

The motion died not receiving a second. Vice-Chairman Westbury made a motion to pass Second Reading of Ordinance 2023-15. Second was given by Councilman Thornton. The motion passed with a 2-1 vote (Westbury, Thornton in favor; Bonnette opposed).

### **Administrator**

Administrator McLauchlin told that there would be a Blood Drive on Friday, June 1<sup>st</sup> at the Sandy Run Community Center, and another on July 17<sup>th</sup> at the old St. Matthews Town Hall. He encouraged participation, due to shortages.

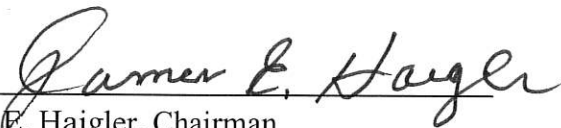
Also, Administrator McLauchlin informed that the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Fireworks show will be held on Saturday, July 1<sup>st</sup>, and thanked the Town of St. Matthews and Calhoun Convalescent for their assistance with the event.

Chairman Haigler recognized Dr. Molnar of LSCOG. Dr. Molnar thanked Chairman Haigler for his chairmanship of the LSCOG Board and remarked on the loss of Mr. David Summers and Mr. Roger Hill.

Councilman Thornton remarked regarding the fire districts.

### **Adjournment**

Vice-Chairman Westbury made a motion to adjourn with second by Councilman Thornton. The motion passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 6:43 p.m.

  
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James E. Haigler, Chairman

  
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Shayla C. Jenkins, Clerk to Council

I am Gail Gressette, a long-time resident of Calhoun County. I moved to St. Matthews in 1979. At that time, I felt comfortable approaching our county leaders, and am saddened to find that is no longer the case.

I have grown concerned with the lack of transparency from our current county leaders, who in my opinion do not seem to have the best interests of this county in mind. Having recognized that, I have made - not 1, but 4 - attempts to contact my county councilperson, Cecil Thornton. Finally, after reaching out for the 5th time did Mr. Thornton return my call. After voicing my calls to my councilperson, I asked for information on the 2023 county budget and the salaries of our county administrators. I did not receive the information I asked for. However, when I asked John McLaughlin questions about specific employees overlapping jobs - for example the human resources officer working on economic development and budget, Mr. McLaughlin asked, "Who did you hear that from?" In my opinion, this implies a lack of transparency about what is going on in our county.

My concern and reasoning for requesting this information is that during this time of inflation, our county, which is one of the smallest in South Carolina based on general population, has expenditures closer to what you might see in a larger county. If you look over the handout I gave you, you will be able to see these numbers for yourself. You may notice that the general budget and payroll budget, as well as administrators' salaries, for our county far exceeds those in counties with similar populations. You may also wish to see how these budgets compare to those of larger counties, which you will find listed there as well. If you wish to see the source material for this information, I have brought it with me today. What you will not see reflected here are the expenses for county vehicles driven for personal use. In addition to their salaries, our county employees are driving county vehicles as their personal vehicles. The citizens of Calhoun County should not be paying for the additional fuel and maintenance required for these vehicles to be used as personal vehicles.

And yet, our law enforcement numbers are lower than even the counties smaller than we are. Why is that? We live in a hub of criminal activity feeding in from Interstate 26, 95, and Lexington, Santee, and Sumter counties, all of which border our county. Our only defense against this is our law enforcement and yet we only have 8 deputies and 3 detectives serving our community. Of all of the departments supported by this county, law enforcement should not have to beg for funding to hire and retain employees.

In addition to the lack of funding for our law enforcement, we also have 164 children (that we know of) who go home from school to homes that do not have food for them. The community is providing weekly take-home bags called Snack Packs for these children to ensure that they at least do not go hungry on the weekends. The parents of these children cannot handle additional taxes being imposed on them for the coming year.

As a long-time resident, I remember that for many years the county budget was reported on in the Calhoun Times, providing a sense of transparency and information to the citizens of this county. Now that we no longer have a newspaper, the county is not making an effort to ensure that citizens are informed of budgeting decisions. We are now on the third reading of the plan budget for the coming year, and yet there are few citizens who have seen any version of it. The citizens of Calhoun County should be receiving copies of each reading of the planned budget to afford them opportunities to offer input via their county councilperson, who should be available for contact from our citizens.

After having suffered economically, I see no reason why the county budget should be increased this year. Perhaps instead, we should be re-evaluating the distribution of funds already represented in the budget.