

**COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE, THURSDAY, MAY 9, 2024, At 9:00 A. M. COUNCIL CONFERENCE ROOM, ROOM 804, COUNTY COMPLEX, 180 N. IRBY ST., FLORENCE, SOUTH CAROLINA**

**PRESENT:**

William Schofield, Council Committee Chairman  
Willard Dorriety, Jr., County Council Chairman  
Stoney C. Moore, Council Committee Member  
Kevin Yokim, County Administrator  
Ashley Davison, Finance Director

**ABSENT:**

Waymon Mumford, Council Committee Member

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Jerry Yarborough, Jr., Council Member  
Kent Caudle, Council Member  
Malloy McEachin, County Attorney  
Shannon Munoz, Deputy Administrator  
Jason Springs, Council Member (joined via telephonically @ 9:32 A.M.)  
Tyler Fedor, Post & Courier Editor  
Hope M. Jones, Clerk to Council

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, copies of the meeting Agenda were provided to members of the media, and members of the public requesting copies, posted in the lobby of the County Complex, provided for posting at the Doctors Bruce and Lee Foundation Public Library, all branch libraries, and on the County's website ([www.florenceco.org](http://www.florenceco.org)).

Chairman Schofield called the meeting to order at 9:00 A.M. Councilman Moore provided the invocation and Councilman Dorriety led the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

FY 24/25 Budget:

Mr. Yokim went over the budget message. Handouts were passed out to the Committee. (documents are attached as referenced)

Mr. Yokim stated economic conditions have begun to improve for the County. The value of one mill of property taxes typically increases by 1.0-1.5%. However, in the past year in the County, the value of one mill increased by more than 3.5%. The County budgets for 97% collections but at a 100% collection the amount was \$515,000 per mill last year this year the County is at \$550,000. This increase in the value of the mill, combined with the increase in interest income as a result of the continued high interest rates, as well as increases in various other General Fund revenue resources, has positively impacted the budget. Therefore, there is no millage increase in the General Fund, except for a 0.5 mill increase for a specific purpose. The County is budgeting a 1.5 mill decrease for the Debt Service Fund. The taxpayers will therefore have a one-mill net

decrease. There is no proposed increase in solid waste fees for next year.

Mr. Yokim stated there will be a 5% across-the-board cost of living increase for county employees. Councilman Caudle inquired if the County is more in line for the EMS and law enforcement workers. Mr. Yokim stated it will be discussed later in the meeting. The County is in the process of developing an RFP for a Compensation and Classification Plan Study (hopefully we will receive the results later this fall).

### **General Fund Expenditures**

Mr. Yokim stated several years ago, the County Council adopted a policy to maintain 25% of annual expenditures in fund balance. Over the last three years, the fund balance has grown by \$14.5M, as a result of budgeting and vacant positions. The Fiscal Year 2023 budget included \$4.0M use of fund balance to balance the budget; however, \$2.9M was actually added to the fund balance, a swing of nearly \$7.0M.

The current General Fund Budget is about \$82M. The base budget is about \$80M since the \$500 quarterly stipends funded with COVID Funds are going away. The requests submitted for the budget were \$97M. Even though the County has good strong revenue growth, the County can't fund all of it. Mr. Yokim referred to the bullet point items on the handouts. (See attached documents)

### **General Fund Revenues**

Property tax revenue will increase by 1.2%. The manufacturers' depreciation reimbursement and local option sales tax are expected to increase. The County is projected to use \$3M in fund balance to balance the budget.

### **Millage Rate Cap**

In accordance with Act 388 modified by the South Carolina Legislature, the millage cap limitation for the FY2024/25 fiscal year is 3.8 mills. The County left the millage rate 2.9 mills under the cap last year, which means the General Fund millage rate could be increased by 6.7 mills in the FY2024/25 budget. However, the current proposed budget includes only 0.5 mills of the 6.7 available millage increase. This millage increase is being dedicated to an increase in direct assistance for PDRTA.

### **Sheriff's Office**

Five new positions are included in the budget. The positions are two CID investigators, a Narcotics Investigator, a Corporal/Training, and a Security Deputy.

### **EMS Department**

Four 12-hour positions are included in the budget (two Crew Chiefs and two Crew Members). These positions will be stationed in such a manner so as to reduce the need to relocate ambulances.

### **Recreation Department**

With the increase in the number of facilities and the addition of the 500-acre Independence Farm property, four full-time and two part-time positions are included in the budget. The positions are two Maintenance Team Leaders, two Maintenance Area Supervisors, and two part-time Athletic



Assistants.

### **Other Items**

Mr. Yokim mentioned the COLA and referenced the bullet points, which the documents are attached for reference.

Councilman Caudle inquired how the automobile leasing program worked out. Mr. Yokim stated Ms. Munoz is working with Jennifer Bledsoe with Enterprise. This is the County's first full year working with Enterprise and we have saved \$700,000.

### **Other Funds**

#### **County Debt Service Fund**

The County Debt Service Fund includes a 1.5 mill decrease. The audited fund balance as of June 30, 2023, totaled \$5.15M and is expected to grow by \$400,000 in FY2023/24.

#### **Local Accommodations Tax Fund**

This is the 3% tax on hotels. The audited fund balance was almost \$3M as of June 30, 2023, and we are exemplary an increase in FY2024 and FY2025. A \$6M bond is being contemplated for the Florence Center but it is contingent on the City of Florence.

#### **Local Hospitality Tax Fund**

Fiscal Year 2024/25 revenues are budgeted at \$2,846,000, up from \$2,730,000. The Fiscal Year 2022/23 audited fund balance was \$1,660,910. The County is projecting a \$750,000 increase in FY2023/24. The funds will be used to expand the museum.

#### **Victim Witness Assistance Fund**

The revenue generated does not cover the cost. Included in the FY2023/24 budget was additional ARPA funding of \$300,000 for lost revenue during and since COVID. This will cover the deficit fund balance for FY2024 and FY2025. But for FY2026, the County will need to do something with the fund.

#### **Solid Waste Fund**

No budgeted increase in the household solid waste fees is included in the budget.

#### **E911 Fund**

As a result of the increased cost of the E911 system and the recent notice from the State of South Carolina of the reduction in the state reimbursement percentage for E911 costs, a \$0.40 increase in the monthly E911 fee on landlines is included in the budget ordinance.

Councilman Dorriety inquired about the bond (\$6 million) for the Florence Center. He asked what would be the recourse with the City of Florence in the future on the bond if they cannot make the payments since they refunded us. Mr. McEachin stated we would need to reflect on the original agreement.

Councilman Dorriety inquired since the County is over the 25% fund balance, do you know what the additional interest would be? Mr. Yokim stated the current year budget in this year interest income in the General Fund is \$920,000. The County will budget \$3.5M next year.

Councilman Dorriety asked what an additional 5% increase for the Sheriff's Department cost. Mr. Yokim stated another \$625,000.

Councilman Caudle inquired about the projected millage rate of the budget as of now because the County does not know what the school district will do until September. Mr. Yokim stated the middle of August is when the auditors need the rates to start compiling the table.

#### **Public Safety Pay**

Mr. Yokim discussed the documents from the Florence County Sheriff's Office and EMS (documents are attached).

Councilman Moore made the motion to increase the millage by one mill to fund the requested pay increase by the Florence County Sheriff's Office and EMS. The remainder of the funding will come out of the Contingency Fund. Councilman Dorriety seconded which was approved unanimously.

There being no other business, Chairman Schofield entertained a motion to Adjourn. Councilman Dorriety made the motion and Councilman Moore seconded which was approved unanimously.

**THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 10:00 A.M.**

Approved by the Committee at its meeting on August 29, 2024

Hope M. Jones  
ATTEST: Hope M. Jones, Clerk to Council

April 18, 2024

Honorable Florence County Council Members

In accordance with South Carolina Code of Laws Sections 4-9-140 and 4-9-630, the annual budget for Florence County for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024 and ending June 30, 2025 is presented for your review and approval.

Current economic conditions have begun to improve for the County. In a typical year, the value of one mill of property taxes increases by 1.0-1.5%. During the past year, due to the growth we are experiencing in the County, the value of one mill increased by more than 3.5%. This increase in the value of one mill, combined with the increase in interest income as a result of the continued high interest rates, as well as increases in various other General Fund revenue sources, has positively impacted the FY2024/25 budget. Therefore, there is no millage increase proposed for the General Fund, with the exception of a 0.5 mill increase dedicated for a specific purpose as discussed below. Additionally, we are proposing a 1.5 mill reduction for the County Debt Service Fund, resulting in a **1.0 mill net decrease for County taxpayers**. There is also no proposed increase in the solid waste fees for FY2024/25. However, the current contract for the operation of the manned convenience centers will expire on June 30, 2024 and the new contract may necessitate an increase in the solid waste fees effective July 1, 2025 for FY2025/26.

Once again, the budget as presented prioritizes Florence County's most valuable asset, its employees. As a result of the fixed dollar amount for cost of living adjustments of \$3,000 and \$5,000 in the previous two fiscal years, turnover has improved dramatically. However, there is still a great need to keep the pay for our employees as competitive as possible. Therefore, a **5% across-the-board cost of living adjustment (COLA) is included for all County employees**, effective with the first full pay period in the new fiscal year. In addition, we anticipate awarding a contract in the next few months for a compensation and classification plan study of all County positions. This may result in a recommendation to adjust the pay for various positions in the FY2024/25 budget, above the 5% COLA. This results of this study will be presented to Council later in the fiscal year. Finally, the one-time incentive pay plan that was included again in the FY2023/24 budget will conclude effective June 30, 2024, since this incentive was funded by CARES Act funding and this funding will be exhausted by that time.

The following factors were considered in preparation of this budget.

#### **General Fund Expenditures**

Several years ago, County Council adopted a policy to maintain 25% of annual expenditures in fund balance. Florence County has realized \$14.5M of fund balance growth over the past three fiscal years (FY2021 – FY2023) as a result of conservative budgeting and vacant positions. Therefore, as of June 30, 2023, General Fund fund balance has risen to 42.5% of expenditures. In fact, the FY2023 budget included a \$4.0M use of fund balance to balance the budget; however, \$2.9M was actually added to fund balance – a swing of nearly \$7.0M. Therefore, in the FY2024 budget, \$7.2M of the fund balance growth was used to balance the budget. Past patterns have demonstrated that this entire amount will probably not be used.



Budget requests for the FY2025 General Fund budget exceeded the FY2024 budget level by in excess of \$15,000,000. Even with the projected revenue growth discussed later in this budget message, given the needed inclusion of the cost of living adjustment for all full-time and part-time employees, along with other budget priorities, numerous requested increases are not included in the budget as presented. Some of the major increase requests which are not included in the budget are as follows:

- \$1,546,680 requested by the Sheriff's Office to provide a \$6,000 pay increase to all certified law enforcement officers
- \$195,378 requested by EMS to fund a 15% increase in EMT pay and a 10% in Advanced EMT pay
- \$656,521 requested by EMS to fund eight new positions to staff the vacant Timmons ville station
- \$750,834 requested by the Planning Department to plant trees along the Highway 327 corridor
- \$200,006 requested by the Planning Department to fund three new fire marshal/fire inspector positions
- \$300,000 reduced from the IT Department requested increase in maintenance and service contracts
- \$350,000 reduced from the Sheriff's Office requested increase in capital expenditures
- \$272,413 requested by EMS for the purchase of a new ambulance
- \$202,164 requested by the Pamplico Rescue Squad for capital equipment
- \$400,000 reduced from the Recreation Department requested increase in capital expenditures

### **General Fund Revenues**

Property tax revenue is expected to increase by 3.5% as a result of natural growth in the property tax base. As a result of this growth, tax revenue is expected to increase approximately \$1,200,000. The manufacturers' depreciation reimbursement and local option sales tax are expected to increase by \$2,250,000 and \$1,750,000, respectively. As a result of the continued high interest rates, interest revenue is expected to increase by \$2,600,000. In addition, \$3,093,818 of fund balance is expected to be used to balance the budget.

### **Millage Rate Cap**

In accordance with Act 388 of 2006 as adopted and subsequently modified by the South Carolina Legislature, the millage cap limitation for the FY2024/25 fiscal year is 3.8 mills. This rate includes the consumer price index adjustment of 4.12% and the population growth adjustment of .35% due to a slight increase in Florence County's population year over year. In addition, in the FY2023/24 budget, the County left the millage rate 2.9 mills under the cap, which means the General Fund millage rate could be increased by 6.7 mills in the FY2024/25 budget. However, the current proposed budget includes only 0.5 mills of the 6.7 available millage increase. This millage increase is being dedicated to an increase in direct assistance for PDRTA.

### **Sheriff's Office**

Five new positions are included in the budget at a cost of \$393,692. The positions are two CID Investigators, Narcotics Investigator, Corporal/Training, and a Security Deputy.

### **EMS Department**

Four new 12-hour positions are included in the budget at a cost of \$309,844 – two Crew Chiefs and two Crew Members. These positions will be stationed in the Effingham area to reduce the need to relocate ambulances, which occurs on a daily basis.

### **Recreation Department**

With the increase in number of facilities and the addition of the 500 acre Independence Farm property, four new full time and two new part time positions are included in the budget at a cost of \$295,838. The positions are two Maintenance Team Leaders, two Maintenance Area Supervisors, and two part-time Athletic Assistants.

### **Other Items**

Along with the estimated cost of \$2,000,000 for the COLA noted above, other notable items in the General Fund budget as presented for Council's consideration include:

- \$113,500 for a requested increase in poll worker pay
- \$132,000 in repairs and improvements to the Planning building
- \$142,000 increase in maintenance and service contracts for the IT Department
- \$250,000 increase in direct assistance for PDRTA
- \$640,000 increase in capital equipment for the Sheriff's Office
- \$262,413 for one ambulance for EMS
- \$62,000 for building repairs at the Animal Control Facility
- \$190,000 increase in maintenance and service contracts for the Recreation Department
- \$123,000 increase in capital improvements for the Recreation Department
- \$226,000 increase in capital improvements for Lynches River Park

## **OTHER FUNDS**

### **County Debt Service Fund**

The County Debt Service Fund includes **1.5 mill decrease**. This reduction is based off a similar growth in the value of one mill as was discussed for the General Fund. These savings are being passed onto the taxpayers of Florence County. The audited fund balance as of June 30, 2023 totaled \$5.15M and is expected to grow by over \$400,000 in FY2023/24.

### **Local Accommodations Tax Fund**

Revenues in this fund continue to increase. The FY2022/23 audited fund balance was \$2,952,301, or 92.8% of fund expenditures. Projected fund balance increases in FY2024 and FY2025 are \$700,000 and \$875,000, respectively. A \$6,000,000 bond is being contemplated for the Florence Center, dependent upon available funding from the City of Florence, which funds half of the annual cost of this facility.

### **Local Hospitality Tax Fund**

Hospitality revenues continue to trend in a positive manner. FY2024/25 revenues are budgeted at \$2,846,000, up from \$2,730,000. Continued economic development including Buc-ee's has driven revenue growth. The FY2022/23 audited fund balance was \$1,660,910, or 98.2% of fund expenditures. In addition, the budgeted fund balance increase in FY2024 was \$750,000. Included in the FY2025 budget is an \$841,000 increase in debt service for a bond that will be issued for the planned museum expansion.

### **Victim Witness Assistance Fund**

Victim Witness Assistance fees increased slightly in FY2023. However, even with a \$120,000 operating transfer from the General Fund, this fund had a negative fund balance of \$91,537 as of June 30, 2023. Therefore, included in the FY2023/24 budget was additional ARPA funding of \$300,000 for lost revenue during and since COVID. This will cover the deficit fund balance for FY2024 and for FY2025. Going forward, further discussion needs to take place as current average revenue levels do not support the total operating costs for the fund. General Fund support may be required to support this fund.

### **Solid Waste Fund**

**No budgeted increase in the household solid waste fees is included in the FY2024/25 budget.** The FY2023/24 increase in these fees is expected to produce a surplus of approximately \$128,000. The audited fund balance as of June 30, 2023 grew to \$1,093,897, which is less than 17% of the budgeted expenditures. In addition, a new contract for the operation of the manned convenience centers will take effect on July 1, 2024, and any negotiated increase to the current contract may require an increase in the household solid waste fees in the FY2025/26 budget.

### **E911 Fund**

As a result of the increased cost of the E911 system and the recent notice from the State of South Carolina of the reduction in the state reimbursement percentage for E911 costs, a \$0.40 increase in the monthly E911 fee on landlines is included in the budget ordinance.

### **Summary**

The budget for Florence County for fiscal year 2024/2025 is now submitted for your final review and approval. Thanks needs to be given to the various County departments who worked hard to prepare their budget requests. We also thank Council for their assistance in developing and adopting a balanced budget in accordance with state law.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin V. Yokim, CPA, CGFO, ICMA-CM  
County Administrator

Ashley Davison  
Finance Director



**FY2024/25**  
**Public Safety Pay**

**Florence County Sheriff's Office**

The Sheriff's Office requested a \$6,000 increase for all certified law enforcement officers. The cost of this increase would be \$1,546,000, and would require a nearly 3 mill tax increase. This request has not been included in the budget. The 5% COLA would give FCSO approximately 40% of this request.

FCSO has provided data (see email attached) which demonstrates that the current pay for an entry-level certified deputy is \$48,388 and is the lowest pay level for similar positions at other agencies. The 5% COLA would bring the entry-level pay to \$50,807. The City of Florence is considering a 4% COLA (effective July 1) and a 2% merit increase (effective January 1), which would bring the City's pay to \$53,592.

The cost to fund the remaining 60% of the FCSO request is approximately \$925,000. This could be funded by an increase in millage by 1.0 mills, generating \$533,500 (\$550,000 x 97%) and the remaining \$391,500 could be funded by reducing Contingency. **This would leave overall millage at the same level as it is in the current year.**

**Florence County EMS**

The EMS Department requested a 15% increase in EMT pay and a 10% increase in Advanced EMT pay. The cost of this increase would be \$195,378. This request has not been included in the budget. The 5% COLA covers \$71,051 of this cost.

The EMS Department has seen a recent increase in the loss of personnel, most of which has been due to the level of pay for EMTs. As a result, there are currently 16 vacant EMT positions. The current pay for an EMT is \$42,213.

The cost to fund the remaining portion of this request would be \$124,327 and could be funded by reducing Contingency.

## Kevin Yokim

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**Subject:** FW: FY2024/25 budget

**From:** Tommy Sullivan <TSullivan@fcso.org>  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 2, 2024 7:18 AM  
**To:** Kevin Yokim <KYokim@Florenceco.org>; TJ Joye <TJJoye@fcso.org>  
**Cc:** C. William Schofield <cws@thesupplyhouse.com>  
**Subject:** Re: FY2024/25 budget

Thank you both for your willingness to have this discussion and giving our request serious consideration. We are very thankful and appreciative to council and administration for their support provided to the men and women at the Sheriff's Office. After a review of the fy25 budget as presented for first reading, we are also very appreciative for the consideration given with our fy25 budget request.

When it comes down to certified officers pay grades, to put it in simply, "It is all about the Benjamin's". When the Sheriff and I began our career, neither of us was concerned with the pay. We wanted an opportunity to have a career in law enforcement. I waited months for my chance at the Sheriff's Office and the Sheriff Joye waited years for his chance with the Highway Patrol.

Today's environment is much different, officers will leave a department over a couple hundred dollars. Over the last couple of years, we have lost personnel to the US Marshal's Service, SCDNR and Florence Police for better pay. We also had an investigator leave in to take a "small town" police chief's job and later return after our last \$5k increase. We see no loyalty or commitment from this generation to any agency.

In January 2021 when we arrived, starting pay was a major concern. The Sheriff's Office had 30 +/- vacancies and the jail had 43 +/- vacancies. With the support from council and administration and the increases in starting pay, we have improved our vacancy rate to 8 +/- and 15 +/-.

We (Sheriff's Office and The County) have made significant progress with recruitment and retention of deputies. My concern is, if we fail to stay competitive with law enforcement pay, we will see our vacancy numbers begin to increase and reverse the progress we have made.

Below is a survey of law enforcement compensation in our area as of March, 2024.

AGENCY	CERTIFIED PAY*
Florence Co SO	\$ 48,388
Florence PD (Additional 2% COLA effective 7/1/24) **	\$ 50,520
Horry Co PD	\$ 49,094
Myrtle Beach PD	\$ 52,647
N Myrtle Beach PD	\$ 51,600
Columbia PD	\$ 48,825
Greenville Co SO	\$ 54,811
SC Highway Patrol & Transport Police	\$ 58,032

SC Dept Natural Resources	\$ 53,000
SC Probation Parole	\$ 58,032
Georgetown County Sheriff's Office **(Effective 7/1/2024)	\$ 55,000

\*Salary information obtained from agency web

sites March, 2024

\*\* COLA increase and new pay rate verified

5/1/2024

Of the twelve agencies listed above, our starting certified pay is at the bottom of this scale.

As you are aware, our current starting certified pay is;

- Class I Patrol Deputy is \$48,388
- Class II Detention Deputy is \$43,463
- Class III Security Deputy is \$ 38,576

Thank you for your consideration with this request and we look forward to further discussions.

Thanks,

*Tommy*

Thomas F. Sullivan, Chief Deputy  
Florence County Sheriff's Office  
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