



**CITY/COUNTY CONFERENCE COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, AUGUST 10, 2023 – 8:30 A.M.
CITY CENTER – 4TH FLOOR – PECAN ROOM
324 WEST EVANS STREET
FLORENCE, SOUTH CAROLINA**

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Teresa Myers Ervin, City Council Committee Co-Chair
C. William Schofield, County Council Committee Member
Jerry W. Yarborough, Jr., County Council Committee Member
Bryan A. Braddock, City Council Committee Member
J. Lawrence Smith, II, City Council Committee Member

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT

Alphonso Bradley, County Council Committee Co-Chair

ALSO PRESENT

Randall Osterman, City Manager
Kevin Yokim, County Administrator
Scotty Davis, Deputy City Manager
Casey Moore, Municipal Clerk

MEDIA PRESENT

Christian Smith with the Florence Morning News and Seth Taylor with the Post and Courier were present for the meeting.

Notice of the City/County Conference Committee meeting was posted in the lobby of the City Center and provided to the media informing them of the date, location and time of the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Ervin called the August 10, 2023 meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

INVOCATION

Councilman Bradley gave the invocation for the meeting. The pledge of allegiance to the American Flag followed the invocation.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Councilman Schofield made a motion to approve the minutes of the September 8, 2022 meeting of the Conference Committee and Councilman Yarborough seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.



CORRIDOR DISCUSSION

Mayor Ervin began the discussion on corridors and enhancing the entrances into the City. She said there are concerns with the entrances into Florence from West Palmetto, the Highway 52/Darlington Street corridor, Irby Street corridor and the East Palmetto Street corridor. The 76 Gateway Study has already put in place a good plan for the East Palmetto corridor, but the others need to be addressed. Councilman Braddock said City Council recently deferred an ordinance that would address the East Palmetto Street corridor in order to establish a comprehensive plan that addresses all corridors in unison. Councilman Braddock asked Mr. Osterman what the plan is for the funding to complete the comprehensive study and Mr. Osterman said there is currently no money budgeted to complete a corridor study. Mayor Ervin said the corridors are addressed in the City's Comprehensive Plan. The issue with the corridors is that properties go in and out of City and County. Partnership and collaboration between the City and County will be most beneficial for corridor improvements. Mayor Ervin said her recommendation is to take each corridor and look at them individually. Councilman Braddock spoke of zoning issues that occur along the West Palmetto corridor from Timmonsville due to the development that's occurring. Consistent zoning would be beneficial, because, as the zoning is now, a multitude of developments could occur.

Councilman Yarbough spoke of the East Palmetto corridor to Francis Marion and inquired on the current status to the study. Mayor Ervin there is a plan on how the zoning should occur and the City and County are working together to enact the plan.

Councilman Smith asked the County Council representatives if they had had any discussion or plans regarding the corridors. Councilman Yarborough said they have discussed the corridors from an economic standpoint and the first impression they make. He further said he would personally be in favor of zoning being applied along all the corridors. Councilman Yarborough spoke of the 76 Gateway Study and asked County Administrator, Kevin Yokim, if the study needed to be brought before County Council or if they are waiting for Planning Commission to make recommendation. Mr. Yokim replied the consultant has completed the first step in recommending what types of businesses and property can be in each zone. The consultants recently provided the County planning staff a proposed ordinance to prescribe zoning for each parcel. The proposal will go before Planning Commission first and will go before County Council for introduction at some point this fall. Due to the large number of parcels, the rezonings will go before Council in a series of ordinances.

Mayor Ervin clarified that the 76 Gateway Study to Francis Marion will add zoning to properties that have existing structures and will help clean up the appearance of the properties. They have an advantage with the West Palmetto corridor because it is largely undeveloped so they have the opportunity to get ahead and choose appropriate zonings.

Councilman Smith expressed his concerns with the North Irby Street corridor from TV Road and asked if any development has been considered since there is a lot of space available. Due to its proximity to I-95, this is a great space for industry. Councilman Yarborough said a large focus of the County has been industrial parks and there are four they are working on. He said he thinks



CITY/COUNTY CONFERENCE COMMITTEE MINUTES – AUGUST 10, 2023

this area will grow, but he did not know of any specific plans. Councilman Yarborough said he believes County Council understands the importance of zoning and will be glad to work on zoning along all the corridors.

Councilman Braddock commented on the timing of a study and spoke of some potential projects that have been discussed along the West Palmetto corridor. He said he doesn't believe the corridor will wait the 18-24 months necessary to complete a study. Councilman Schofield spoke of the trash along the I-95/I-20 corridor and said one of his main concerns in developing this corridor, along with the others, is the image and the first impression that is made. He does not want this corridor to end up like the I-95/I-20 corridor with a lot of trash and no one making claim to clean it up and he suggested that the City and County take turns cleaning. It is a moot point if the City and County don't focus on image and appearance along these corridors. Councilman Yarborough inquired on the cost to conduct a gateway study and Mr. Osterman said it is approximately \$100,000.

Mayor Ervin said the City and County will both move forward by looking at what can be done at the corridors and an update will be provided at the next Conference Committee meeting. Mr. Osterman made the point that many of the corridors involve state roads and the key player missing from this conversation is the state. He said it will be helpful if Council got the legislative delegation on board also.

INTENT STATEMENTS FOR TAX SALES

Mayor Ervin said an issue the City is experiencing with revitalizing the community is people, frequently from out of state, purchasing property at the tax sale and that property then declining. She asked the County to research adding an affidavit of intent to the tax sale properties, particularly residential properties located within the City. This will help people be more responsible for their properties and improve the appearance of the community. Councilman Schofield said there could be issues, as South Carolina is a property rights owner state, and anyone can purchase property and sit on it if they please. The City can enforce ordinances to keep the property maintained, but Councilman Schofield said he doesn't think they can force the property owners to develop. Mayor Ervin clarified that it is a letter of intent and compared it to the rental registry that applies to rental properties in the City. The rental registry requires that a representative of that property be within 50 miles of the property. There is currently nothing to hold the out of state people that purchase through the tax sale responsible for the property. There are multiple properties in the City that are neglected due to being purchased at the tax sale, and staff goes through rabbit holes when attempting to contact the owner. Mayor Ervin said tax sale properties are an issue and asked the County for help to come to a resolve.

Councilman Braddock inquired on the possibility of requiring the property owner to sign off that the City could buy the taxes and take control over the property. Mr. Davis said the City has purchased tax properties in the past but have run into various issues such as clearing a title, which can take years.



**CITY/COUNTY CONFERENCE COMMITTEE
MINUTES – AUGUST 10, 2023**

Councilman Yarborough said state law gives municipalities the ability to adopt an ordinance that the City can clean up unkempt property and levy the taxes for the cleanup. Mr. Davis said you can place a lien, but there is a ten-year window on the lien. Councilman Yarborough asked if it were possible to add a provision to the tax sale properties that they must be brought up to code when properties are purchased. Mr. Yokim said he believes that would require change to state code. Mayor Ervin thanked the County for looking into this.

FLORENCE CENTER PROPERTY DISCUSSION

Mayor Ervin said this request came about from the Florence Center Commission meeting. She spoke of the hill alongside the Florence Center and the hotels. A hotel removed some trees causing people walking from the hotels to take the shorter path down the hill. Recently, an individual fell down the hill and was injured. Mayor Ervin spoke of different ways it could be addressed either by fencing or greenery so people take the proper entrance as opposed to venturing down the hill. Councilman Schofield said he likes the idea of greenscape, but the root of the problem is that people want to take the short cut. He suggested putting in a pathway that could be as simple as a set of stairs with hedging that the Florence Center would then maintain. Councilman Yarborough asked if the hotel that cleared the vegetation owns the hill. Mr. Yokim said he has a map of the property line, and the hill is located on Florence Center property. Councilman Schofield asked if the hotel is required to maintain a buffer between the properties, to which Mr. Osterman replied they likely do. Mr. Osterman said there is enough of a slope on the hill that an ADA compliant winding pathway could probably be constructed to avoid steps all together. There was discussion on if the hotel removed the trees legally and Mr. Osterman said he would look into it.

WATER FEES

Councilman Yarborough said this agenda item was his request as he has heard the City has big plans. He spoke of the cost differences in water tap fees between City residents and County residents. At the cost of \$3,400, tapping into the City water system is over tasking to County residents and it makes it difficult for these individuals to use the utility. Councilman Yarborough said he is unsure of the best solution, but he believes the City and County will grow a lot faster if they can find a way to even out the tap fees. Councilman Braddock said he requested that the City do a study to see what could be done to adjust the tap fees. Mr. Osterman said if funding is required, then Council will have to request the study. Mr. Osterman said the City has reached out to their rate consultant to ask if they would look at the tap fees as well or will it require additional funding for the study, but they have not received that information back yet.

Councilman Braddock mentioned that Council is reviewing options to cover the cost of the bond and asked the County if they would be favorable to an adjustment in rates that would mitigate the cost of the tap. Councilman Braddock said there is a cost differential in tap fees between City and County residents to account for distance and maintenance. Councilman Yarborough used an example, saying the Florence County taxpayer is putting in a \$2,500,000 project off Olanta Highway, Deer Road and Oak Road – the Deer Road water project. He said the water is being funded by the County taxpayer and the Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA) grant, but the City



**CITY/COUNTY CONFERENCE COMMITTEE
MINUTES – AUGUST 10, 2023**

will still collect the \$3,400 tap fee. The tap fee is almost double that of the City and the cost can be out of reach for some. Councilman Schofield asked on the possibility of a reduced fee if the developer puts in the tap instead of the City. Mr. Davis said there is already a differential in City installed and owner installed.

Councilman Smith asked if the \$3,400 tap fee is due up front or if it can be added into their water bill and Mr. Osterman said there is a financing schedule available. Councilman Smith asked how the County would feel about making adjustments only to the residential water rates to mitigate the tap fees. Councilman Yarborough spoke of his concern with commercial tap fees in the County as well. Commercial buildings require two taps: a tap for regular water service as well as a sprinkler system tap. Commercial taps in the City are approximately \$3,000, depending on meter size, whereas in the County they are double at approximately \$6,000. Mr. Davis clarified the tap installation fees. An owner installed tap in the County is \$1,900 and \$3,400 if the City installs the tap.

Councilman Braddock said the focus is on the resident because the resident does not have an avenue to pass that cost off, whereas a business does. Councilman Schofield agreed that focusing on the resident is a first step. Water is a necessity and he used examples of the federal government making broadband accessible to everyone at the same price and the County providing EMS and fire services at the same fee county wide. Councilman Schofield said, in his opinion, everyone should be charged the exact same rate. He said the doughnut hole neighborhoods could be a starting point.

MAINTENANCE ISSUES

Councilman Yarborough said he placed this on the agenda due to the amount of recent water quality concerns. He asked how complaints are handled and processed. Mr. Osterman said Councilmembers are welcome to send any complaints they receive directly through him or through Mr. Yokim. Residents are asked to report their concerns to the water department. The City will go out to inspect the water. Many times, it is discovered the resident is on a dead-end line; in this instance they will be placed on a flushing schedule. The past few weeks, there has been a spike in complaints to the west part of Florence due to Alligator Road construction and contractors opening and closing valves and breaking water lines without informing the City.

ADJOURN

Without objection, the August 10, 2023 meeting of the City-County Conference Committee was adjourned at 9:35 a.m.

Mayor Teresa Myers Ervin
City-County Conference Committee Co-Chair

Councilman Jerry Yarborough, Jr.
City-County Conference Committee Co-Chair