

MINUTES
TUESDAY, JANUARY 16, 2024
WORK SESSION
4:00 P.M.

Colleton County Council
Lowcountry Regional Airport
537 Aviation Way
Walterboro, SC 29488

Present: Chairman Steven Murdaugh called the meeting to order with Council Members Dr. Joseph Flowers, Phillip Taylor, Bubba Trippe, and Scott Biering in attendance.

Others Included: Meagan Utsey, Sean Thornton, Kaela Brinson, Solicitor Duffie Stone, Johnny Stieglitz, Latosia Simmons, Clarence Wiggins, Barry McRoy, and Sabrina Johnson.

Councilman Bubba Trippe gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

New Business

A. Capital Projects Update

Mr. Stieglitz: stated, I am here to give you all an update on Capital Projects as a whole, as well as, some of the CPST projects.

- **Green Pond Fire Station:** We are currently interviewing and will submit a proposal for replacement of the fire station to the architects this week. Hopefully, by the end of the month we will have a contract awarded and be able to move forward.
- **Neyles Fire Station:** After talking with Chief McRoy today, I believe all is just about resolved.
 - Mr. Griffin: Stated, we will be doing a friendly condemnation on this that will be on the next agenda. There is a conservation easement on the property and the easiest way for us to get from under that was to do a friendly condemnation on that particular property.
 - Mr. Steiglitz: Stated, once all of that is complete we will begin the same IDC process and then go to work on the project.
- **Harrelson Building ADA/ New Entrance:** This project is about 70% complete with the interior portion moving forward.
- **Harrelson Building:** There is an IT project going on that is a separate project. This project is at the 40% mark. We are slowly renovating and moving office spaces in the building, as well as installing new security measures. The first security door has been installed by HR. This will isolate them as the general public does not need to access them. The same thing will be happening on the third floor to isolate the administration offices of Planning and Development. The Assessor's Office will also receive the same

door to isolate the administrative office. There will also be a security door at the beginning of the IT Department. This will limit the public and help secure the facility.

- **Green Pond Community Center:** This started off as a smaller project and some state funding was added to it due to the underground railway that came through this area. The state is land marking the Gullah-Geechee Trail. The interior framing, electrical, and HVAC is finishing up. They have also started the parking lot.
- **RPM Building Upfit for the Summer Feeding Program:** We are doing a final walk through this week with a punch list. The punch list does not normally take more than a week to complete. Summer Feeding should be able to occupy that building by the end of this month borrowing no big problems with the punch list.
*** Discussion was had on the Summer Feeding program.
- **Voter Registration:** The building at the corner of Bells Hwy and Jefferies is at the 60% mark. They will start with setting toilets and the flooring in the coming week. Angela Upchurch wanted it for the first round of voting in March. While it is close now, I can't promise that. It will be done for the general election in November. Everything will be housed in this building. There is also an isolated area with HVAC that will be county storage. There will also be drive-thru voting.
***Discussion of a reader board on the outside of the building was had.
- **Courthouse Window Replacement and Exterior Painting:** The project is out to bid and due back by this Thursday. I hope to have this to council on the next agenda for approval. This project is scheduled to take a year due to the contractors not being able to work in certain areas when court is in session. They are only allowed to pull out and put back what can be done in a day rather than pulling them all out and working on putting them back in.
- **CPST Projects:** We started with the Animal Control project. They selected an architect for us to negotiate with. In my opinion, and as of today Mr. Griffin concurs with me, we are unable to come to an equitable negotiated cost for the project with them. They were pretty extravagant in their request. Generally, the architects are running anywhere from 10-11% of the cost of construction. This company was at 17%. We are looking to go back through the process to see about getting a better price.
- **Emergency Operations Center:** We had the kick off meeting this past week. This one came back right at 10% cost of construction.
- **Recreation Pool:** I am in a holding pattern on this right now.
 - Mr Griffin: Stated, Council, I would like for you all to give us some feedback on where you would like to put this facility, out where the current recreation center is or in town. If this is going to go in town we need to start looking at sites.
 - Council discussed optional sites that would be located in town rather than at the current recreation center.
 - Mr. Steiglitz: Stated, that it is taking two years from start to finish on all projects right now.

Councilman Trippe requested Mr. Steiglitz to send updates on all projects through Mr. Griffin.

*****Further discussion was had on sites in town for the recreation pool. Council agreed that they would like to see available sites in town.**

- **Veterans Park:** I am on hold on this and waiting for a directive. There has been discussion with the Veterans Park and the Tuskegee Airman on a joint park. I just need a directive on this or if it is in a holding pattern.
 - Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, it is not in a holding pattern. The money that we have is to go to the Veterans Park. The location is going to be out here. The Tuskegee group, their side of it, is in a holding pattern. I believe as far as the Veterans are concerned, we are full steam ahead. If the Tuskegee group wants to come around then they can participate. If they do not want to come around, then there may not be anything that we can do.
 - Mr. Stieglitz: Stated, I will get with administration on the location and we will move forward.
- **Cottageville Park:** This is just generally on hold. It is the last one on the list. I have been trying to tackle some of the other stuff.
 - Mr.Griffin: Stated, we have a Legislative request to add a library there. That will take a little bit of time.
- **Coroner's Facility:** We are working with Administration on this. We have met with the Coroner and went through the same IDC process. We are supposed to have the architectural contract completed by Friday to have Administration sign. If you are facing the Sheriff's Office, it will be to the left hand side.
- **Smoaks/Johnsville Community Center:** I met with the Smoaks/ Johnsville Community Center board twice to go over the project. The second time we took a field trip to view the Neyles Community Center. I left it up to the board to send me a letter back to let me know that it was going to be fine and to let me know if they wanted to make any changes. My understanding is that the funding that was requested for the CPST was a duplicate or the same amount as the Neyles center. When that was submitted the engineer added additional funding to it because at that time it did not have enough for the architectural and engineering. The number used was just a construction number. Since the last meeting, the board wrote me a letter, as well, we copied several council members requesting that the facility look like the Green Pond facility. It is a bigger facility than Neyles. The Green Pond facility had an extra roughly \$400,000 that was given to them to expand that facility because of the Harriet Tubman underground railroad trailer. When that request came in, it shocked me because I do not have that funding. So, I need a directive on what we are going to do.
 - Councilman Taylor: Stated, let's invite them to our next meeting and have them come talk with us.
 - Mr. Griffin: Stated, that is fine. Right now for this year, that would have to be a Legislative request.
 - Mr. Steiglitz: Stated, the cost difference is around that \$400,000 mark.
 - Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, what you are saying is that when it was placed in the CPST it was placed to be designed like the Green Pond Facility?
 - Mr. Steiglitz: Stated, Neyles Facility.
 - Mr. Griffin: Stated, the Green Pond Facility was designed like the Green Pond Facility until we got the additional funding.
 - Mr. Steiglitz: Stated, it was their request to have it like the Green Pond Facility and I do not have the funding to cover that.

- Mr. Griffin: Stated, they could put in a Legislator request. We still have plenty of time to do that.
- Mr. Steiglitz: Stated, I did make them aware that the funding came in through Senator Matthews.

Councilman Taylor: Stated, I know you have been doing a lot of updates at the jail, but I know the Sheriff still wants a new jail at some point. I know we do not have the money anywhere, but what are we thinking?

Mr. Griffin: Stated, we have the MRB Group we just hired on IDC and they're doing a review of the facility now. They are going to be looking at two things: upgrading the facility to bring it up to standards of the Department of Corrections according to the letter Chairman Murdaugh received, and they are looking at an expansion operation to make it last another 10-15 years that is equitable. They were looking at funding that with the GO Bond.

Chairman Murdaugh: Asked, has there been any further discussion about the regional jail?

Mr. Griffin: Stated, we were doing really well and having a lot of meetings until the issues arose in Beaufort County. It is my understanding that they should have someone to fill the administrator position here soon as the interim is not interested in the position. Beaufort County is the driver, because they have the most money.

***Further conversation was had on the regional jail.

Chairman Murdaugh: Asked, we have talked about the spending side of these Capital Projects. Is the money coming in as expected?

Mr. Griffin: Stated, yes, we are doing very well.

Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, does anyone object to public questions?

(Mr. Wiggins is paraphrased due to the recorder not picking up his voice consistently.)

Mr. Wiggins: I do not know where the idea came from of building the Smoaks/Johnsville Community Center to the size of the Neyles Community Center. In a 10 miles radius, you are talking about 5,000 people. The size of the Neyles Community Center would not serve us well. The Neyles Center is smaller than our old building so, it would not be beneficial to the community. I was on the committee and I did not know it was designated to the size of Neyles.

Mr. Griffin: Stated, my understanding is that you all worked directly with the architect and the engineer. We were not inside that process.

Mr. Wiggins: Stated, Ross in Columbia told us to get with you all. He was supposed to come out there and meet with the trustees and he never did.

Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, we are going to have to look at that.

Councilman Taylor: Stated, let them come to the next meeting and meet with us.

Mr. Griffin: Stated, that is fine. My advice would be to put in a request through the Delegation.

B. Senior Tax Work Off Program

Councilman Taylor: Stated, several counties have an opportunity for seniors to do a work off program instead of them having so much on their taxes. Dorchester County did one and I would like us to have a conversation about that. If some of these individuals can come in and work off some of this tax debt, maybe that would provide some support for us on getting things done and give them an off on their side of things.

Councilman Trippe: Stated, the way I understood it was that the senior would pay the amount and then worked to be paid back for the amount that they paid in.

Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, this sounds like an internal program, not a state program, which is probably why they had to pay the amount first.

Councilman Taylor read aloud the below:

Dorchester County is currently accepting applications for the Senior Citizens Tax Work-Off Program through February 23, 2023. The Senior Citizen Tax Work-Off Program permits senior citizens the opportunity to trade valuable time and needed skills for government services in exchange for compensation equal to their County property tax obligations. Persons 60 years old (or older), that own property (in their name) in Dorchester County and reside at said property are eligible to apply.

Senior citizens are compensated at minimum wage (currently \$7.25 per hour) for the sum equal to that portion of their property tax bill designated for County Operating, County Debt and Capital Improvements. Participants will be placed in various departments throughout the County and receive a check after they complete the requisite number of hours calculated.

Councilman Taylor: Stated, the application is simple with an area where they would type out their skill sets, limitations, and days they can work.

Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, I am not opposed to it. I think we will just need to stay within the parameters of the law. There are lots of boxes to check to make sure we are in compliance.

Mr. Griffin: Asked, do you know how much it is being used in Dorchester?

Councilman Taylor: Stated, Jason told me it was being used, but I will have to get a definitive answer for you.

Councilman Biering: Asked, could you get some more details and information from Dorchester County?

C. GO Bond

Mr. Griffin: Stated, we plan to wait until the very end to see what else we need to cover. This would include the Voter Registration building, the Coroner's Office, and the jail upgrades. We

have 12 million dollars in GO capacity so, we should not have any trouble. This may include another project that we will discuss in executive session.

D. Lease Purchase

Mr. Griffin: Stated, when we went to the lease purchase with all the passenger vehicles, it really helped us a lot. Now, with the lease purchase for the heavy equipment, it would include your heavy haulers at the landfill, motograter, fire trucks, etc. You all will see these coming up, so I wanted to let you know ahead of time.

We will probably wait until the end of the budget year to do everything. We may have some projects that will need to be tacked on like the Ag Exposition Center, which is coming along well. We got an additional 1.1 million from the state and 2.4 million, that we feel pretty good about, coming from the USDA.

E. Confederate Monument

Councilman Taylor: Stated, on May 10th, the Council received an email from Mrs. Sabrina Johnson, who is seated here today. The email read:

Hello Colleton County Council Members:

“Today, May 10, 2023, Colleton County is observing Confederate Memorial Day.^[1] This is a request that you reconsider the county officially observing Confederate Memorial Day in the future. In 2019, The Associated Press reported that The State newspaper surveyed all 46 counties in South Carolina and Colleton County was 1 of 8 counties that closed in observance of the holiday and gave workers paid leave for the day each year.^[2] Given that not all counties officially observe this holiday, it seems as if this is not mandated by the state and each county has control of their own holiday schedule or calendar. Colleton County is choosing to observe Confederate Memorial Day. As council members, you have the power to change this. In addition, as a resident of Colleton County, I submit that the time has come for the removal of the Confederate monument at the Colleton County Courthouse located at [101 Hampton Street](#), in Walterboro, South Carolina.^[3] The monument undermines our core principles of liberty and justice for all. It is unconscionable that anyone going into the courthouse, a place promising equal justice for all, should be forced to do so under a shadow of injustice and suppression. Removing this Confederate monument is necessary to maintain public confidence in the judiciary system and to achieve the greater good of ensuring racial justice and equality. The Confederate monument prominently displayed in a place of honor on the south front lawn of Colleton County Courthouse provides a governmental embrace of racists and white supremacy views. The Confederate monument introduces the risk that impermissible factors such as unconscious or implicit biases, conscious prejudice, and sympathy for white supremacy views that violates the rights of people of color to a fair trial, an impartial jury, due process of the law, and equal protection of the law that’s provided under provisions of the South Carolina Constitution, and may impact decisions and actions inside the courthouse where fairness and justice for all is supposed to reign.

On June 16, 2020, at the Colleton County Council Special Virtual Meeting, Colleton County Council Members discussed the Confederate monument located in front of Colleton County Courthouse.^[4] Opinions of the Councilmen were given at the time about the monument, but no action was taken at the time, and I do not recall any other discussions or action taken regarding the community concerns and requests that the Confederate monument be moved.

I appeal that you outline and commit to a process for a timely and definitive removal of the Confederate monument from the grounds of the Colleton County Courthouse.

Lastly, I look forward to your response from each of you, as well as a response on the record. Thank you in advance for your consideration of these concerns and being of service to all citizens of Colleton County.

With kindest regards, I am

Sincerely,

Sabrina L.W. Johnson”

Councilman Taylor: Stated, I wanted us to have some conversation. I understand that I am the sole minority black person on this Council. I don't know how anyone can feel what I can feel. I am not indifferent toward, nor am I saying to destroy or demolish the Confederate Monument in any way. I am saying we can find a place, besides the front lawn of the Courthouse, for the Confederate Monument. We can also look at moving this holiday, and still give the staff the 12 days that they currently get. Most people around the country have gone to like a Good Friday. It is something that is non threatening to any groups, and it does not recognize any one person, instead of a confederate memorial day. Has anyone here heard of the Doctrine of Discovery? This issue has come up even most recently. The Doctrine of Discovery is being talked about in many circles across the United States, but most recently in Canada. When Columbus and those came, there were over 100 million indigenous people here in this continent already. It is already documented, so some counties have decided to do an Indigenous Day. It is something for us to have a conversation about. The Doctrine of Discovery gave Europeans the right to create freedom and slavery at the same time. The Christians that came over from Europe, I am not a history professor but how I understand it is, if they could determine that a person was not Christian, then they could do land takings and colonize and do all of those things. If you look up the Doctrine of Discovery, you can see how it was used. Matter of fact, President Lincoln met with a group of ministers and other black leaders prior to the emancipation proclamation, and basically told them we are not getting along the right way in this country with you being here so, why don't you organize and take your group back to Africa and we will help you resettle. That went through a couple of readings, but the Emancipation Proclamation was established. So, if you could determine that a person was property and not a person, you could sell them into slavery. These are scars that we face every day. People in the county have asked and we need to respond if we are going to do something or not do something. I am aware that there is a law in South Carolina about the Confederate Monument. I do not think it says we can not move it, because it has been moved several times. It is not in the original place that it was on the Courthouse grounds. When it was first installed, you could find it on the rear corner by the Novits Building, then it was moved to the Jeffries side. After the Courthouse was remodeled, it was moved to the front of the building in the center. If you go back to the Press and Standard, when it was placed there, it was brought from New York. The head person raising the money was from Charleston. Our state Senator came and spoke at the dedication. He stated that the justification for the Confederate Monument being in front of our Courthouse was the Egyptian pyramids standing in

Egypt. So, I don't know if there is any feeling to move the Confederate Memorial Holiday to Good Friday so that people can still get their holiday. I do not have any indifference towards the Sons and Daughters of the Confederacy, I have a lot of friends everywhere, but when you look at a building, like the Courthouse, that has to represent everyone, it is a huge scar and a slap in the face to people who were discriminated against and called slaves. They were called slaves. They weren't enslaved people, they were called slaves. I think we can do better. I think we have the moral compass to do better.

Councilman Biering: Stated, we have had emails and I have talked with Mrs. Johnson. As far as Confederate Memorial Day, I have no difference to that day. I did not know what it was when it came up originally. I had to look it up to see. I am up to discussion on that. I do have a hard time erasing or diminishing history in any way, shape, or form. I know you said it has been moved several times and we will have to explore the legal process to that and whether it can be moved now. The law did just change not too long ago. I am open to exploring our options with that. I do not know if this is something that council decides or if we have to put it to referendum. I am open to discussion and suggestions on how we look at that.

Councilman Tripp: Stated, I basically feel the same way. I also did not know when that holiday was, but I think Columbus Day is in October. As far as the monument, no matter who it is or was, I would be hard pressed to vote for any monument to be destroyed.

Councilman Taylor: Stated, I am not saying destroy. I am saying, move from this location to another.

Councilman Tripp: Stated, I am up for discussion on this.

Dr. Flowers: Stated, my grandfather fought in that war. I am against any movement to erase any history. When you start erasing history, history will repeat itself. You have got to remind yourself of where the history was. The reminder needs to be there all the time if you are not going to repeat history. When you start destroying history and you start destroying monuments, and try to change history to meet the current narrative, then we have a big problem in this country. I think this is where we are. If you start messing with history, then you start lying to ourselves, our children, and the community. So, I think we do need to have a conversation about where we are now, and why we are wanting to destroy history when we need that to remind ourselves of history.

Councilman Taylor: Stated, I want to be clear, I said, "Not destroy or diminish history in any way." I said, I have many friends from all walks of life.

Dr. Flowers: Stated, I know you said that, but when you start messing with monuments and stuff like that, which from a legal standpoint I don't think we can move it based on the law, but that is neither here nor there. When you start changing history or start trying to start changing history for whatever reason, then you repeat problems over and over again. Look at where the Israelis are right now. They were castigated and have been since biblical times as you well know. Slavery was in the bible as you well know. Let's look at history and not try to change history by moving monuments and stuff like that.

Councilman Taylor: Stated, when it was moved before we did not have a conversation, it was just moved.

Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, there are several different things going on here. Number one, and Dr. Flowers may have alluded to this, what can we do under the law? Let me address the holiday first and come back to the monument. My understanding of the County's holiday schedule is that we adopted the state holiday schedule. Now, the state may adopt Confederate Memorial Day as a holiday, that is not something that I know the answer to because I do not spend a lot of time on that.

Mr. Griffin: Stated, they do.

Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, if that is something that we wanted to change, then we can discuss that. My thought on having the same holiday schedule between the county and the state, is that when one agency is closed, the other agency would typically be closed. Since we work hand in hand, it makes sense that we have the same holiday schedule. Then the people at the state level make those decisions. I am not saying that it's right or wrong. Maybe the state shouldn't have that as a holiday. I thought we were just adopting the state holiday schedule. We didn't put in predetermined thought into the process that we want to be closed on Confederate Memorial Day in the years that I have been on Council. We simply followed the state holiday schedule. If we want to change that, that is fine, I am open to discussion.

As it relates to the monument, in Phillip's defense, number one, none of us can change history, that is a fact. We live in a world right now, and I am going to step on some toes when I say this, but I am going to say it, we are so divided, and I won't say why I think that, but most of you know why I think that. We have leaders that demonize people, just like this issue with immigration. Certainly we need to do something to control it, but guess what? Everyone in this room is an immigrant. All our families were immigrants, we did own America. Phillip is right, there were very few people that were indigenous to this country. I am from Scottish-Irish descent, none of us were from here. I am not saying that there aren't things that need to be done here, but we have got to stop demonizing people. As it relates to the monument, we are not going to change history. The Civil War happened and the confederacy existed. People have different opinions on why the war, but certainly one of the reasons we had the war was because of slavery and slavery ended, and that is a good thing. We can not change the fact that it existed. In fact, it existed for nearly 250 years. The year 1619 was when the first slaves came to America, and we didn't change until 1776. Even though Alexander Hamilton, George Washington, and all those guys had this great idea of forming the constitution and doing all these things, they didn't fix the problem for 250 years. Now, as to why the monument was put where it was, I have no idea because I was not on council then. I know it wasn't in the location that it is now. I wish it wasn't in the location that it is in now. It is in a horrible location and destroys the front few of the court house. Now, was it in a better location before they moved it? I don't know exactly where it was at or where it was moved the second time or the third time but, I'm not opposed to looking at that. If there's a place, whether we move it off the Courthouse ground, I'm not saying we should do that? I don't know if we can even move it from this current location under the law. We need to first check that, but we've got to stop, you know, just trying to demonize people because they have a different opinion than we have. We can't do that because, you know why, our leadership

doesn't reflect that. Until we start doing that, we're never gonna heal the divide of this thing. If we want to move it to a different location, let's discuss where we wanna move it to. Get it out from the front of the courthouse. I don't have a problem with that. That way maybe people don't have to walk right by when they go in. Everything everybody said is right, we're not gonna change history. Maybe the state law won't make us move. We don't know any of that. We got our own legal counsel, and I am an attorney but I can tell you I don't know what the act says, because that's just not an act that I look at, and probably neither is our council. But if we want to relocate or do something so that we can at least show some effort that we're compassionate to the other opinion. I'm not opposed to that, but it certainly can't be destroyed. Maybe we don't want to move it from the grounds completely. Let's look at the history of where it was, and let's look at the history of why it's moved because, I don't know that history. We can figure it out as far as the holidays are concerned. Like I said, I just simply thought we adopted the state holiday schedule because it made the most sense. I don't think we can be criticized for, or have someone trying to claim we're not being sensitive to somebody's thoughts, that's just the decision we made because both agencies work hand in hand. They are open and closed on the same days. Maybe we need to have that conversation with our state legislatures, let them change that holiday. That's just my opinion of it, and the only thing I would say is that we could ask our administrator to give us a history of the monument, its location, its movements, and when all that occurred. Maybe try to come up with some consensus from there, but we're not going to resolve it tonight. I can tell you that.

Councilman Taylor: Stated, I just want to have a conversation.

Councilman Biering: Stated, I want to say I concur. So, I jumped right in first being one of the youngest members so, you never know how that's going to go. Not just the youngest member, but one of the shortest term members. Last year I was highly impressed with this council's unanimous vote to fully fund a life size replica P 51 to honor the Tuskegee Airman. That is something we're showing solidarity, we're showing that we value our history, we value all members of our Community, and all the history of our community. I am okay with discussing the monument, its locations and history of it. I love to see all that. I can tell you this, you have a council here that if you bring something up of somebody with significance from this community that was a part of this community's past, we'll work hand in hand with you to honor those of all backgrounds and all religions. We're here for that. I mean that's why I think we bring ourselves together by working hand in hand for the Tuskegee. I was very humbled to see the dedication for this and all the people that were out here. That is a very big part of our history. There's so many people of greatness with all backgrounds in this community. I'm looking forward to discussing something with somebody right now about the first African American doctor that was in this community. I don't know whether he actually was or not, we have to get some history on that. I'm a hundred percent for honoring all people of this community so, I'm open for that conversation. I look forward to hearing what we come up with.

F. Columbus Day

*****Please see this discussed under "Confederate Monument".**

G. Public Comment Rules

Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, I have never held my position as Chairman of County Council any more important than anyone else on this Council. All I frankly do is “herd the cats”. I don't have any more responsibility than anybody else, but I do have the responsibility and control of public comments. The way I control it is probably different from the way anybody else would control it. You know we all control things differently. One thing we've done over the years to address public comments is that we put a time limit. Doc remembers there were times when people would talk the whole hour of public comment, then when I would come to the meeting, we had to put some restrictions on it. There were some suggestions made about an egg timer, but I don't want to be one to enforce the egg timer. Maybe the next chairman can bring the egg timer. I think when you put an egg timer up there, you automatically offend the citizens. We try to enforce the three minute rule, and for the most part, most people adhere within that time frame. Now the issue that we have is that citizens will come and talk about the same issue over and over and over again and again and again. Now, part of the reason that they say that they do that is because we don't ever do anything to resolve their issue. Maybe there is some truth to that. If it's an issue we can't resolve, we need to tell them we can't resolve it. So, that they're not going to keep coming. We can't put lights up for example because we don't have the authority to do that. Only the co-ops and other people, but maybe the issue is communication rather than us controlling public comments. I don't have a problem with the same person coming up. It does get frustrating when this same person comes up and talks about the same things. So, if there are issues with public comments, I need to hear the input back from you all. I think if they come up with a new subject, they obviously should be allowed to talk. I'm a big believer in open government. The best thing you can do is let people get up and air their agreements sometimes, because then they feel like, number one, they're part of the process because they are, we represent them. I want to hear some input on what we should do as far as public comments. We try to adhere to three minutes, but if you all have some suggestion about how to curtail or limit public comments I'm all ears.

Councilman Trippe: Stated, I didn't really see anything wrong with how we have been running it. Mrs. Johnson came a few times, almost every time, but I kind of got to where I looked forward to her coming. We were trying to help her.

Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, let me say this so that we can dispel that notion. I know you're new on council, sometimes for a reason. It might be because they don't like the way we're doing things, so don't be hesitant to share your idea just because you're new to council. We're all citizens of the public. We serve the public and you're in that seat because the people put you there. Certainly we need to try to speak to the citizen or respond to the citizen so they don't keep addressing the same issue, but as far as the timing, I haven't seen where that's been excessive.

Councilman Taylor: Stated, I think the timing and all of it has been good. Now as a councilman, if I bring an issue to the floor, I can bring it one time and it is voted up or down. In the case with Mrs. Johnson, I only use Mrs. Johnson as an example because this was a case, I've been to Mrs. Johnson's house several times. There's scratch marks on my wife's car to prove it. I went to her house, I knew where she lived and when she moved there. I know where she lived before she moved there. I know the people in that community. I have family in that community. So, I know a little bit about the community, but I talked to Mrs. Johnson several times. I go to her house, sit

down and talk with her about how to get in touch with DOT. I said, let's talk to DOT about a traffic light, traffic patterns, and try to get a person here to talk about a light. There is a light in her front yard that she didn't pay for. The lights at my church that she referenced at our meeting, we paid for them to be installed and we pay the bill for them. Again, I talked with the sheriff, sent people over, talked with Mrs. Hazel, and she's mad that I talked to Mrs. Hazel to try to negotiate with her to get some things done. Scott went over there several times to talk with her. There is a lot of conversation and communication which you talk about going. I am saying maybe we could limit it. If it's a new issue, bring the new issue, but if we're working on the issue for you, it's a business meeting, it's not a circus. We're not as strict as the city. The city says you can only talk about things that's on their agenda. We don't do that. You can come talk about what you want to talk about. Now, there was one other issue that came up, and it wasn't really from me. The staff didn't feel that they should be held accountable to read somebody else's comments when it's posted online. So, how do we do that? Do we take those online comments and post them on a screen for the public to see? Now, in one case I read the comments. I got them on the phone and said, "I'm gonna read your comments". Someone could say anything in their submitted comment, and, the staff are saying, it is not right to make them read something that may be offensive to them. So, that was just a conversation. I wasn't in charge of the whole public comment issue.

Mr. Griffin: Stated, we got some more information from the state Attorney General's office on that. I'm talking about that specific issue of online comments. It puts our staff in a bad place. I mean, Mrs. Johnson's comments were fine. It just generally puts our staff in a bad spot. Whether it's me reading it or them reading it, they said that you only have to accept online comments if it's a COVID or a disaster related situation, meaning it's only online and there is no one there in person. Otherwise, you do not have to take comments online. We can still broadcast the meeting online and they can watch it online. However, if you want to make comments, you need to come to that meeting and do it face to face.

Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, that is what we have adopted now, correct?

Mr. Griffin: Stated, yes, that is the state's stance, and that's pretty much what everybody in the association of counties is doing.

Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, I am okay with that. We can broadcast, in other words, and they can receive, they just can't input and I'm okay with that.. You know COVID caused all of us to have to do some unusual things we have never done. I think having the meetings broadcasted is a good idea, and not taking the comments, we've already seen that to be a fiasco. However, broadcasting it is good. We ought to be trying to get as many people as we can to engage in the government process.

Councilman Biering: Stated, I defer to you as to how you handle the meetings. Mrs. Felicia Johnson coming up and speaking, I know it is repetitive but I think we just helped her with one of her big problems. I think she's very gracious for that. I don't have any problem with people getting up and speaking. I mean it's a short period of time. It hasn't gotten out of hand. We don't have three, four, five people doing it to the point that it is holding the meeting up forever. So, I will entertain a conversation on that, but my personal feelings are that it hasn't got to the point

where it belabors the meeting so I don't have a big issue with that. I do know most of the stuff she brings up is DOT and otherwise. I'm still working with her and I think we're making some headway on that, so maybe we can educate and help her with those items. As far as online comments and reading them aloud, I think there's no place for that. I deal with that in my business on a daily basis, people get to go online, not saying those things have come up recently, but they get to say things without repercussions, without having to look somebody in the face, and that's a recipe for us to have a disaster. Now, as far as participating in the live streaming, 100%, everybody needs to see what we're doing. Total transparency. If it is important enough to put on public record, it's important enough to show up.

Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, we've done a lot over the years to streamline the meeting. When I was first elected, we used to meet on Monday night and Tuesday night. The Monday night meeting was our committee meeting, the committees that we're all assigned to. We met on Monday night, and all five of us were sitting on the bench, but each committee chairman would call their particular committee to adjourn and the public had no idea what was going on. We were discussing it and we're coming back on Tuesday night and voting on the same things discussing it again, because two members on the committee couldn't participate in the discussion, so the next night we all talked about it. It made no sense, so we just decided to go to one meeting. We probably should use the committees occasionally more than we do to talk about items.

Council Time

Councilman Trippe: Stated, I want to thank Councilman Flowers, Chairman Murdaugh and Councilman Taylor for helping Scott and I. We've been here about a year and you all have helped us, Meagan and Kaela, Kevin. We asked a lot of questions and are still asking a lot of questions but we thank you for putting up with us. We have to ask questions because that's how we find things out. I thank you all for that.

Councilman Biering: On that note, I know you said we used to have a meeting on Monday night and then Tuesday night. Monday night was pretty much not necessary, but do we need to schedule more of these work sessions or another informational meeting so we can work through some of these items in a more complete way, in my opinion, and can we do that or what are your suggestions on that?

Chairman Murdaugh: Stated, if there is an issue that needs to go before your committee, then you as the chairman of that committee don't need my permission. I would like to know, maybe call me and say, Chairman, I'm going to ask my committee to meet. Then we coordinate it to Kevin, but if there's a topic you feel like needs to go before your committee, by all means, call your committee together. Call your committee together, meet and discuss those items, and then you can report it back to us at the next Council meeting. I like the workshops, personally, I don't think we need to do them every month, maybe not even every quarter, but a couple of times a year I think would be helpful. It keeps us up to speed and we kind of keep our focus on things that we want to accomplish in the short term, and then maybe have some farther out in the long term. So, maybe an even more detailed work session, like a full day, where we can really get into some nuts and bolts on some topics. That is a lot of work for the staff and they will need time to prepare for that.

Dr. Flowers moved to go into executive session to discuss the following: Real Estate–Emergency Operations Center, Old Post office, Charter School, and Pool Project, Contractual–Public Works, Economic Development Update, and Solar Farm FILOT. Councilman Biering seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Executive Session

- a. Real Estate
 - 1. Emergency Operations Center
 - 2. Old Post Office
 - 3. Charter School
 - 4. Pool Project
- b. Contractual – Public Works
- c. Economic Development Update
- d. Solar Farm FILOT

Councilman Taylor moved to exit executive session. Councilman Trippe seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously.

Adjournment

Dr. Flowers moved to adjourn the meeting, Councilman Biering seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously.

This 6th day of February 2024.



Steven D. Murdaugh, Chairman

ATTEST:



Kaela Brinson, Clerk to Council