



**COLLETON COUNTY COUNCIL  
SPECIAL MEETING  
June 25, 2025, at 5:30pm**

**Minutes**

Chairman Scott Biering called the meeting to order with Council Members Steve Murdaugh, Phillip Taylor, Bubba Trippe, and Johnny Frank in attendance.

Others Included: Thomas Higgs, Meagan Utsey, Jon Carpenter, Barry McRoy, David Greene, Ceth Utsey, Ed Williams, Lynn Stroble, Sharon Witkin, Spencer Witkin, Charles Murdaugh, Glenn Nixon, Jessica Williams, Linda Hyman, Heather Spade

Councilman Taylor gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Councilman Frank made a motion to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded by Councilman Murdaugh and the motion carries unanimously.

**Public Hearing**

Councilman Trippe made a motion to open Public Hearing. Councilman Murdaugh seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

- a) Ordinance 25-O-05, To Provide for the Levy of Taxes in Colleton County, South Carolina, for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026 to Provide for All Other Appropriations Thereof; and to Provide for Other Matters Related Thereto.

Councilman Biering asked if anyone present would like to address Ordinance 25-O-05, To Provide for the Levy of Taxes in Colleton County, South Carolina, for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026 to Provide for All Other Appropriations Thereof; and to Provide for Other Matters Related Thereto.

Mr. Ed Williams addressed Council during public hearing to advocate for increased support for the school board, emphasizing the critical financial situation and the need for local funding to supplement state funds for classified staff and overall needs. Requesting that Council ensure adequate funding for the school district in the upcoming tax levy.

No other comments were heard.

Councilman Taylor made a motion to close Public Hearing. Councilman Trippe seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

After public comment, the Council then moved to the 3<sup>rd</sup> reading of Ordinance 25-O-05, To Provide for the Levy of Taxes in Colleton County, South Carolina, for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026 to Provide for All Other Appropriations Thereof; and to Provide for Other Matters Related Thereto. Councilman Trippe made a motion to approve. The motion was seconded by Councilman Frank; motion opened for discussion.

Councilman Murdaugh brought up several points regarding the ordinance before discussing funding, including a potential unnecessary property transfer in Section 21, the outdated travel reimbursement rate in Section 9F, the election commissioner stipends in Section 9 and a typo in Section 11B regarding cremation fees. The County Administrator noted that the travel reimbursement rate could be addressed in the personnel handbook review. Councilman Murdaugh informed Council of his proposed amendments to the budget ordinance, including increasing the school district millage from two to three and redirecting the police academy funding to the solicitor's office. Councilman Murdaugh explained the rationale for redirecting funding for the solicitor's office, highlighting the high caseload per attorney and the importance of effective prosecution for public safety based on concerns raised at a recent community meeting on gun violence and crime. Councilman Murdaugh clarified that the requested funds would support attorneys prosecuting cases in Colleton County. Councilman Murdaugh provided context regarding the school district's millage, stating that it has been underfunded for years, similar to the county's current financial situation. Councilman Murdaugh compared Colleton County's school operating mill rate to eight bordering counties, noting that Colleton County has the lowest mill rate in the region. However, Councilman Murdaugh explained that millage rate alone is not a sufficient indicator due to varying property values per mill. Councilman Murdaugh also calculated the local investment per student, showing that Colleton County's taxpayers invest less per student compared to most neighboring counties, ranking second to last in a seven-county comparison excluding Charleston and Dorchester which were considered outliers. Councilman Murdaugh stressed the importance of adequate school funding for attracting industries and ensuring workforce readiness, noting that industries consider a County's investment in its school system. Councilman Murdaugh concluded that Colleton County School District is significantly underfunded and emphasized that the requested 3mil increase for the school be the same as the County's operating millage.

Councilman Taylor made a proposal of 3mil increase for the School District and a suggested 4mil increase for the County. Concerns were raised about the impact on taxpayers, although the Finance Director clarified that a 1mil increase would have a minimal impact on residential property taxes. Councilman Taylor also advised looking into adding fiscal autonomy to the ballots.

Councilman Biering gave an alternative proposal, advising that he wants to show that the County and School District are working together. Investing in the law enforcement program could be used to provide more than 3mil of funding to the School District, with the aim of demonstrating collaboration and investing in public safety and workforce training. Councilman Biering also raised a concern that increasing funding for the solicitor's office would necessitate a proportional increase for the public defender's office. Councilman Murdaugh argued against this, stating that the solicitor's office has the responsibility to prosecute every case, unlike the public defender's office which handles only cases for indigent defendants.

Councilman Taylor initiated a discussion about the School District's funding request, specifically regarding the 3mil and the potential law enforcement project. Councilman Taylor questioned the logic of prioritizing the law enforcement project when the districts lead official requested the full 3mil instead.

Council asked the Colleton County Superintendent Ms. Jessica Williams to approach for clarification. Ms. Williams said while the board consensus favored a law enforcement class, they would prefer the millage increase to have recurring funds. Ms. Williams also highlighted the district's significant budget cuts and on-going deficit, emphasizing the need for the full 3mil.

Councilman Trippe withdrew his original motion and made a motion to amend his motion for 3mil for the School District and 2mil for the County with no funding going to the law enforcement program or the solicitor's office. No second on the table, motion opened for discussion.

County Administrator advised that if the County goes to 2mil then the County is still back at square one. Transferring more money out of the reserve fund to then balance the budget from where the County was last year.

Councilman Taylor advised that based on discussion his impression was the panel was at 3/3. 3mil for the County and 3mil for the School District.

Councilman Trippe withdrew his third motion and made a motion to amend his motion for 3mil for the School District and 3mil for the County with no funding going to the Law enforcement or solicitors' office. Councilman Frank seconded the motion; motion opened for discussion.

Councilman Murdaugh advised if Council is not approving the law enforcement program for the School District than to use those funds to give to the solicitors' office. County Administrator advised that those funds were not formulated in the budget, that a request would have to be made by Council and then a resolution would have to be completed and approved.

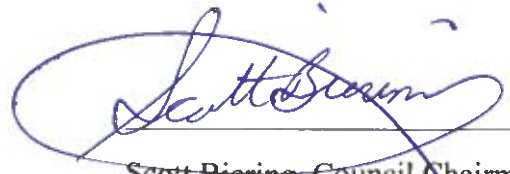
Councilman Trippe made a forth motion to amend his motion for 3mil for the School District and 3mil for the County with no funding going to the Law enforcement or solicitors' office. Councilman Trippe also made a motion to adopt all recommended changes to Ordinance 25-O-05, To Provide for the Levy of Taxes in Colleton County, South Carolina, for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026 to Provide for All Other Appropriations Thereof; and to Provide for Other Matters Related Thereto. The motion was seconded by Councilman Frank, motion was voted four to five.

### **Adjournment**

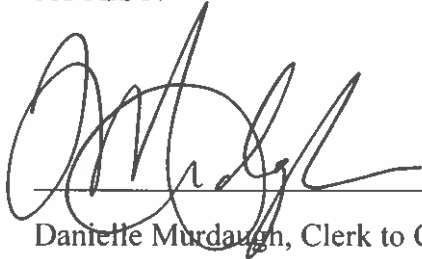
Councilman Frank moved to adjourn the meeting. Councilman Murdaugh seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

[Signature Page to Follow]

This 25<sup>th</sup> day of June 2025

  
Scott Biering, Council Chairman

ATTEST:

  
Danielle Murdaugh, Clerk to Council