



**COLLETON COUNTY COUNCIL
BUDGET WORK SESSION MINUTES
May 29 2025, at 9:00am**

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

Others Included: Meagan Utsey, Jon Carpenter, Thomas Higgs, Barry McRoy, David Greene, Marty Stallings, Sharon Witken

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

Councilman Trippe made a motion to amend the agenda to add an Executive Session item that is Personnel. The motion was seconded by Councilman Frank. The motion was carried unanimously.

Budget Discussion

County Administrator Thomas Higgs opened the discussion on what the proposal would be for the upcoming FY2026.

The County Administrator Thomas Higgs explained the following to Council along with the County Deputy Administrator Meagan Utsey and Finance Director Jon Carpenter regarding the upcoming budget year. There has been an immense amount of work completed over the several months to get the budget where it needs to be, and to find a solution moving forward into the new fiscal year. Over time the County has been plugging and playing with the budget, taking money out of the unrestricted fund balance to balance the general fund, which is fine. However, it has led to not necessarily a deficit, but a move in direction, which needs to pivot and start moving in another direction. The County needs to refund the reserve balance, as we are living in an inflationary market, so to help with this a 15% cut across the board in operational costs is being implemented for the upcoming fiscal year. Most departments met this requirement at the end of the year, so this will not be a huge undertaking for those departments. However, some departments will find this a little more challenging. All the department directors and elected officials were counseled on the changes that need to be implemented for the upcoming year to keep the County in the black. Also relayed to Council was for fiscal year 25-26 the County will implement the freezing of all unfilled head count positions that currently budgeted for one fiscal year, as well as trimming any new hire positions that were proposed in the current years budget proposal. This would not include the public safety services (Fire-Recue, Sheriff's Office, Detention Center and Coroner). Thomas advised that current debts and currently occupied buildings that the County owns will be evaluated and brought forward to the Council once evaluation is completed on those areas to see what changes need to take place to help benefit the County. Thomas explained that historically looking back at the budget, millage over the past several years has not increased to

keep up with the pace in inflation, so a 3mil increase is being proposed for the County. For the School District a suggestion was put on the table for a 2mil increase and giving them operating expenditure to fully fund their Law Enforcement Pilot Program, which would be a direct benefit back to the community.

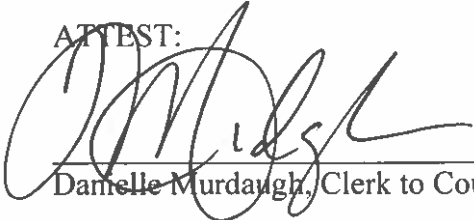
Discussion was held by Council, and no action was taken.

Adjournment

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

This 29th day of May 2025.

ATTEST:



Danielle Murdaugh, Clerk to Council



Scott Biering, Chairman