

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, agendas for the following meeting were mailed to all members of Council, County Attorney Richard Ness, Lower Savannah COG, *The Bamberg Leader*, *The Times and Democrat*, SouthernCarolina Regional Alliance, Bamberg County Library, Bamberg County Website, Bamberg County Courthouse Annex and a copy posted on the bulletin board in the main hallway of the County Courthouse.

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In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bamberg County Council met 6:00 p.m., March 7, 2022 in Council Chambers with limited seating for the public alongside livestreaming of the meeting provided for public view. **Present:** Chairman Spencer Donaldson, Councilwoman Sharon Hammond, Councilmen Evert Comer, Jr., Clint Carter, Phil Myers, Jr. and Dr. Jonathan Goodman, II. **Absent:** Councilman Larry Haynes. **Others Present:** Joey R. Preston, T.M. Thomas, Richard Ness, Alice Johnson, Gina Smith, Chip Maier, Donald Kirby, Sh’Kur Francis, Miriam Beard, Sue Clayton, Kenneth Bamberg, Dr. Ronnie Hopkins, Leticia Dowling, Dwaine Smiley, Rosa Verner, Kay Clary, Booker Patrick, Gary Bailey and Will Walls.

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Bamberg County Council meeting was called to order by Chairman Larry Haynes at 6:00 p.m. Invocation was rendered by Councilman Evert Comer, Jr., followed with the pledge of allegiance repeated in unison.

On motion by Councilwoman Hammond, seconded by Councilman Comer, council approved the minutes from the January 10, 2022 and February 7, 2022 meetings with necessary corrections should there be any.

On motion by Councilman Comer, seconded by Councilwoman Hammond, the agenda was approved as submitted.

Voorhees President Dr. Ronnie Hopkins began his presentation by thanking the council for recognizing and selecting Voorhees College as ambassadors for Bamberg County. Dr. Hopkins proceeded to say they have totally initiated its first graduate program for the institution. Also, Voorhees will soon begin an operation of solar unit panels and the provision of organic farms on the 300 acres of property encompassing the institution. The timber that’s on the property will be harvested and the vacant land will be utilized to fulfill the plans for the organic farms and the solar panels. At the end of the presentation Dr. Hopkins announced that he has a vision to moving Voorhees to the next level of excellence and is expecting to the college will officially become a university (Voorhees University) on April 7, and he will be inaugurated as the 10<sup>th</sup> president on April 8 and an invitation was given to council to attend. The council wished Dr. Hopkins well and thanked him for his attendance at the meeting.

CPA’s Gary Bailey and Will Walls from accounting firm Love Bailey and Associates reported on Fiscal Year 2021 audit for Bamberg County. Again, Bamberg County has received an unmodified opinion for fiscal year 2021. Mr. Bailey pointed out that there were two significant deficiencies and they were in the magistrates’ and clerk of court’s offices both offices dealt with premature reconciliation of funds. The county finance staff assisted by preparing an annual summary of activity for each of the magistrates’ accounts and also reconciled the bank statements at the end of the year. The chief magistrate has worked to clear some of the overages and the county is continuing to help resolve the concern. The clerk of court’s office is reconciling accounts on a monthly basis with the county finance staff providing support as needed. Mr. Bailey continued by noting the county’s total assets came in at \$34,184,010 and total liabilities at \$23,448,255. The general fund reported a fund balance of \$5,056,692, an increase from the 2020 fiscal year of \$1,774,960. Bamberg County Controller Gina Smith gave highpoints of the audit and further stated that the county demonstrated good fiscal stewardship. Several positive points were mentioned, one being the county gaining \$1,436,113 in capital assets during the 2021 fiscal year. The council expressed gratitude to the gentlemen for their audit presentation.

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**COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS:**

**Southern Carolina Alliance - Monthly Report**

No representative was present to give the monthly report for Southern Carolina Alliance. This agenda item will be placed on the April agenda.

**Bamberg County Treasurer - Monthly Report**

Bamberg County Treasurer Alice Johnson reported for the month of January. The county had \$2,828,232.66 in income and the expenditures were \$878,223.06, leaving a positive balance of \$1,950,009.64. After adding the negative bank balance at the end of December (\$434,779.55), the county's regular account was a positive balance of \$1,515,230.09. Treasurer Johnson's report was accepted as information.

**Bamberg County Finance - Monthly Report**

Finance Director T.M. Thomas reported the general fund had year-to-date revenues of \$6,019,576, at the end of January. Expenditures stood at \$4,537,818, for a positive general fund balance of \$1,481,758. This report was received as information.

**Bamberg County Administrator – Monthly Report**

Administrator Preston gave way to Sheriff Kenneth Bamberg to come forward and address the council. Sheriff Bamberg thanked council and the administrator for their support and allowing them to do their job. Appreciation was extended to the staff of his office and all other departments who help move the county forward. Sheriff Bamberg ended his remarks by stating when we work together, we can accomplish more with the limited resources that we have. Council thanked Sheriff Bamberg for all they do for Bamberg County.

Administrator Preston reported on the COVID-19 figures for the county. Bamberg County has reported that 66 percent of Bamberg County residents have had at least one COVID-19 vaccination, and 56 percent have had their second vaccine. Children ages 5 to 11 are now eligible to receive the Pfizer vaccine. Booster shots are also permitted and recommended for those 12 and older. It was announced to save the date Tuesday, March 22 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. for dedication of Tobul Field at the Bamberg County Airport. You can register by logging in at <https://bambergair.com.com/>. The South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff is conducting a broadband internet survey to gather information from citizens on their desire to obtain residential high-speed broadband. All were encouraged to fill out the survey at: <https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/a79de0eacc1f48098d03f1a33a707670>. Palmetto Rural Telephone will be working on phase one installation from March 14 through April 29. Phase two installation is scheduled to run from December through April 2023. Also reported was the county received \$12,645 in Palmetto Pride grant funds. Several community litter cleanups will be planned in the near future. Administrator Preston reminded county that Bamberg County will be 125 in December. Groundbreaking will be held within the next sixty days for the new fire department in Denmark. Road improvements to Lazy Lane and Salty Road are scheduled to begin in September (approved by the C-Fund Committee).

Administrator Preston's report was received as information.

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On motion by Councilwoman Hammond, seconded by Dr. Goodman, council approved and ratified a proclamation to recognize and commend Denmark Technical College for the transformative impact the institution has made on the lives of legions of students, alumni and the Bamberg County community as they celebrate their semi-sesquicentennial (75 Year) Anniversary and to designate the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) as an official Bamberg County Ambassador.

On motion by Councilwoman Hammond, seconded by Dr. Goodman, council approved and ratified a proclamation honoring Voorhees College in Bamberg County upon the celebration of its transition to

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University status and to designate the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) as an official Bamberg County Ambassador.

On motion by Councilman Myers, seconded by Councilman Haynes, council approved a proposed resolution authorizing Rural Utilities/USDA Broadband grant funding.

**Calendar of Events:**

On motion by Councilman Carter, seconded by Councilman Myers, council approved the calendar of events as submitted.

On motion by Councilman Carter, seconded by Councilman Myers, council approved the appointment of Ms. Margaret B. Meyer to the Bamberg County Office on Aging Board as a representative from council district #4.

Chairman Donaldson called for public comments. County resident and Bamberg County Concerned Citizens chairperson Sue Clayton was present and shared several concerns: **1)** Requested transparency; **2)** Conservation of the budget; and **3)** Reduction of debt. Also, shared comments from Ms. Miriam Beard were heard: **1)** County held back by those not wanting to advance; **2)** Inquiring about the next c-fund meeting; and **3)** Payment installment plan for taxes.

During comments from council, the following statements were pointed out: **1)** thanks to the staff for their hard work; **2)** requested that all stay safe and continue wearing their masks; **3)** reminded everyone to complete the Broadband survey; and **4)** thanks to all in attendance.

There being no further business for discussion, on motion by Councilman Carter, seconded by Councilwoman Hammond, council voted to adjourn at 8:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rose R. Shepherd. Clerk to Council