

MINUTES OF BAMBERG COUNTY COUNCIL VIRTUAL MEETING - June 29, 2020

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 Advertiser-Herald*, *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.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bamberg County Council met 6:00 p.m., June 29, 2020 in various locations within the Bamberg County Courthouse Annex and some participated by way of teleconference. The public joined the meeting by various means of technology. **Present:** Chairwoman Sharon Hammond, Reverend Isaiah Odom, Councilmen Kerry Trent Kinard, Evert Comer, Jr., Larry Haynes, Clint Carter and Joe Guess, Jr. **Others Present:** Joey R. Preston, T.M. Thomas, Richard Ness, Adam Ness, Gina Smith, Mary Tilton, Chip Maier, Ruthie Brown, William Molnar, Bridget Kinard, Harold Shepherd, Dionne Gleaton, Bill Johnson, Ken Ahlin, Chasity and Walt Inabinet.

Bamberg County Council Virtual meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Sharon Hammond at 6:00 p.m., followed with a moment of silence in memory of those that loss the battle to COVID-19 and to the ones that are trying to recover and overcome the virus. Invocation was rendered by Councilman Evert Comer, Jr., followed with the pledge of allegiance by Councilman Joe Guess, Jr.

On motion by Rev. Odom, seconded by Councilman Guess, council approved the agenda as submitted Those voting in favor of the motion were: Councilmen Kinard – Dist. 1; Haynes - Dist. 3; Guess – Dist. 4; Odom – Dist. 5; Comer – Dist. 6 and Chairwoman Hammond – Dist. 2. Councilman Carter – Dist. 7 was absent during the vote.

On motion by Councilman Guess, seconded by Councilman Kinard, council approved the recommendation for approval of the award of recreation funds for FY 2019-2020 as proposed by the Bamberg County Recreation Committee. There were 21 approved applications with 19 of the groups being awarded \$682.89 and the other 2 groups awarded \$425.00 and 600.00 (these 2 groups only requested \$25.00 and \$600.00). Total awarded was \$13,999.91 out of the allotted \$14,000.00. Those voting in favor of the motion were: Councilmen Kinard – Dist. 1; Haynes - Dist. 3; Guess – Dist. 4; Odom – Dist. 5; Comer – Dist. 6 and Chairwoman Hammond – Dist. 2. Councilman Carter – Dist. 7 not present during the vote. Councilman Kinard was concerned about the number of grants that were awarded to the same people.

At this time, Chairwoman Hammond called for public comments on an ordinance to adopt the operating and capital budgets of Bamberg County for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2020 and ending June 30, 2021, and to make appropriations for such Bamberg County budgets for county ordinary purposes for which the county may levy a tax; to provide for the levy of taxes on all taxable personal and real estate properties in Bamberg County for such county ordinary purposes, including sufficient tax to pay the principal and interest on outstanding indebtedness of Bamberg County maturing during said fiscal year; and to provide for other matters relating to Bamberg County and Bamberg County budgetary matters. At this time, comments were read as submitted from Bamberg resident Ken Ahlin (comments attached to the June 29, 2020 minutes). Mr. Ahlin was concerned about the present meeting not being held in the Bamberg Civic Center for more space and public participation. There were no other comments from the public.

On motion by Rev. Odom, seconded by Councilman Haynes, council gave third and final reading to an ordinance to adopt the operating and capital budgets of Bamberg County for the fiscal year beginning

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July 1, 2020 and ending June 30, 2021, and to make appropriations for such Bamberg County budgets for county ordinary purposes for which the county may levy a tax; to provide for the levy of taxes on all taxable personal and real estate properties in Bamberg County for such county ordinary purposes, including sufficient tax to pay the principal and interest on outstanding indebtedness of Bamberg County maturing during said fiscal year; and to provide for other matters relating to Bamberg County and Bamberg County budgetary matters. The proposed budget total amounted to \$26,802,595 for Fiscal Year 2020-2019 with no tax increase. Those voting in favor of the budget were: Councilmen Kinard – Dist. 1; Haynes - Dist. 3; Guess – Dist. 4; Odom – Dist. 5; Comer – Dist. 6. Those voting against the budget were: Councilman Carter – Dist. 7 and Chairwoman Hammond – Dist. 2. Councilman Carter said he opposed because there needed to have been some cuts, but he was not sure where. Councilwoman Hammond agreed with Councilman Carter and she added that she would like to have seen an itemized list of personnel broken down per person and not grouped together. Councilman Kinard made another motion to amend the budget to delete the \$68,000 allocated for council salary and travel expenses from the budget. No second was made. When asked, about parliamentary procedure for pursuing the motion, County Attorney Ness said that that's the way we do it and we are not doing it. Councilman Kinard further stated that it was not right that his motion was not voted on and he vowed to take the matter to the Ethics Commission for clarity on the motion. Councilman Kinard said again that his vote is yes for the budget. Controller Smith said that last year substantial cuts were made and every year is unique. The Council requested a budget with no increases. There are still some unknowns in the FY 2020-2021 budget. Hopefully we will get money back from the COVID-19 CARES Act. After a lengthy discussion, the council went back to their initial motion to accept the FY 2020-2021 budget. Administrator Preston said, "There is some confusion out there or just a lack of understanding that people are saying we're increasing the budget by \$1.8 million, therefore there must be a hidden tax increase. That's not true." The county is participating in USDA Rural Development's Community Connect Grant Program to expand broadband access to underserved rural areas. "There is no county money going into this. What we did is budget the amount of money that we would receive from the Department of Commerce and what would have to be paid through a revenue bond, which would be the people that sign up for it. There's no county tax money that goes into it at all. At the time that we were working on the budget, that was the grant that we applied for to make sure that we could get broadband" in the Rivers Bridge and Hunter's Chapel area. Administrator Preston said, "County council has directed us to try to get broadband in the community, and this is the way you have to account for it." Councilman Carter wanted to know why was Treasurer Johnson's department being picked on and why was Accounts Receivable dropped in her lap. With the question being asked what is the value of a mill, the response was \$29,086.

Administrator Preston informed council that he talked with Senator Brad Hutto and Representative Justin Bamberg concerning the CARES Act money, in respect to COVID-19, expenses incurred from March 1 – December 2020. As soon they tell us how to make application for it, we are ready to go.

At this time, Chairwoman Hammond called for comments from council. Comments were made that we go back to doing the budget the way it was done in the past (line item by line item). Administrator Preston, Controller Smith and the staff were thanked for their work on the budget. It was asked if we were going to adopt a policy regarding the wearing of masks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There being no further business for discussion, on motion by Councilman Haynes, seconded by Reverend Odom, council adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rose R. Shepherd, CCC