



COLUMBIA CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2020

CALL TO ORDER

The Columbia City Council conducted a virtual meeting on Friday, March 20, 2020 at City Hall, 1737 Main Street, Columbia, South Carolina 29201. The Honorable Mayor Stephen K. Benjamin called the meeting to order at 2:18 p.m. and the following members of Council were present: The Honorable Sam Davis, The Honorable Tameika Isaac Devine, The Honorable Howard E. Duvall, Jr., The Honorable Mayor Pro-Tempore Edward H. McDowell, Jr., The Honorable Daniel J. Rickenmann, and The Honorable William Brennan. Also present were Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager and Ms. Erika D. Moore Hammond, City Clerk. This meeting was advertised in accordance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act.

INVOCATION

The Honorable Mayor Pro Tem Edward H. McDowell, Jr. offered the invocation.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Upon a motion made by Mr. Davis and seconded by Mr. Rickenmann, Council voted unanimously to adopt the agenda, subject to adding the discussion of a Letter to General Assembly.

CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION / ACTION

1. A Resilient Columbia: Economic Sustainability Plan - The Honorable Mayor Stephen K. Benjamin – *Approved*

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager said we tried to create a baseline regarding what we know to be possible impacts of COVID-19 on small businesses and non-profits across the city while also including the impacts to us internally, to the city's budget, and to the ability to provide a seamless delivery of public services in response to this emergency. Within the plan there is an specific focus on the sustainability and stability of small businesses and non-profits.

Councilor Rickenmann asked for clarification on the meaning of non-profit for this discussion.

Mayor Benjamin said we are talking about those crucial service providers that provide essential community infrastructure that becomes incredibly important in times like this. It is important to know that this plan is a living document and we expect to be meeting regularly to continue modifying the plan.



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Ms. Missy Caughman, Budget and Program Management Director said we anticipate a decline on business license revenues. The general fund is where we fund our primary operations like water, police, fire, parks and recreation, public works, courts, and central administration. The main areas we expect to be impacted are the hospitality tax, tourism development fees, and accommodations tax. All three of these funding sources are critical to the city and community. We have specific areas of concern raised by City Council and staff regarding gaps and assistance for small businesses and non-profit service providers. Our hospitality organizations are not able to carry events that would have produce operational income and covered expenses. We have contacted those groups and provided options for them to either carry forward or get reimbursed for expenses they have incurred. These unprecedented events have placed an additional burden on limited public safety resources. We have continued to deliver our services to customers by telecommuting and allowing customers to interact with us on a self-service basis through on-line services. It is very critical to have the technology we need to keep providing services. We have proposed a transfer from water and sewer non-operating revenues to the general fund in the amount of \$6 million.

Mr. Jeffery Palen, Assistant City Manager Chief Financial Officer said non-operating revenues are the revenues that come in through the water and sewer system in addition to budget interest earnings and other rental income. This year we hit budget at \$3.9 million for investment interest earnings. We anticipate about \$6 million in interest earnings this year and that is the source of the recommendation we are making today.

Ms. Missy Caughman, Budget and Program Management Director said the recommendations we have are: establish a small business and non-profit stabilization package in the amount of \$2 million; reduce the hospitality tax transfer to the general fund by suspension of the last three months of the transfer for a total amount of \$925,000 to help ensure continuation of existing allocations and reserve for future losses; provide funding for CPD recruitment and retention plan needed to strengthen the city's ability to respond in emergencies in the amount of \$2 million; provide funding for additional public safety initiatives (Fire, 911, and Emergency Management) to respond in emergencies and for information technology enhancements for on-line services in the amount of \$1 million; waive penalties for hospitality tax and tourism development fee collected through June 2020; and waive fees for on-line credit card payments.

Councilor Devine asked if the city will not have a fee at all for people to pay on-line or will the city need to recoup that fee somewhere else.



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Ms. Missy Caughman, Budget and Program Management Director said we are charged the fee and we will waive the fee and absorb it. The deadline for business license payments is extended to May 15, 2020. We are bagging parking meters near restaurants for quick access for to-go orders. We have established a new economic development website for small business resources and developed a survey to help identify the needs of small businesses. We have been working closely with United Way to coordinate homeless service providers in the Midlands for adults and families including a list produced daily that includes resources, sheltering information, medical services, and other needs. DHEC is providing sheltering for folks that need to be quarantined or isolated and are taking care of their needs.

Councilor Devine asked if there is not a better way to streamline services to families than going through the United Way and instead working directly with Homeless No More or the family shelter to make sure families don't have lag time in getting services.

Ms. Missy Caughman, Budget and Program Management Director said Homeless No More is leading the coordination of the families directly.

Councilor Devine asked how does a family experiencing homelessness contact United Way or Homeless No More.

Ms. Missy Caughman, Budget and Program Management Director said Richland County libraries are putting information together, but we can find out more information on how to help provide families with direct links.

Ms. Missy Gentry, Assistant City Manager for Development said Federal House Bill 6201 has passed. It targets businesses with 500 or fewer employees. It is a payroll credit for required paid sick leave and a credit for sick leave for self-employed individuals. There is also pending legislation for 500 or more employees. We participated through the Office of Business Opportunities (OBO) in the SBA webinar on Economic Injury Disaster Loan. We are pleased to say that South Carolina has been added to the disaster area. We have released a business survey through OBO and so far we have 684 responses. We have listed all the websites and have made all information available to the public. As the results come in, we will consolidate all of the results and report on what we are getting back. We are also pushing social media initiatives and highlighting businesses that are open and operating. We are encouraging consideration of rent relief for small businesses, but that is not something we can mandate. We have talked to a lot of property owners and management companies and we will continue to track that. We have 37 businesses that have commercial loans with the City of Columbia and we have come up with



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options to either defer loan payment for a 3-month period and add it at the end of the loan or make interest only payments for 6 months. We are in the very beginning stages of that process but we recognize that any assistance we can provide will be beneficial. We have proposed three program recommendations, starting with establishing the COLA Loan-Loss Revenue Fund (LLRF) in the amount of \$1 million. This will allow us to leverage our million dollars with private banks and CDFI's to secure some additional funds that can be used for small business loans. Our funds will be used as a 10% backstop in the event that the loan recipients are not able to pay the full amount. This will be a collaboration between the City and local private financial institutions. The second recommendation is to establish a small business forgivable loan program specific to this disaster. We will use \$500,000 to dispense and it would be a zero interest forgivable loan for small businesses in the city limits with under one hundred employees. Online applications will be accepted. The businesses will need to have the ability to demonstrate negative impact on the business because of COVID-19. Recommended areas of assistance are lease and mortgage assistance, utility assistance, vendor supplier payments, and others. The third recommendation is to establish a grant program for non-profit service providers. That is intended for providers who are helping the most vulnerable community with needs specific to the disaster. We are requesting \$500,000 for the non-profit service providers. We will allow staff to work with partner agencies to leverage funds while balancing turnaround time for support.

Mayor Benjamin said we need to urge the Governor, Speaker of the House, and the President of the Senate to preserve the \$1.8 million surplus so that we can meet the needs of the state for this fiscal year and the next. We need to make sure we all sign the letter. We need to formally approve the Senior Resources request for \$250,000. We have great assurance that the county is going to match that request and private funding as well with a strong urge from us that they engage with our local businesses in procuring the food and needs for our seniors. My recommendation is to have this in addition to the \$500,000. We need to make sure our non-profit partners in both public and private sector comply with clear requirements that ensure the dollars that are spent are handled in a responsible manner.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Duvall and seconded by Mr. McDowell, Council voted unanimously to approve the Resilient Columbia: Economic Sustainability Plan as outlined in the summary of recommendations presented to Council and with the following amendments: increase the water and sewer fund transfer to \$6,250,000; earmark \$250,000 for Senior Resources; ask staff to come back with guidelines and recommendations for implementation of the plan; and to submit letters to the Governor, the Senate President, and the Speaker of the House urging them to preserve the \$1.8 million surplus.



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ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion made by Mr. Duvall and seconded by Mr. McDowell, Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 3:53 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Erika D. Moore, CMC
City Clerk