



COLUMBIA CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2020

The Columbia City Council conducted a virtual meeting on Thursday, March 26, 2020 at City Hall, 1737 Main Street, Columbia, South Carolina 29201. The Honorable Mayor Stephen K. Benjamin called the meeting to order at 2:14 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 Mayor Benjamin and seconded by Mr. Davis, Council voted unanimously to adopt the agenda, subject to adding Ordinance No.: 2020-034 An Emergency Order Declaring a Stay Home Stay Safe for the City of Columbia, South Carolina.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Upon a motion made by Mr. Duvall and seconded by Ms. Devine, Council voted unanimously to enter into **Executive Session** at 2:18 p.m. for the discussion of **Item 1** as outlined.

1. Receipt of legal advice related to matters covered by attorney-client privilege pursuant to S.C. Code §30-4-70(a)(2)

Coronavirus Update

Upon a motion made by Mr. Duvall and seconded by Mr. Davis, Council voted unanimously to adjourn the Executive Session and reconvene the meeting at 3:20 p.m.



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EMERGENCY ORDINANCE

2. Ordinance No.: 2020-034 An Emergency Order Declaring a Stay Home Stay Safe

Mayor Benjamin said the vast majority of our citizens are doing everything they possibly can, but some are not. We need to make a decision in the interest of a long-term public health concern. We need to do anything we can to flatten the curve and ensure health care resources are there for the public long-term. This ordinance will be available online on the City's website. The public can read it in its totality and look at the list of essential services referenced. We are working with the Police Department and they have been compassionate in trying to make sure three or more people aren't gathered. We are all adhering to social distancing norms.

Councilor Rickenmann said I think our community has done a tremendous job and most of the businesses are closed. It seems like the people who are required to stay home don't deal directly with the public for the most part. The people who are hurting from this are the working people. What are we trying to accomplish from this, because we are not prohibiting anybody from going anywhere or doing anything other than dining in. We have covered everything in this ordinance and we are getting ready to add more businesses. I think we need to be encouraging people to stay home and make sure the folks who are at high risk are voluntarily self-quarantined. To just say stay at home but have all kinds of businesses open is not going to flatten the curve. I think this is drastic and small businesses are already suffering.

Mayor Benjamin said the list of essential services comes from a list articulated by the Homeland Security Administration. Some services have been added to meet our economic infrastructure. I do agree this will allow a significant part of our community to stay at work and allow the continuation of services we need. The purpose here is to push and force a cultural shift in the way we operate and to encourage people to stay at home and stay safe. We need to try and reinforce the efforts of DHEC to get good data to make more informed decisions. We are going to encourage more testing here in the city. We need to put the preservation of human life at the top of our agenda. I had a call from a state legislator yesterday regarding three dozen young people having a party in his neighborhood and having to call CPD to respond to it. There was another gathering of young people on Main Street yesterday. Those are just two examples in the past 24 hours.



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Councilor Devine said my biggest concern is our medical facilities. We don't want to be in a situation where we could have taken action now that can slow down running out of equipment or having to make decisions of who gets medical treatment or who doesn't. I am hearing some concerns with places that don't have high numbers yet. There are lot of people who are voluntarily staying home but since it is not mandatory most folks are not.

Councilor Brennan said the next 14 days in the Midlands is very important for public health. I believe that layering in law enforcement is important. I think there is frustration with everybody. I want us to focus on pushing the law enforcement side of this and making sure we are following the guidelines put by the state.

Councilor Duvall said we have to be as hard as we can against this disease so we come out on the other end with a healthy population that can take advantage of the federal release to get back in operation sometime quickly.

Councilor Rickenmann said we are not changing how people interact anywhere. We have every possible industry in the essential services list. The businesses that we are concerned with are closed. My main concern is we are going to shut down other businesses that have less contact with people. What we need to do is thank the people who are doing the right thing and for those folks who continue to break the ordinance allow the police to get involved. According to the police chief we have not had that many incidents. What is the stay at home order really doing that we are not doing now? A lot of people are being let go because there is no business for them. We are going to lose a lot of businesses throughout this. We need to understand the long-term consequences.

Councilor Davis said I don't mind having further discussion about what is considered essential and what is not. Everything is not essential. If everything is, then we don't need the ordinance.

Councilor Devine said there are businesses that are not essential that are not listed here. I think we have balanced the concern that have been raised about businesses and closing businesses that we know our citizens will need access to. I know businesses that are open right now. People are going to them and they are crowded. They should be shut down to help us stop the spread of the virus. I have talked to people at hospitals and the numbers are rising. If the numbers continue to go up, we will see an overwhelm of our healthcare system.



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Councilor Rickenmann said this isn't about capital, this is about peoples' lives and businesses. This is not just affecting businesses and owners, but everything that is connected to it. There is a dentist office today that laid off 45 people. We all can have different opinions but this is about peoples' lives.

Mayor Benjamin said yes, this is about lives and livelihoods. If we get ahead of this and do the right thing based on what every single legitimate professional in the world and epidemiological studies tell us we should do, we need to be doing it right now so we can save lives. We don't have the time and luxury to wait.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Duvall and seconded by Mr. Davis, Council voted [6 to 1] to give first reading approval to Ordinance No.: 2020-034 - An Emergency Order Declaring a Stay Home Stay Safe. Mr. Brennan, Mr. McDowell, Mr. Duvall, Ms. Devine, Mr. Davis, and Mayor Benjamin voted aye. Mr. Rickenmann voted nay.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mayor Benjamin and the members of City Council reviewed and responded to public comments that were submitted online and via email. For more information refer to this video link: https://youtu.be/4VvQeej_Tl0

CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Mayor Benjamin said we need to move forward with an effective date of the stay at home ordinance. I recommend 12:01 a.m. Sunday morning to give people time to adjust. That is the effective date in the draft. I am speaking with the press today to make sure folks are getting information. Staff is pulling together a FAQ list that will be available online and we will also have a designated phone line for people to call and ask questions.

Mr. Clint Shealy, Assistant City Manager of Columbia Water said we believe it will be appropriate to use the (803) 545-3300 Customer Care line.

3. A Resilient Columbia: Small Business and Non-Profit Stabilization Package - Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Assistant City Manager for Operations, Ms. Missy Caughman, Budget and Program Management Director, Ms. Melissa Lindler, Office of Business Opportunities Director, and Mr. Ryan Coleman, Economic Development Director



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Ms. Melissa Lindler, Office of Business Opportunities Director said we continue to put the Small Business package in place. We are updating our website on a constant basis and we are using the City of Columbia website and social media to share information in a timely matter. We are taking calls from small business owners and the Economic Development Office met with and received feedback from the business associations in regards to their concerns. We have 1,245 survey responses. We are bagging parking meters for easier restaurant take-out access and we are eliminating parking meter enforcement. In regards to our commercial revolving fund, we have received numerous calls requesting modifications. We are processing those but we are still in accordance with our federal guidelines for those funds. Council approved \$1.5 million for the Small Business Stabilization Forgivable loan program (SBSF) and our loan revenue fund. We have developed preliminary draft criteria and an application for the SBSF loan program. We will put the survey responses on the website on Friday after we get all the responses in. We have been in contact with our partners from SBA, SBDC, University of South Carolina, and others who are providing services to our small business community. We are proposing up to \$10,000 to provide immediate relief for a two to four-week period for a two-year term with 50% of the original loan forgiven annually at the anniversary of the origination of the loan. Eligible applicants would include businesses that have been in existence for at least a year; businesses with a physical establishment within the corporate limits of the City of Columbia; businesses with 100 or less employees; and businesses with documented losses due to COVID-19. All businesses must agree to provide requested financial information. Priority will be given to businesses with 50 or less employees demonstrating losses of 50% or more in revenue; businesses with plans for recovery; businesses who exhibit commitment to retaining their employees as long as possible; businesses that need working capital to support expenses from the ordinary course of business; and businesses unable to access capital through alternative sources. A number of things are going to be covered for small businesses through our traditional SBA 7a program. This program will help to provide assistance to businesses that do not qualify for traditional loans and do not have lines of credit with financial institutions. We will be doing a webinar next week through ZOOM for people that are interested in the loan program. We will record it and play it on our websites and social media. We are requesting from Council an increase in the SBSF loan program from \$500,000 to \$1 million based on the feedback from the small business community has given us and based on what we have heard individually and from our partners. This increase will result in a reduction to the Loan Loss Reserve Fund (LLRF) from \$1 million to \$500,000; therefore, not showing any kind of increase in the overall program. If this is approved today, we can release the program criteria and start accepting applications immediately. If everything goes well, we can start sending award notifications along with loan documentation and issue checks beginning the week of April 6, 2020. We will report to Council bi-weekly regarding the applications received and dollars awarded.



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Councilor Devine asked how are we making the determination in regards to the criteria of access to alternative sources.

Ms. Melissa Lindler, Office of Business Opportunities Director said we have a specific question in the application that asks what sources have they applied for and if they received a response. A lot of the possible applicants have just submitted the SBA's application which opened up last Friday. There is also additional money coming down through this third new bill that the federal government will approve tomorrow that will add additional money to our SBA 7a traditional program. Those loans are going to businesses that have a relationship already with banks. It is going to be easier for those businesses to access funds quicker because of that relationship. We are looking at businesses who don't have lines of credit. Also, SBA will help us verify information. In regards to the reduction of LLRF and the increase of the SBSF fund, we are still able to get funds to those borrowers that do not qualify through traditional banks. I will suggest that we work with all interested institutions to encourage placement of funds into a CDFI. If Council is okay with focusing on our CDFI's, we can get the letters out and do a video conference about the program to see if there is interest.

Mayor Benjamin said let's shorten the timelines as much as possible, provide any information needed for Council to help constituents access this funds, and be clear in our communications.

Ms. Missy Caughman, Budget and Program Management Director said we have established a grant program for non-profit service providers in the amount of \$500,000. We are targeting non-profit agencies that provide services/supplies to our most vulnerable population to include seniors, high risk, and underserved communities. We have been working with our partners in the community and have come together in a coalition to coordinate our relief efforts with the United Way of the Midlands and the Central Carolina Community Foundation. We are also reaching out to neighboring jurisdictions for participation and to broaden our response. We will have a unified online grant application to eliminate grant duplication and to increase grant impact. We recommend funding in two phases: phase one to non-profits providing direct and immediate COVID-19 support to vulnerable populations and phase two to non-profits in need of operational support as a result of COVID-19 impacts. Phase one or phase two will be open for 501(c)3 non-profits located within city limits. We are also suggesting a grant cap of \$10,000 with the ability to apply for additional support. Organizations will be asked to provide project proposals, identify other sources sought or received, and report a minimum type of assistance being provided, number of individuals served, and any partnerships. We are looking to have the phase one online grant application available no later than April 1, 2020. Phase two is to be determined and in line with other coalition partners.



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Upon a motion made by Mayor Benjamin and seconded by Mr. Duvall, Council voted unanimously to approve the A Resilient Columbia: Small Business and Non-Profit Stabilization Package as presented.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion made by Mr. Davis and seconded by Mr. McDowell, Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 5:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Erika D. Moore, CMC
City Clerk