

**CITY OF COLUMBIA  
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL CALLED MEETING MINUTES  
JULY 30, 2008 – 9:00 AM  
CITY HALL – 2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR  
1737 MAIN STREET**



The Columbia City Council held a Special Called Meeting on Wednesday, July 30, 2008 at City Hall, 1737 Main Street, Columbia, South Carolina. The Honorable Mayor Robert D. Coble called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. The following members of Council were present: The Honorable E.W. Cromartie, II, The Honorable Sam Davis, The Honorable Daniel J. Rickenmann and The Honorable Belinda F. Gergel. The following members of Council joined the meeting via teleconference: The Honorable Tameika Isaac Devine and The Honorable Kirkman Finlay III. Also present were Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager and Ms. Erika D. Salley, City Clerk.

**CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION / ACTION**

A. Discussion of Funding for the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority

Mayor Coble explained that he requested this meeting so that Council could get a legal briefing on the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) and the current status of funding for the transit system. He said that the Council also needed to know what the various options are. We were counting on the referendum for the November election to fund a number of things; apparently that is not going to happen, because Richland County Council voted not to do it.

Dr. Caroline Whitson, Chair of the Richland County Transportation Study Committee briefed Council on the ramifications of Richland County Council's decision to vote down the proposed one cent sales tax referendum on the third reading; therefore the referendum will not be on the November ballot. She has two major concerns to share with the Council. The first concern is that the bus system has to keep running, because the economy of our city depends upon that. She tried to get people to understand that economic times will worsen if our bus system fails. It will be dramatically reduced from it's already barely minimum operating status or it will in fact fail to function. The second concern is related to that; we will come up with a short-term way to keep it funded at a minimum level and that will make it seem to go away. She said that the current system is significantly under funded and it only covers 65% of the population that is transit dependent. The plan had called for an expansion of services. The study revealed that the system is difficult to navigate; the signs are inadequate; and there is a lot that needs to be done to the transit stops. The committee believed that if you never ride the bus in your life, you still need this system to transport the employees that provide the various services we depend on. She urged the Council to be energetic and articulate to the fact that a short-term solution would be a band-aid on a very large wound. Our city is suffering from congestion, poor air quality and the lack of infrastructure for those that ride bicycles. She urged the Council to do what they can now and to remember that we have to address the larger problem if we are going to be the city that we know we can be.

Mr. Robert Liming, Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority Board Member said that he is here as a citizen, Chairman of a group of bipartisan citizens that represent a cross section of the community called Save Our Buses Taskforce, a CMRTA Board Member and a member of the Richland County Transportation Study Committee. He said that we are in a perfect storm, but there is also the opportunity for every elected official, business leader and citizen to come together to solve this problem. It is a crisis that impacts every citizen to include the wealthy and the neediest in our community. He reported that the combined budgets of the City of Columbia, Richland County and the cities that make up the CMRTA equal over a billion dollars in assets. He said that we can find the money somewhere.

Dr. Caroline Whitson, Chair of the Richland County Transportation Study Committee added that thirty-eight (38) people spoke at the public hearing held by Richland County Council on second reading and there was overwhelming support for going forward with the referendum. The Chamber of Commerce was also there in great numbers to strongly support it.

Councilor Rickenmann said that we are here today, because we want to come up with a solution and it is going to be a band-aid to start with, but we must make plans for long-term funding. He inquired about the response from other governments in regards to being a part of a truly regional transit system. How do we have a free transit system like Pickens County? We are currently under serving.

Councilor Davis said that he read the reports and it doesn't shift the balance to one particular area or entity; it was a job well done. He said that it's not just about the wheels rolling on the buses, but you have to look at the entire infrastructure. We need to look at providing shelters and seating at bus stops. It's about the system, the people and the economy. He is hopeful that Richland County Council will revisit the issue soon since it is within their purview to do so and the options are limited.

Councilor Finlay asked if the chances of getting the referendum on the November ballot are slim at best.

Mayor Coble said that is a fair statement, because Richland County Council has already voted.

Councilor Cromartie said that the City of Columbia started looking at a dedicated tax fifteen (15) years ago. They went to look at other bus systems and found out that the only way we could fund a successful bus system was through a dedicated tax. Every major city in America and every foreign country in the world has an outstanding bus system. He referred to it as an economic "no-brainer". He said that we should have let the voters decide on the referendum.

Councilor Gergel stated that there is overwhelming support within Council District III to move forward with a great transit system.

Upon motion by Mayor Coble, seconded by Mr. Rickenmann, Council voted unanimously to go into Executive Session at 9:23 a.m. for the receipt of legal advice related to a matter covered by attorney-client privilege.

- Council adjourned the Executive Session discussion at 10:26 a.m.
- Council reconvened the Special Called Meeting at 10:42 a.m. Ms. Devine was present at this time.

Mayor Coble stated that the Council received legal advice and a legal briefing on the various options and tried to put together some ideas on how the City of Columbia should move forward with Richland County. He spoke to Richland County Council Chair Joe MacEachern after the Executive Session and explained to him what the city wanted to do.

Upon motion by Mayor Coble, seconded by Mr. Cromartie, Council voted unanimously on the following motion. Mr. Finlay was not present for the vote.

1. The City of Columbia believes that a permanent funding source for the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority ("CMRTA" or "RTA") is essential to provide bus service; whereas bus service is essential for those who rely on it for doctor appointments, jobs and other necessities in life; it is essential for economic development in our community and it is critical to the community, city and county becoming a green community, city and county; we agree with the County Council

members that ending the bus service is simply not an option.

2. Ask the Richland County Council for a Joint City- County meeting for establishing an interim funding solution for the RTA, in conjunction with the motion passed yesterday at the RTA board meeting to have a committee study this matter.
3. Ask and encourage County Council to vote for a referendum for a sales tax as soon as possible, as the only permanent solution. If this is not possible for 2008, then the next General Election would be 2010, realizing that the only permanent solution for a bus system as described by Dr. Whitson is a permanent funding source of a sales tax.
4. Ask staff to explore legal and financial options for funding sources available to the City of Columbia for any interim solution.

Mayor Coble asked all City Council members to contact members of the Richland County Council in an effort to reach out and ensure that we are on the same page to work together to get the interim funding approved and to work toward a permanent funding solution.

- **Council adjourned the meeting at 10:46 a.m.**

Respectfully submitted by,

Erika D. Salley  
City Clerk