

**CITY OF COLUMBIA  
CITY COUNCIL BUDGET WORK SESSION MINUTES  
MAY 12, 2008 - 9:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M.  
EAU CLAIRE PRINT BUILDING – 3901 ENSOR AVENUE**



The Columbia City Council conducted a Work Session on Monday, May 12, 2008 at 9:00 a.m. at the Eau Claire Print Building located at 3901 Ensor Avenue, Columbia, South Carolina 29204. The Honorable Mayor Robert D. Coble called the meeting to order at 9:24 a.m. The following members of Council were present: The Honorable E.W. Cromartie, II, The Honorable Anne M. Sinclair, The Honorable Tameika Isaac Devine, The Honorable Daniel J. Rickenmann and The Honorable Kirkman Finlay III. The Honorable Sam Davis arrived at 9:39 a.m. Also present were Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager and Ms. Erika D. Salley, City Clerk.

**CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION / ACTION**

1. Melrose Tank Structural Evaluation – Mr. Joey Jaco, City Engineer

Mr. Joey Jaco, City Engineer reported that the dome structure has failed on the Melrose Tank and that the tank is offline. It is an important part of the system that needs to be put back into service as soon as possible. He noted that it was the first elevated tank built in the City of Columbia in the mid 1920's. It is an old style structure with rusted and corroded trusses which has caused the dome to collapse. There is funding within the Capital Improvements Program to replace the tank, but the existing tank will be refurbished and staff will consider replacing it within the next 20 years. For now, additional columns will be erected within the tank, the repairs will be made and the tank will be placed back into service in June 2008. He noted that additional repairs will be made during the fall and winter while demands are down. The cost of initial tank stabilization and putting it back into service is estimated at \$620,000.00. Staff did consider replacing the original dome structure with an aluminum structure, but it was not a viable option due to limited access to the site.

Councilor Sinclair asked if the tank could be moved.

Mr. Joey Jaco, City Engineer stated that access to the site is very limited and that would not be an option.

Councilor Sinclair asked if staff is confident that the tank will be as good as new upon completion of the repairs.

Mr. Joey Jaco, City Engineer stated that the repaired tank would not be as good as new, but it will operate as well as a new tank. A new tank would cost \$4.4 million and it costs less than \$1.5 million to renovate the existing tank. It is a two (2) year process to implement new tanks.

Councilor Sinclair asked if the city will do a proactive public relations effort so that residents will know what to expect.

Mr. Joey Jaco, City Engineer said that as part of this contract, the local residents will be notified about what's going on. He noted that the residents are watching the site and asking questions.

Councilor Finlay asked what our plans are for tackling the construction issues.

Councilor Sinclair believes that the tank should be placed somewhere else.

Mr. John Dooley, Director of the Utilities and Engineering Department stated that this is something they have been talking about, but they had had not planned for the repairs. Additional real estate is needed around the tank for a staging area for the construction of a new tank. He noted that the construction time on elevated tanks is about 18 months and that there are problems with the delivery of steel.

Councilor Finlay asked how much more land is needed.

Mr. John Dooley, Director of the Utilities and Engineering Department stated that one fourth of an acre is needed.

Councilor Finlay wants to make sure we are not putting a band aid on this system, because we keep bumping our heads on tanks and capacity. He doesn't want to spend \$1.5 million on a short-term repair that costs half as much as fixing it for 50 years.

Mr. John Dooley, Director of the Utilities and Engineering Department stated that the short-term repair is something we don't have an option on at this point.

Councilor Devine asked what the challenges are with keeping the tank off line.

Mr. Joey Jaco, City Engineer stated that the residents may see a higher water pressure so there is no concern there, but there may be challenges in controlling the system at the Canal Water Plant. He does not predict any shortages of water and if we move quickly there will not be any concerns, except the cost of repairs. He noted that the future long term repairs should cost the same amount as the initial evaluation and stabilization.

Upon motion by Ms. Sinclair, seconded by Ms. Devine, Council voted unanimously to approve the Melrose Tank Structural Evaluation and Stabilization Project, as requested by the Utilities and Engineering Department. Award to Chao and Associates, Inc. in an amount not to exceed \$620,000.00. This firm is located in Columbia, SC.

Mr. Joey Jaco, City Engineer further reported that the project will be done by the first week in June, noting that the weather, delivery of materials and other factors could cause delays.

- **Mr. Davis joined the meeting at 9:39 a.m.**

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager suggested that the deadline be moved 30-days to July 2008.

1a. \*\*Greenlake Subdivision - Mr. Joey Jaco, City Engineer

Mr. John Dooley, Director of the Utilities and Engineering Department reported that during the first part of May 2008 the city's Wastewater Maintenance Division was called about a blockage in the Greenlake Subdivision off of Leesburg Road. A city crew responded to the call, located the stoppage on Jadetree Drive, broke the blockage and left fairly soon after to report to another call. Unfortunately, there were other problems in the area and we were notified again the next morning that there were stoppages on Greenlake Drive and four homes had flooded as a result of the blockage.

Councilor Devine asked what caused the original blockage.

Mr. John Dooley, Director of the Utilities and Engineering Department explained that a main line collapsed and then sand got into the line where it collapsed. He further explained that there are a number of problems in Greenlake, because it is a tar paper impregnated pipe that we don't use anymore. The City has operated this system since the late 1970's, but it was put in by the developer. He noted that it is hard to cut roots around tar paper piping. We have made a couple of mainline repairs in the area. We have installed a backflow device in the service line to these homes to prevent backups from flowing into other houses. The concern is that with a backflow device you can't get your backflow out.

Councilor Cromartie asked if we install backflow devices for commercial businesses.

Mr. John Dooley, Director of the Utilities and Engineering Department stated that we rarely install the devices for commercial properties. It was required by DHEC in the early 1990's and it is in the City Code that all commercial sites must have water backflow devices installed during construction, but not sewer backflow devices.

Councilor Devine asked how long the clean up will take.

Mr. John Dooley, Director of the Utilities and Engineering Department stated that the water problem has been taken care of, but there is some restoration work that will take a couple of weeks to complete.

Mayor Coble complimented staff on their efforts and asked if Mr. Dooley thought the original crew did something wrong.

Mr. John Dooley, Director of the Utilities and Engineering Department stated that the crew should have crossed all their tees and made sure that all residences were taken care of before they moved on to another call; they could have been more cautious. He noted that they may get 5-6 calls per night, but they have to be more conscientious about these things, because there was sand in the line so it sucked more sand in and there was another main line problem on different street.

Mayor Coble said that we have to report back on what happened, what we should have done differently and what will be done differently.

Councilor Finlay stated that it is important to tell the guys that we know that they are working as hard as they can. The real issue is the risk assessment of our sewer system and understanding where the breaks are.

Mr. John Dooley, Director of the Utilities and Engineering Department said that there will always be these kinds of items in the Capital Improvements Program, because a lot of subdivisions are old and need line replacing.

Mr. Joey Jaco, City Engineer stated that the Delverton Road project is moving forward and is on the right track. He noted that 50 easements must be obtained.

Councilor Davis said that it started out as a beautiful stream behind people's houses and ran deeper and deeper so now people are losing land because of it. He asked if they will get some of their footage back.

Mr. Joey Jaco, City Engineer stated that property owners will get future protection, because we are building a boulder wall.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager asked Mr. Dooley what will be done as it relates to training remediation and a review of operational procedures.

Mr. John Dooley, Director of the Utilities and Engineering Department explained that the supervisors have talked with the crews and will discuss these procedures with them as well. He said that they should have called in another crew and that dispatch hours have been increased to midnight on Mondays through Fridays and to eight hours on Saturdays and Sundays. He admitted that 24-hour dispatch is needed.

Councilor Cromartie asked about the implementation of a catastrophic phone line.

Mr. John Dooley, Director of the Utilities and Engineering Department said that there is a voice activated system that calls the supervisor automatically. You leave a message and then it calls the person in charge and that person gets the message and is supposed to respond quickly.

- **Council recessed at 10:19 a.m.**
- **Council reconvened at 10:28 a.m.**

2. Police Department – Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department, reported that the Columbia Police Department's budget is approximately \$25 million; salaries represent 85%, supplies 5%, expenses 6% and capital outlay 4%.

Councilor Sinclair asked if the budget reflects adequate capital funding for all funded positions. What are some of the strategies that will be used to fill these positions? Are there new efforts in terms of recruitment; and have we budgeted for all equipment for new personnel?

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department, replied that new individuals were hired in the recruiting and retention area; funding was added to the recruitment accounts for seminars; the pay and retention plan will help to bring officers in; equipment will be replaced after we pay salaries, expenses and essentially out fit all officers; and 1/3 of the fleet will be replaced per year.

Councilor Sinclair asked how it works in terms of new personnel.

Captain Rick Hines said that new recruits have cars available to them for patrol operations.

Councilor Devine asked what other things are incorporated in the budget for training and equipment to help address issues such as morale and to keep the best in addition to recruitment efforts by Human Resources. What happens to the older fleet?

Captain Rick Hines said that older vehicles are sold at auctions and then the money goes back into the General Fund for fleet purchases.

Councilor Devine suggested that the revenue generated from auctions go back into the Police Department's budget.

Chief Tandy Carter, Columbia Police Department said that the Police Department must work with what we have, even if it may not be enough. He agreed that retention is not only about the money. He is not sure how we go out and do our recruiting business, because we are in a competitive market. We need to do unique things rather than the traditional things to attract people to our entity.

Mayor Coble said that the Council needs for them to say what is needed for the Police Department.

Chief Tandy Carter, Columbia Police Department stated that by this time next year he will be able to determine if we are maximizing what we are doing; are we using our resources twice; are we scheduled properly; what are the problems that drive the force; He said that he needed time to assess the agency. He applauded Council's efforts in supporting the retention and recruitment plan. Do we have the equipment /technology to make the officers jobs easier? Is the court system working with law enforcement? Should we have a night court for officers that only work at night?

Councilor Devine urged the Police Department to consider parking broken downs patrol cars in neighborhoods to deter crime.

Councilor Rickenmann asked Mr. David Knoche, Director of General Services for the number of cars in service now, but not issued to personnel.

Mr. David Knoche, Director of General Services explained that some vehicles are being replaced this year; we purchased 38 brand new cars in the last three months; some of those listed in poor condition will be replaced; and he has provided a listing of cars that have been identified for replacement in next year's budget.

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department said that all cars that were put out were fully equipped with cages, mobile radios, cameras, docking stations, etc.

Councilor Rickenmann asked about the 15 Toughbooks.

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department explained that 19 marked vehicles will be fully equipped with cameras and Toughbooks. All marked vehicles will be fully equipped with cages, consoles, mobile radios, in car cameras, laptops, etc. He added that the traffic units have in car cameras for video recording.

Chief Tandy Carter, Columbia Police Department added that not all cars are fully equipped

Mr. David Knoche, Director of General Services said that there are 127 marked patrol cars and about 75 of those cars do not have cameras.

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department said that they are fully equipping all vehicles going forward, but you can't go backwards and outfit the remaining cars.

Councilor Rickenmann asked about a contingency for fuel costs and the decrease in funding for operations.

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department said that they look at the Vehicle Repair Services Account.

Councilor Davis asked if it is a policy to deposit funds from the auction to the general fund.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager said that Council can establish a policy or change the procedure and then give it a try for a budget cycle to determine if that helps. He asked for the average amount of money recouped during the auction.

Mr. David Knoche, Fleet Services explained that vehicles are taken to State Surplus on Boston Avenue and sold each month. Over \$200,000 is earned per year when everything is sold to

include garbage and fire trucks. The amount is not separated by departments. Councilor Davis asked if they looked at the economics of officers driving patrol cars home in terms of an incentive.

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department noted that only thirty-two (32) Officers live in the city limits.

Chief Tandy Carter, Columbia Police Department replied that this is another incentive to look at, but there is a tremendous cost associated with doing this. They encourage Officers to live within city limits, because it would help to reduce crime and provide a greater presence. He believes that the city would have to purchase additional vehicles to accomplish this.

Councilor Davis noted that the Columbia Police Department has a good reputation for acquiring federal grants. He asked how much grant funding has been received this year.

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department explained that they participate in the Ballistics Vest Program, which provides half the cost on all vests purchased; the Department of Justice grant to improve field based reporting by updating laptops in cars; a grant for the gunshot triangulation system; a grant to upgrade the Forensics Lab; a Methamphetamine grant for the Special Operations Division; an accident reconstruction grant; and a grant for enhanced traffic support. Approximately \$480,000 was received in grants this year. The funding has decreased since Homeland Security has been broken out into the federal government. A lot of the COPS Programs are still consistent, but the funding levels have decreased. We are looking at other grants.

Councilor Davis asked how do we operate substations; are officers there when folks walk in and want to talk or make a report; and do we have bodies in there 24 hours per day.

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department stated that substations are not manned 24 hours per day and that substations are not staffed, but instead used for shift changes and by officers returning from court. There is more activity within substations during the daytime hours.

Councilor Davis asked about the economics of having the substations. He said that the expectation is for bodies to be there.

Chief Tandy Carter, Columbia Police Department stated that there is a misconception. The Officers are handling calls throughout the day or officers on light duty work at substations. A lot of people walk into substations for information. At the South Region they take reports, but they don't have fulltime staffing at these sites.

Councilor Cromartie asked if the city could lock in a contract for a year to pay a specific rate for gas. We are buying a lot through the state. Is there really a savings?

Mr. David Knoche, Fleet Services noted that Mr. Ken Wiggins, Director of Purchasing is checking on this to determine if we are getting the best bang for our buck.

Councilor Cromartie asked if all officers have radios on their bodies.

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department stated that every officer has a portable radio with the highest degree of operability in this state.

Councilor Devine expressed concerns about only 32 officers living in city limits. The Columbia Police Department needs to get with the Community Development Department to promote city loan programs.

Councilor Finlay asked why 90% percent of our officers do not live in the city.

Chief Tandy Carter, Columbia Police Department explained that Officers don't live in the city; because they try to get away from the people they deal with from day to day. He noted that a lot of the officers were born and raised in the city and he is not sure why they don't live in the city. It's worth exploring, but it's not unusual.

Councilor Finlay said it's an economics question; is it too expensive, because it's an issue for a large percentage of the workforce not to live within city limits. This needs to be focused on citywide. He inquired about the budget for community policing operations, because personnel services numbers are less than last years cost; we budgeted 20% less money to run three (3) additional cars. How do you normally deal with this situation.

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department stated that in a no change budget, you remain within the funding as is and then try to plan ahead as much as possible.

Councilor Finlay is not blaming the staff, because Council asks more of them than is budgeted for and fuel costs change from day to day; do we cut service back 5% since the budget was reduced by 5%. Or will you cut other areas and move money to fund gasoline and vacancies to fund overtime expenses. He asked if hiring is delayed in order to save money for other costs.

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department replied that people are hired as soon as possible. It might take three (3) months to get the employee on board.

Councilor Finlay suggested that the Police Department is heavy in administration and light on the number of duty officers. He said that it is incumbent for the Chief to structure the department to match the budget; otherwise money will continuously be moved amongst line items to get the job done.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager asked how many special events do we normally handle each year and how many are unanticipated.

Captain Rick Hines, Columbia Police Department responded that there are over 300 special events during the course of a calendar year, 20% of events are unplanned and the Police Department is not paid.

Councilor Rickenmann suggested that funding for these events be supplemented from the Hospitality Tax Fund.

Councilor Davis suggested that the city start billing all organizations.

Councilor Devine asked Mr. Austin to investigate what USC is charged for events for services from the Highway Patrol and Richland County.

Councilor Finlay requested that the Council add \$250,000 for police fuel costs and \$500,000 for overtime, because of the numbers.

Councilor Davis asked for the amount of savings generated from vacant positions.

3. Public Works Department – Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Director of Public Work

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director, stated that Public Works is the emergency response team for any situation that occurs and they work during the rain, shine, sleet or snow. She began with the Animal Services Division, noting that they take in about 12,000 animals per year. This number will increase once the expansion project is complete in September or October 2008. She noted that 57% of the animals originate from Richland County. They provide humane education programs to 3,000 kids annually and would like to expand this program to reach more students.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director explained that the contract requires Richland County to pay the City \$14.00 per animal. While under construction there is not an official contract. Richland County will pay for the animals brought in by Officers, but not the ones brought in by citizens. Once we open the extension, we will sign another agreement. The County has paid their invoices in a timely manner for the expansion project, but they feel that they shouldn't pay for animals left at the shelter by their citizens.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services added that Richland County would not pay for animals dropped off by their citizens, because they weren't satisfied that there was enough verification that the animals came from Richland County.

Councilor Sinclair stated that it is imperative that Richland County pays its portion of the Animal Services contract and if not there needs to be some sort of ramification.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director stated that it is important to accept animals, because they would be left outside our shelter either way. She added that Project Pet pays our full adoption costs to adopt our pets.

Councilor Davis asked if we fund Project Pet.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director responded no.

Councilor Rickenmann stated that adoption fees don't cover all of our costs and that county residents should take pets directly to Project Pet to reduce our costs.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director explained that Project Pet is a non profit organization that serves as a no kill facility, meaning that they refuse to take animals that are not adoptable because they have a no kill policy. They are trying to build a facility on Bower Parkway.

▪ **Ms. Devine left the meeting at 11:53 a.m.**

Councilor Sinclair said that you must have a shelter willing to keep an ailing animal and to care for it. She believes that we have a good contract with Richland County; we just need to ensure that all obligations are fulfilled.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director stated that Forestry and Beautification does a lot of work year round by planting over 60,000 annuals with a large portion of the funding coming from Columbia Green and the Five Points Association. They also apply for SCDOT grants to help improve areas like the Garners Ferry Road intersection. They did not apply for funding this year, because we applied for two (2) sidewalk projects. This division also maintains 48,000 trees within the right of way each year.

Councilor Rickenmann said that Council needed to know exactly where the money is going and which things are anticipated, because it is not fair to departments or staff to work with a tight budget; there needs to be an increase for the employees to survive. He noted his concerns about fuel costs for this division. We are always adding more services and the budget should be increased to reflect that. He suggested that the city's logo be printed on the watering bags that go around the trees. He wants to ensure that employees have the proper equipment.

Councilor Cromartie asked if it would help to have an Ordinance that requires residents to bag yard debris. He said that leaves and trash on the side of the road tends to clog up the drainage system. This might help to save money and manpower. He suggested that staff look at what other cities are doing and report back to Council.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director stated that staff would need to determine if mandatory bagging is practical during leaf season. Staff presented a memo on this matter last year.

Councilor Rickenmann asked what would be the cost difference if you took out all garbage collections and contracted that service out to the private sector.

Mr. Robert Anderson, Superintendent of Solid Waste stated that Richland County charges \$236.00 per year per household through a private contractor.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager recalled an instance when Richland County requested that the City of Columbia Solid Waste Division assist their private contractor with county garbage collections.

Mr. Steve Gantt, Senior Assistant City Manager for Operations noted that Lexington County gets the highest number of complaints about private contractors collecting garbage.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services explained that they spend a lot on overtime during the holidays and he questions whether or not we have to collect trash on holidays given the economic situation. He suggested that we look at trash collections to include limbs and old equipment and determine if we have to do this every week.

Councilor Rickenmann suggested that the city put dumpsters in parking lots for people to dispose of waste.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director stated that \$380,000 is spent annually on holiday collections.

Councilor Rickenmann stated that the city may have to increase the price for commercial collections.

Councilor Finlay stated that everybody pays a water bill for the amount of water they use in this city. He is not in favor of a tax increase, but he is in favor of a use fee and wants to pick up garbage picked up on holidays.

Ms. Melissa Caughman, Interim Finance Director noted that we are one of the few cities in which garbage is included in the tax base as opposed to a separate milage. Our property tax collections cover public safety.

Councilor Cromartie said that he would not agree with this at all, because it would hurt many poor people who would not have the capability to pay the fee. He said that commercial collections are different from residential collections.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director stated that the first roll cart should be included in the base tax rate, but citizens should be charged for additional containers.

Councilor Rickenmann said that it would increase recycling efforts.

Councilor Davis agrees with increasing the fee for commercial collections, because businesses have more volume. It would be hard to decide to levy or charge an additional fee for residential collections. He said that landlords will pass the fee along to the tenants.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director started to discuss the Street Division, which is funded by multiple funds; the general fund, water and sewer and storm water, because it provides a variety of services. The funding from the general fund is for street and sidewalk repairs. The funding from water and sewer is used to repair utility cuts and the funding from storm water is used to provide funding for storm water maintenance and construction. She explained that the city needed to focus on road maintenance before constructing additional sidewalks. The responses to the Request for Proposals for a Pavement Management Study are due this week, so we should be in a position to prioritize roadway and infrastructure needs and the associated costs for next year.

Mayor Coble asked if we would be getting road maintenance funding if the proposed 1 cent sales tax increase were approved. He asked that staff contact Dr. Caroline Whitson as the Chair of the Richland County Transportation Study Committee to determine if we get funding for road maintenance as well as the sidewalks if this passes.

Councilor Cromartie requested that the Richland County Transportation Study Committee and a Richland County staff person present their findings to the Columbia City Council so we can fully understand what's in the proposal.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director explained that Traffic Engineering performs a variety of services to include the maintenance of 275 traffic signals throughout the city. They also work with SCE&G on items relating to wreath lighting and maintaining the decorative lighting that the city owns. The Radio Shop also helps Traffic Engineering by performing traffic studies and hanging banners for non-profit organizations. They maintain Christmas ornaments; street signs and markings; perform a variety of electrical needs; they work with neighborhoods on traffic control matters; and they handle graffiti removal inside the right of way. She noted that graffiti removal on private property is handled by Development Services.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director explained that the Main Street and Harden Street infrastructure won't support the twinkling Christmas lights and that the cost to add the infrastructure would be very expensive. Staff is looking at LED Christmas ornaments in an effort to identify a suitable alternative for these streets.

Councilor Cromartie requested that staff install the needed infrastructure on Main Street and Harden Street so that Christmas lights can be hung during this holiday season. He said that it is unbelievable for a major city to not have lights on Main Street. It is the responsibility of the city to ensure that this happens.

Councilor Sinclair said that it would be acceptable to wrap lighting and greenery around the poles using the same electrical component that lights the wreaths. This would give the wreaths a better effect. She said that it was frustrating to not have the wreaths and lights last year, because the decision was made without City Council discussing it. She thought that all along we would have the necessary wiring to implement holiday decorations.

Councilor Cromartie asked if this can be enacted by Christmas 2008, because the downtown merchants were very upset about what was done.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager asked staff to talk about the infrastructure issues that might impact the recommendations and some of the obstacles that we would have to overcome.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director explained that the electrical system for both areas will not support twinkle lights in the same fashion as the past. The Christmas ornaments are headed towards LED and the type of systems that will require less power or less capacity. There are more limitations in Five Points, because the trees and light poles are short. Staff is exploring all options.

- **Mayor Coble left the meeting at 12:35 a.m. Councilwoman Anne M. Sinclair is now presiding.**

Councilor Cromartie asked which department handles the removal of graffiti and how a citizen goes about getting it removed quickly, especially in the neighborhoods and the downtown area.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director suggested that property owners report graffiti to 311. She noted that anything in the right of way is removed by Traffic Engineering and anything outside the right of way is removed by Development Services or the Police Department. These departments work together to track complaints and abatement efforts.

Councilor Davis asked about lighting on North Main Street from the Blue Ribbon Cab Company to Wilson Boulevard, noting that it is a dark, big, black hole at night. He inquired about it and was told that the two block area is in Richland County so residents would have to request lighting for the area from the county. He thought we had a relationship where we could encourage the county to do that. He referred to it as a donut hole.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director explained that the city pays SCE&G a monthly fee for every street light in the city limits. The citizens in Richland County have to pay for their own street lights if they want them. Staff looked at the area in question and is working with the Legal Department, because Richland County has an ordinance that prohibits lights that exceed a certain height. That particular road is in the city limits while some of the properties are not.

Councilor Cromartie asked if there will be better coordination of street repairs once street work is complete. This has been taking a long period of time.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director stated that they are educating employees to report problems to the Street Division as they see them. Sometimes other agencies are responsible, such as SCE&G and Time Warner Cable.

Councilor Cromartie asked if all traffic lights are automated.

Ms. Melissa Gentry, P.E., Public Works Director stated that 80% are on the system where they can communicate with each other and can be controlled by Traffic Engineering. The city spent a lot of federal money to enhance the system. There is not a camera in every intersection, but they can see what the signal is on and change them in the event of a crisis.

Councilor Cromartie requested a tour of the upgraded system.

Councilor Rickenmann asked if the Council would see a revised budget for Public Works.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager answered yes.

- **Council recessed at 12:45 p.m.**

- **Council reconvened the meeting at 3:13 p.m. Mayor Coble was present at this time and is now presiding. Mr. Finlay was not present at this time.**

### **CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION / ACTION**

3. Parks and Recreation Department – Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services explained that the Department of Parks and Recreation consists of three (3) distinct divisions to include the Parks Division, which is responsible for the maintenance of parks; the Recreation Division involves programs and contact with people; and the Administrative Division oversees the day to day operations. Public Services consist of the Department of Parks and Recreation, Public Works, General Services and the 911 Center. These Departments spent some time with the University of South Carolina to develop a Strategic Plan with specific goals and objectives as well as a mission statement. The Parks and Recreation Department has 306 employees; 157 full-time employees; 47 permanent part-time employees; and 102 seasonal employees. Several years ago they developed goals and objectives to help improve the condition of the parks and from those goals City Council was able to see what was needed and what had to be done. Some facilities were completely renovated and improvements were made to others. As part of that the Park Ranger Corp came aboard and today we have 23 Park Rangers that have made a major difference in how we manage and maintain our Riverfront property and the new Southeast Park. He distributed a list of facilities that have been improved over the last two (2) years. Five facilities were completely renovated and the other parks had major work done that was beyond routine maintenance. He noted that over the past five (5) years they have made an effort to hire employees that were craftsmen in carpentry and other things; therefore, most work was done in house with the assistance of contractors when needed. Approximately \$100,000 was spent to renovate Pacific Park, but most of the work was done in-house resulting in a \$150,000 savings. He admitted that it takes longer to complete projects in-house, but the employees do quality work and it helps to stretch funding.

- **Mr. Finlay returned to the meeting at 3:20 p.m.**

Councilor Sinclair reiterated the importance of folding in the on-going maintenance into the budget, just as we include replacement vehicles. For many people our parks are all they see. It is important to keep the building and the grounds maintained as an on-going part of the budget. She said that some of the listed capital improvement projects are truly maintenance projects.

Councilor Devine commended Mr. Baker for his efforts to save the city money. She has seen a difference since the maintenance is being handled internally. She said that this should be done in all departments throughout the city.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services provided an update on the various construction projects underway in Parks and Recreation. The Gervais Street Connection adjacent to EdVenture is finished from the city's perspective. We are waiting to connect to the south side of Gervais Street.

Mr. Steve Gantt, Senior Assistant City Manager for Operations reported that the advertisement for the Canal Front project for work on the north side of the Gervais Street Bridge to tie into the Gervais Street Connection was advertised on yesterday. He anticipates that the ad will run for two (2) more weeks and the bids will come in 30-days afterward.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services reported that the South Edisto / Rosewood Neighborhood Facility construction drawings are complete and the project should be advertised for bids on Sunday, May 25, 2008 and would be due to the city within 3 weeks.

Councilor Sinclair reminded the Council that there is a Tot Lot in this neighborhood and that the equipment will be moved to the new park. She added that the existing Tot Lot could then be sold for residential use, if the zoning hasn't changed and the proceeds could go towards the new facility.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services talked about the construction of a new administration building for Parks and Recreation. The Request for Proposals was advertised in the newspaper on May 4, 2008 and they are looking for an architect to do the design work. The proposed location is Earlewood Park and the intent is to make a portion of the proposed building accessible to the neighborhood for meetings. The existing building would be removed.

Councilor Rickenmann asked what's being done to maintain the amenities that are currently at Earlewood Park. He noted that the polyurethane needs to be reapplied to the front of the Amphitheater and there needs to be a stairway that leads to the Amphitheater. He asked Mr. Baker to look at this site.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services explained that the ramp is handicap accessible and that the connection from the new building will have a level surface leading to the Amphitheater.

Councilor Sinclair asked what would be done with the property where the existing Administration Building is located.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services explained that they will keep the Art Center, since a lot of work has been done there, but they have not decided what to do with the remaining property.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager explained that there are other city functions located at the site, such as Emergency Operations and any decisions would have to take into consideration the relocation of those other divisions.

Councilor Sinclair added that more and more cities are emphasizing their arts programs. She noted that Mr. Steve Hewitt's efforts are amazing and now people are learning pottery and different forms of art. She would like for the city to have a place with specialized rooms for art classes. She proposed that the current Administration Building be transformed into a real Art Center with classrooms for children and adults with the proper aesthesis. She further proposed that there be an exhibit area with an area to sell the artwork.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services said that staff would consider Ms. Sinclair's proposal. He continued to report that they are working to repair the pedestrian bridge at Riverfront Park and that work should be completed on May 16, 2008. The stage at Riverfront Park will also be refurbished by May 26, 2008 in time for the Spider Lily Festival. There is \$420,000 available for landscape improvements at Maxcy Gregg Park pending approval of an encroachment permit from SCDOT. There is an opportunity to do some work on the Rocky Branch side of the park; we have to resolve the flooding issues; the architect has recommended a series of concrete paths through the park, but he does not agree with that, so it will be an add/alternate in the contract; and work on the curb appeal along Blossom Street; and the primary purpose is to improve the border between Blossom Street and the Park. This will include the addition of brick columns and wrought iron fencing along the front. He reported that the design concept and location for the Owens Field Skate Park was approved by Council on May 7, 2008 and the construction documents will be complete by May 30, 2008. They are waiting on the purchase order to begin the Drew Park Spray Pad. The Columbia Housing Authority has already provided the funding for this project to the city. They will begin improvements at Martin Luther King Park in July 2008.

There is a request for improvements at Bethel Bishop Apartments and staff will work in the playground area to create a baseball field and a basketball court. He added that the park property already belongs to the city and the improvements should be completed within the next couple of weeks. The responses to the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for landscaping services at Hyatt Park should begin advertisement on May 25, 2008. We are waiting on permission from the Guignard Family for an easement for the Saluda Riverwalk.

Councilor Rickenmann inquired about improvements to Greenview Park.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services reported that they are researching the cost of improving the kitchen area; exercise equipment; and sound systems for the renovated gym and the new gym. He noted that funding for these improvements is pending.

Councilor Rickenmann asked if Mr. Baker requested the funding in this years budget, because Greenview Park is heavily utilized by the community, especially the seniors. He stated that the city would be making a huge mistake if it did not address the needed improvements.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services said that staff did not expect the high level of usage. It has turned into a wellness center and staff will utilize Greenview Park as part of the city-wide wellness challenge. He noted that he has discussed the needs of Greenview Park with the City Manager and Councilor Davis. They did include funding in this years capital budget for playground equipment.

Councilor Devine reminded the Council that space is needed at the Charles R. Drew Wellness Center for childcare while people are working out, especially mothers. She said that Mr. Baker has been very forward thinking and has estimates on how to utilize the space. She would like to see this project move forward.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services explained that he has talked with staff about possible alternatives at the Wellness Center, because there is a lot of space there. He transitioned to a discussion about youth violence, stating that children are not always in gangs when they are being bad towards other children.

Mr. Terry Dozier, Parks and Recreation Specialist explained that the PALS in the Park Program is an effort with the Parks and Recreation Department and the Police Department to create a safe environment for our young people to participate in recreational activities, life skills and other self improvement programs. He has been here for two (2) months and believes that we are working on a lot of good things. He stated that the program is held at Hyatt Park and Sgt. McCary represents the Police Department. Mr. Dozier described the following programs: Venture, which helps to build self esteem; The Explorers, which exposes the kids to different career opportunities; a Dance Team; Karate; the Fundamentals of Basketball; Arts and Crafts; Passport to Manhood; Rites to Passage Co-Ed Life Skills, which lasted for three months due to the associated costs; V.I.P. Thursdays wherein guest speakers tell about their personal experiences; Conflict Resolution; and Fun Fridays wherein they take field trips and participate in other events since this is a collaboration with many other agencies.

Councilor Cromartie asked if PALS in the Park would be at any other locations.

Mr. Terry Dozier, Parks and Recreation Specialist replied that they are considering Pinehurst Park.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services stated that Lorick Park is being considered as well, but they have not decided which park to go to next. The idea is to have PALS at every park facility that is staffed. He said that they are probably ready to move to the next location. He added that they needed to meet with the new Police Chief to discuss incentives for Police Officers that are willing to be mentors for the programs, because it doesn't work without a pal. They are not seeking the police presence, but they are seeking their voluntary involvement.

Mr. Terry Dozier, Parks and Recreation Specialist said that he wants to make sure the Officers have a vested interest in working with our youth.

Councilor Sinclair said that she has talked with Mr. Baker about an urban camping program, because there is a lot of research out there to indicate that this type of activity does a lot to build a child's self esteem and their ability to cope with challenges. She suggested that some retailers that sell camping equipment may be willing to donate previously rented camping equipment to the program. She noted that kids don't have to be athletic to go camping.

Mr. Terry Dozier, Parks and Recreation Specialist said that he is working with Mr. Archie Maddox, the Executive Director of the Youth Commission to survey the kids to find out what they like to do.

Councilor Devine asked if the city is providing transportation to Hyatt Park

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services said that Parks and Recreation provides limited transportation. He discourages staff from selling transportation, but when there is a need or a very specific program they will provide transportation.

Councilor Cromartie stated that the kids with real concerns don't have transportation and unfortunately they don't even use the taxi; they use a community based taxi system and pay for transportation services underneath the table until they get their paychecks. He said that there are real concerns in the Colony Apartment area and that area churches were planning to have a cool summer with the youth by putting together activities through a joint effort. They have organized volunteers and mentors. He suggested that the city be a part of this effort to engage the youth.

Councilor Devine stated that they talked about the Gang Assessment and that Mr. Baker has come up with ideas about how to utilize existing resources to implement the recommendations. She said that the city could gather the resources like PALS in the Park and KOBAN and begin to implement the recommendations of the assessment. She stated that there are clearly a lot of needs and we should impose the highest milage rate increase possible, to meet these needs.

▪ **Ms. Devine left the meeting at 4:05 p.m.**

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services reported that staff is working on a RFQ for a Landscape Architect to work with the improvement of the outside of Hyatt Park. He has started discussions with the neighborhood president and others and they agreed that the first step is to hire a Landscape Architect to help work them through the process of prioritizing improvements to that area. He believes that it will be a multi-year process, but we are ready to begin.

Councilor Rickenmann asked if there is a way to look at improvements at all parks and then prioritize those needs.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services replied that staff has looked at grants and explored possibilities of funding for a master plan for the entire Department of Parks and Recreation. In 2001 they created a preliminary master plan that was never approved by City Council. It was still helpful and staff continues to look for grants. Parks and Recreation staff is responsible for a total of 54 park locations; approximately 600 acres of land; 37 buildings; and 131 sq. ft. Mr. Baker noted that they originally expected 1500 members at the Wellness Center, but they have 3,065 members to date. They received a \$244,000 grant from the federal government to do a youth obesity program. He stated that the department is moving towards improving their efficiency, by realigning staff and being able to curtail the amount of travel between sites. They are purchasing smaller and lighter trailers and fuel efficient equipment; funding evergreen plants in place of annuals thus reducing costs; using chemically treated mulch to save on fuel and man hours; and other things to reduce costs.

Councilor Rickenmann asked how staff decides to use contractors or to do the work in house.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services said that when we acquired Sara Nance we decided it would be much cheaper to pay our staff overtime to do the maintenance rather than hire a contractor. In some instances we saved 50% of cost, so now we do a lot less contracting than we did in years past. He admits that staff worked on Saturdays to catch up, especially during the rainy seasons.

Councilor Finlay noted that permanent staffing would help to reduce overtime costs. He suggested that the city establish a program wherein a few trees are planted in the parks each year.

Councilor Cromartie inquired about the ditch around Pinehurst Park.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services stated that Mr. John Dooley, the Director of Utilities and Engineering refers to it as an open channel and it will not be closed in. He has explained to the neighborhood group that it is important to ensure that it functions as it should and that it is safe. He believes that the open channel is functioning as it should and it's safe. He doesn't foresee anything else happening with it.

Councilor Cromartie asked if there was a pipe that kids could run into and possibly get lost. He asked if the area was eroding.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services reiterated that it was just an open channel. He explained that they addressed the erosion by using rift raft in some areas.

Councilor Cromartie asked about the open channel that extends behind the Latimore Manor Apartments.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services responded that he is not aware of the open channel behind Latimore Manor and noted that it is not under his purview.

Councilor Rickenmann inquired about the line item under 5101 for professional services rendered for department involvement and communication with the public.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services explained that there is a contract with Bud Ferillo and Associates for marketing to help increase membership at the Charles R. Drew Wellness Center. It was a promotional tool.

Councilor Finlay asked for the price of the contract.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services stated that it will cost \$10,000 this year, but initially it was \$18,000. He added that the line item covers professional training for the staff.

Councilor Rickenmann asked if the contract with Bud Ferillo and Associates included advertising for the Wellness Center; thus increasing the cost of the contract. He inquired about the professional services and the advertising line items.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services further explained that the line item included the purchase of materials, literature and graphics.

Ms. Hattie Bing, Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation explained that the 6366 line item covers the Bud Ferrillo contract and departmental training. The line item for advertising is used to fund the printing of materials such as the Park Life Magazine for the whole Department of Parks and Recreation not one (1) site.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services added that the department trains as a group twice per year during Departmental Workshops. They bring consultants in to train staff. He noted that they do take advantage of programs offered by Training Administration, but they also need specialized training such as Toastmasters.

Councilor Cromartie stated that Mr. Ferrillo has also assisted the Wellness Center with various events and fundraisers for scholarships. He asked if Mr. Baker could figure out the amount that has been raised for scholarships to date.

Ms. Hattie Bing, Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation stated that she would provide the requested information to the Council.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services said that Bud Ferrillo and Associates was selected through a RFQ process and initially the contract was split between two (2) agencies until they went through the RFQ process again and selected Bud Ferrillo and Associates.

Councilor Rickenmann asked about the decrease in funding for electric and gas. He stated that during the previous year \$617,000 was spent, but only \$300,000 was requested for the next year.

Ms. Melisa Caughman, Interim Finance Director asked if they combined some of the contingency electricity accounts from that one source versus some of the other line items.

Mr. S. Allison Baker, Assistant City Manager for Public Services said that he would have to look into that.

Councilor Davis asked if the city gets a special rate or bonus for being one of the largest electricity customers.

Ms. Melisa Caughman, Interim Finance Director said that we get charged if we go over projections and we get charged extra if we stay under projections. She is not sure if we have a special rate, but we don't get discounts for using more.

Councilor Sinclair said that she is not seeing beefed up public relations efforts in other parks or for other city related activities. There are a lot of things going on in the parks, but people don't know about them. She said that the Wellness Center is always front and center and she is not hearing or seeing the other parks be recognized at the same level. She noted that the Richland County and Irmo Recreation Commissions have information all over the place. She doesn't know how public relations should be structured. She knows that we have great programs that are not being celebrated and recognized. She asked that this matter be addressed in this budget.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager stated that after he centralized the public relations function, he recognized that a portion of it can remain centralized, but there are other portions that may need to be reviewed in terms of the individual department. He stated that Parks and Recreation fits into that category given the nature of all that goes on.

Councilor Sinclair suggested that the Youth Commission play an active role in the implementation of the recommendations from the Gang Assessment.

Mr. Charles P. Austin, Sr., City Manager said that the Youth Commission needed to be re-evaluated to determine how it can be maximized as a resource.

- **Council adjourned the meeting at 4:31 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Erika D. Salley  
City Clerk