

## **Special Called County Council Meeting**

March 18, 2020

12:00 PM

County Council met in special session, with Chairman Roy Costner presiding. Agendas, bearing date, time, and location of meeting were mailed to members of council and local news media on March 18, 2020.

### Council Members in Attendance:

Roy Costner, Chairman

Chris Bowers, Vice Chairman

### Council Members who called in via conference call:

Wes Hendricks, Vice Chairman Pro-Tem

Ensley Feemster

Carl Hudson

Trey Whitehurst

### Staff in Attendance:

Ken Roper, Acting County Administrator

Meagan Bradford, Clerk to Council

Les Hendricks, Contract County Attorney

Denise Kwiatek, Emergency Management Director

Pierce Womack, Deputy Director of Emergency Management

## **WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER:**

Chairman Roy Costner called the meeting of March 18, 2020 to order and welcomed those in attendance. He stated he would like for Mr. Roper to give an update on things that have happened since their last meeting, regarding COVID-19.

Mr. Roper stated he wanted to get back with Council because as we discussed on Monday evening at the Committee of the Whole, we are watching the advice we are getting from the state and from the federal authorities. He stated we are also paying attention to what our neighboring counties are doing. He stated we wanted to get back together because we thought it would be wise for us to move under our own ordinance. Mr. Roper recognized Denise Kwiatek, Emergency Management Director.

Ms. Kwiatek stated we currently have 47 cases of COVID-19 in the State of South Carolina, and before the end of the day, we will have more cases because of how many testing sites are set up. She stated we currently have 0 cases in Pickens County, but our surrounding counties in Anderson, and Oconee specifically, are closing the buildings to the public and encouraging citizens to do everything by phone, by fax or online. She stated this keeps our employees safe. She stated a state of emergency will allow Pickens County to get additional resources, and allows us to open spending in case we need to. Ms. Kwiatek stated the EOC will go to OPCON-2 and we will continue to monitor and create plans for each week as this progresses.

Chairman Costner stated he understands Emergency Management has been in contact with Prisma Health and AnMed Cannon and are working very closely with them.

Mr. Roper stated yes, that is correct. He stated there will probably be more information come out in the next day or two regarding the hospitals. He stated we will announce this at the appropriate time. Mr.

Roper stated if any members of Council have any questions he is happy to answer. He stated under the provisions of the Emergency Ordinance that Council put in to place a few years back, an Emergency can be declared at a meeting that's gathered, or by the Chair, Vice Chair, or council member should the circumstance warrant. Mr. Roper stated the recommendation he has received from our Emergency Management Division and from others in the county is that we go ahead and declare a state of emergency at this time, if Council deems appropriate.

Chairman Costner asked Council what questions they have.

Councilman Trey Whitehurst asked what resources Emergency Management needs that they do not have right now.

Mr. Roper stated it is more than just resources; they spent a great deal of time yesterday trying to gather some resources like bottled water, etc. He stated we hit our credit card limit on buying water yesterday. He stated it is not a high limit, but things like that we need flexibility for. He stated a lot of people are struggling to get different kinds of resources and the primary reason we are asking today is for flexibility. Mr. Roper stated our Emergency Management Team are asking for decisions like closing public buildings, etc. that we need an emergency declaration to give himself the power to do. He stated it is more of a flexibility issue so that he can start being proactive.

Councilman Trey Whitehurst asked we do not have any jurisdiction over the cities, correct.

Mr. Roper stated we do not have any general jurisdiction over that. He stated things like the Sheriff, we do have jurisdiction within the city limits.

Councilman Trey Whitehurst stated in terms of closing buildings, restaurants, etc. He stated the City of Greenville closed all their restaurants, but they cannot close the ones in the County. He stated it doesn't do any good unless it's a coordinated effort.

Mr. Roper stated we will have to be in communication with them and for Councilman Whitehurst main question, no; he does not have the authority to do this in the city limits.

Councilman Whitehurst stated if we are going to declare a state of emergency in Pickens County, we need to be in coordination with the cities in Pickens County because it will affect the cities and does not show any main purpose.

Mr. Roper stated a couple of cities have reached out and are looking to see what we do in that regard.

Vice Chairman Chris Bowers stated the federal government has already declared, the state has declared, restaurant dining has been shut down; schools are shut down, etc. He asked why the declaration is needed at this point.

Mr. Roper stated there may be things that come up where we need to do limitations on certain access for roads, suspend procurement policy, etc. He stated we are concern if we wait until that situation arises, and have to activate Council to get a quorum, that will be a limitation on what we are trying to do.

Councilman Wes Hendricks stated if we do come to that point where we have to make a decision, and we do declare a state of emergency, that staff keep Council informed of what they are doing and trust your judgment.

Mr. Roper stated it is his obligation to keep communicating with Council as this happens. He stated this is not happening because they are contemplating some specific purchase, but it is more a general situation where it is the ability to act if things change.

Councilman Trey Whitehurst said the chairman can declare a state of emergency at any point. He stated he thinks our declaration of what we are going to do should not be based on what our neighbors are doing. He stated if we need immediate action, this happened with the flooding and the chairman declared a state of emergency and it was done. He stated he is leaning towards declaring if something triggers this, as opposed to we just want to be ready.

Vice Chairman Chris Bowers stated he agrees with Councilman Whitehurst but the irony is that 5 out of 6 council members could say that we do not want to declare a state of emergency when the chairman has the power to do it. He stated if you tell me we are maxed out on what we can spend on our credit cards, then we are going to have to declare a state of emergency because we are going to have to spend this much more on a piece of equipment. He stated he agrees with Councilman Whitehurst in regards to following the crowd to declare a state of emergency.

Chairman Roy Costner stated it is not that he wants to follow along with everyone else, but it's that he is hoping we can be more proactive rather than reactive. He stated he does not want to wait until an instance where we have to tract council members down. He stated his hope is that after his conversation with other Council Chairmen, their point was we just want to be prepared and ready, and not wait for something to happen. Chairman Costner stated he has the trust in our acting Administrator to make the best decisions and he does not think we are going to go out and buy things for the sake of buying things.

Councilman Wes Hendricks stated he agrees and he thinks we need to be prepared.

Councilman Carl Hudson stated with the exception of restaurants closing dining in, what other businesses would be effective.

Chairman Costner stated we are not talking about closing businesses, but we are talking about is the ability for our administrator and for emergency services to do what they need to do without stopping and having to make some phone calls. He stated it does not have anything to do with local businesses; this has already been taking care of at the federal and state level. He stated the surgeon general spoke yesterday and stated the COVID-19 is not going to be solved at the federal or state level, but it is going to be solved at the local level. He stated that is where we, as a community, actually come together to make good choices. He stated because things are moving so quickly, he thinks it's important for us to stop now and have this conversation.

Vice Chairman Bowers asked in order to count moneys used for COVID-19 pandemic, do you have to be in a state of emergency for those funds to add up so that if there were FEMA dollars for reimbursement.

Ms. Kwiatek stated no, because the President of the United States declared a national disaster so we are working with the state and FEMA in regards to filling out our applications and being able to apply. He stated it just allows us for any purchases we have to make; we have a state of emergency because it gives us more of a reimbursement power.

Chairman Costner asked if this also give Ms. Kwiatek the ability to make more widespread decisions on people who are in the more high-risk bracket.

Mr. Roper stated yes, it will make his authority broader and for example, if he needs to rearrange employees in departments, or people to go home, he stated he has this general authority every day.

Chairman Costner stated one of the things he is hoping we can solve a problem for pretty quickly is something that he is seeing happening on social media. He stated the problem is it is harder for the older population to get out and get supplies, and he is seeing a lot of people on social media post about helping the older population. He stated he would love for our staff to work out a place to call in for people who are willing to help.

Mr. Roper stated he has also been in contact the past 24 hours with United Way. He stated they are looking at people who are food vulnerable and may have other needs. He stated if we start limiting our public openness, and start closing down sections of the county government that we can, if he had this authority he could redirect those people.

Vice Chairman Chris Bowers stated he does not understand how that is any different from day-to-day.

Mr. Roper stated he would be concerned about selecting one private entity that he wanted to favor over another, unless we are in an emergency situation.

Councilman Whitehurst stated he does not think we are anywhere close to that. He stated he does not know how much interaction between people needs to happen right now. He stated his feeling is that a state of emergency is reactive because that is what it is designed to be – a reaction to a scenario. He stated we have no one in the county who has tested positive for this and we are doing everything in the county to prepare for it coming.

Mr. Roper stated he will make the preparations and he stands ready to react when Council deems it is appropriate in an emergency fashion.

Councilman Ensley Feemster stated we can begin preparing and exercising for something even more serious like a nuclear disaster. He stated we can go through the steps that we go through just to be sure that we know what we are doing.

Chairman Roy Costner asked if anyone else had any other discussion.

Seeing none, Chairman Costner stated Vice Chairman Bowers and himself will be sitting in on a call with the Federal Government at 1:00 PM to get an update from them. He stated if they hear anything differently, we will make sure the Clerk sends out information to everyone as a result of that call.

**ADJOURN:**

Pickens County Council stood adjourned at 12:29 p.m.

Respectively Submitted:

Approved:

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Meagan Bradford, Clerk to Council

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Roy B. Costner, III, Chairman of County Council