

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, agendas for the following meeting were delivered to all members of Council, County Attorney Richard Ness, Lower Savannah COG, The Bamberg Leader, The Times and Democrat, Southern Carolina Regional Alliance, Bamberg County Library, Bamberg County Website and Bamberg County Courthouse Annex.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bamberg County Council met 6:00 p.m., February 3, 2025 in Council Chambers with limited seating for the public alongside live streaming of the meeting provided for public view. **Present:** Chairwoman Sharon Hammond, Councilwoman Michelle Martin, Councilmen Spencer Donaldson, Kenneth Ahlin, Larry Haynes and Dr. Jonathan Goodman, II. **Others Present:** Joey R. Preston, T.M. Thomas, Richard Ness, Gina Smith, Alice Johnson, Walter Bennett, Kathy Booker, Shawn Hanks, Chip Mair, Alisha Moore, Kenneth Bamberg, Donald Kirby, Dr. William Molnar, Josh Urick, Natosha Hayward, Henry Miller, Will Walls, Jannie Johnson and three additional visitors.

Bamberg County Council meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Sharon Hammond, at 6:00 p.m. Invocation was rendered by Councilman Spencer Donaldson, followed with the pledge of allegiance led by Councilman Evert Comer, Jr.

On motion by Councilman Haynes, seconded by Councilman Donaldson, the minutes from the January 6, 2025 meeting were approved with necessary corrections. The correction stated by Councilman Ahlin was that it was his wife that held the bible during his swearing in ceremony, not his daughter. On motion by Councilman Ahlin, seconded by Councilman Haynes, the correction to the minutes will be duly noted.

On motion by Councilman Haynes, seconded by Councilman Donaldson, council approved the amended agenda as presented.

Mr. Walter Bennett, II, FACHE, chief executive officer of MUSC Health-Orangeburg enlightened the council about additional specialist care and extended research opportunities are being fulfilled for Bamberg County and neighboring areas. Three subjects were expounded on during the presentation, empowering health communities, driving innovation and health transformation and reshaping the future of its workforce. The hospital has hired seven new providers centered around the areas of interventional cardiology, medical oncology, general surgery, obstetrics, interventional radiology, critical care and primary care. They are in the process of developing a family medicine residency program that focuses on primary care to have better access to care in the counties that they serve. A timeshare clinic will be opened by the hospital, to allow specialists from Charleston to practice at the Bamberg-Barnwell Emergency Medical Center. During his in depth presentation, Mr. Bennett went on to say that they are going to be putting a Health-Plex in Bamberg. He said the hospital is partnering with the local community, including with Voorhees University on the research hub. They have been working with Denmark Technical College as well. Their goal is to keep the patients close to home. Mr. Bennett introduced Ms. Kathy Booker, the hospital's external affairs and strategic engagement manager. She said the hospital is also working with area school districts, including Bamberg County School District, in the area of workforce development, including bringing a mobile operating room to Bamberg County. They get resources from their system partners like Medtronic and all of those companies that are willing to come and bring programs to the community. The Council thanked Mr. Bennett and Ms. Booker for their very beneficial presentation.

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Ms. Natosha Hayward, S.C. Thrive manager-partner engagement, spoke to Council about how the agency helps senior citizens connect to state resources available to them. S.C. Thrive provides a “one-stop shop” for South Carolinians to connect to benefits they may not know are available to them. She talked about different senior resources such as Healthy Connections Prime, the Medicare Savings Program, Healthy Connections Medicaid Long Term Care, and SNAP’s Elderly Simplified Application Project. Information was shared about each resource. She said S.C. Thrive deals with all age groups, as well as seniors. Pregnant women are provided assistance as well. Clients can go in the system to access resources on their own. You can apply with S.C. Thrive by calling 800-726-8774. You can email them at scthrive.org. Ms. Hayward was shown gratitude by Council for her presentation.

Mr. Henry Miller, Executive Director of the Samaritan House of Orangeburg County, Incorporated, gave an update on the shelter and their services. Mr. Miller said that they provide temporary housing, outreach programs and transitional services to people experiencing homelessness. He said that he has seen an increase need for shelter and their services. Some of the space they have is not conducive to be able to support what they are looking into bringing into the shelter. The shelter went from serving 40 people to 54 in their kitchen daily. Funds are being sought so that they will be able to aid those in need of their services. From September 2020 to May 2024, The Samaritan House has housed and served over 560 residents. They cater to men, women and families to help them get back on their feet. They will continue serving those in need as long as possible. Council thanked Mr. Miller for the information and he was grateful to have been given the opportunity.

Dr. Molnar, Executive Director for LSCOG stated that the CDBG funds for transit and transportation have been placed on hold along with other federal grants as well. Dr. Molnar proceeded to say additional information will be shared with council as he gets it.

Bamberg County Controller Gina Smith and Mr. Will Wall, CPA, Audit Manager from Love Bailey & Associates, presented the Bamberg County Annual Financial (Audit) report for the year ended June 30, 2024. Bamberg County earned an unmodified/clean audit opinion with zero internal control issues and an increase to the general fund balance of over \$1 million. Bamberg County has earned an unmodified audit opinion for the tenth consecutive year. This demonstrates good fiscal stewardship and is the most important measure of financial stability. Controller Smith explained that an unmodified audit opinion is a vital indicator of good governance in the public sector, demonstrates financial integrity, promotes transparency, and builds public trust. Hard work and attention to detail are imperative in the continued financial stability of Bamberg County. Chairwoman Hammond expressed delight in the 2024 audit and stated as a team, we strive for fiscal excellence. According to Controller Smith, a clean audit in government is crucial for maintaining public trust and ensuring accountability because it: 1) Demonstrates responsible use of taxpayer money; 2) Enhances transparency; 3) Builds public trust; 4) Facilitates effective decision-making; 5) Reduces the risk of fraud and waste; 6) Improves government efficiency; and 7) Strengthens accountability. CPA Will Wall commended the entire Bamberg County Financial Staff by echoing Bamberg is fortunate to have such a skilled financial team, which is not always possible for smaller counties with limited resources. Administrator Preston said despite a challenging 2024 with a limited staff and budget, the financial team worked diligently to ensure we not only achieved a clean and unmodified audit but a fund balance surplus as well. The FY 24 audit is the best one yet and Gina is to be commended and the entire financial team for a job well done.

COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS:

Southern Carolina Development Alliance - Monthly Report

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Project Director Joshua Urwick reported that SCA have some things in motion, but further information could not yet be released on the project. There is an industry partnership meeting scheduled for Wednesday, February 5th. The Rural Development Summit will be held March 3rd and 4th in Columbia, SC. Hopefully there will be additional information at the next council meeting.

Bamberg County Administrator – Monthly Report

Administrator Preston reported that: 1) Proud of the financial status of the Sheriff's Department, and Magistrate's Department, job well done; 2) Boundary lines between Barnwell County and Bamberg County will change; 3) Courthouse roof permit has been issued; 4) Will finish the water tank in March and dedication will follow; 5) Council members were asked to check their calendar for available dates in March for scheduling of the 2025 Retreat; and 6) Update of MAMAS Shelter This report was received as information.

On motion by Councilman Comer, seconded by Councilwoman Martin, council passed a resolution recognizing and honoring February 2025 as Black History Month. This resolution was sponsored by Chairwoman Hammond.

On motion by Councilman Comer, seconded by Councilman Haynes, council gave first reading (by title only) to an ordinance authorizing the execution and delivery of a special source revenue credit agreement by and between Bamberg County, South Carolina and a Company currently known to the County as Project Black Jack with respect to certain economic development property in the County, whereby such property will receive certain special source revenue credits in respect of investment in infrastructure. Voting in favor: Hammond, Haynes, Donaldson, Goodman, Comer and Martin. Voting not in favor: Ahlin.

On motion by Councilman Comer, seconded by Councilman Haynes, council approved the calendar of events.

On motion by Council Haynes, council approved the Bamberg County Council 2025 Standing Committee Appointments: Administrative/Finance – Chairwoman Sharon Hammond, Evert Comer, Jr. and Larry Haynes; Personnel/Education, Recreation, Health and Welfare/Intergovernmental Relations – Chairman Haynes, Ken Ahlin and Sharon Hammond; Public Service/County Planning – Chairman Comer, Dr. Jonathan Goodman, II and Spencer Donaldson; Justice and Public Safety – Chairman Donaldson, Ahlin and Michelle Martin; Solid Waste/Recycling – Chairman Goodman, Haynes and Martin.

At this time, Chairwoman Hammond asked for comments from council. Council thanked the public for attending and Administrator Preston and his staff were acknowledged for their hard work. All were reminded about the Clean Up scheduled for Saturday, February 22nd in Denmark. A moment of reverence was shared in remembrance of those that perished in the airplane and helicopter crash over the Potomac River in Washington, D.C. on January 29th. Thanks was given to the citizens that attended the meeting.

There being no further business for discussion, on motion by Councilman Comer, seconded by Councilman Haynes, council voted to adjourn at 9:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rose R. Shepherd, CCC