



Richland County Council  
Coronavirus AD Hoc Committee Meeting  
**MINUTES**  
June 1, 2023 – 3:00 PM  
Council Chambers  
2020 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29204

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Gretchen Barron, Chair, and Chakisse Newton

NOT PRESENT: Jason Branham

OTHERS PRESENT: Paul Livingston (via Zoom), Allison Terracio, Don Weaver, Chelsea Bennett, Michelle Onley, Sarah Harris, Lori Thomas, Leonardo Brown, Angela Weathersby, Anette Kirylo, Kyle Holsclaw, Aric Jensen, Patrick Wright, Zachary Cavanaugh, Abhijit Deshpande, John Thompson, and Dante Roberts

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – Chairwoman Gretchen Barron called the meeting to order at approximately 3:08 PM.
2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
  - a. May 16, 2023 – Ms. Newton moved to approve the minutes as distributed, seconded by Ms. Barron.  
In Favor: Barron and Newton  
Not Present: Branham  
The vote in favor was unanimous.

3. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA** – Ms. Newton moved to adopt the agenda as published, seconded by Ms. Barron.  
In Favor: Barron and Newton  
Not Present: Branham  
The vote in favor was unanimous.

4. **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION/ACTION**
  - a. Unallocated Funds – Ms. Barron stated we have had several conversations about what to do with the unallocated funds as it relates to the ARPA funds. Noting we already have two categories we have not utilized all the funds for, and there are possibly other categories we will not use all the funds for. Some items could potentially be funded from this pot of money. As a committee, it is important that we give options to Council to utilize the funds or not. She noted it appears there is approximately \$600,000 that has not been allocated.

**POINT OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE** – Ms. Barron thanked Ms. Lori Thomas, Assistant County Administrator, for leading the charge and helping the committee stay on track in allocating the funds.

Ms. Thomas indicated the committee had allocated funding for:

- Non-Profits (Allocated: \$765,332; Remaining: \$234,668)
- Senior Assistance (Allocated: \$1,000,000; Remaining: \$0.00)
- Broadband Services (Allocated: \$505,546; Remaining: \$1,494,454)
- Affordable Housing (Allocated: \$4,000,000; Remaining: \$0.00)
- Unhoused Persons (Allocated: \$1,618,950; Remaining: \$381,050)

The committee has not taken up the following categories: Workforce Training, Education Assistance, Food Insecurity, Youth and Recreational Services, and Small Business. There was an allocation for Food Insecurity of \$548,046 from the previous year's budget.

Ms. Barron noted the categories under “To Be Awarded” will be taken up at the end of June.

Ms. Newton reminded the public about the process used regarding the ARPA funds. She noted the application process was open to everyone in the County. The applicants could submit an application streamlined to have the broadest amount of responses. Once the applications came in, they were reviewed to ensure compliance with the federal guidelines to make sure the County was a good steward of the funds.

Ms. Newton suggested that any unawarded funds from the 16M dollar ARPA grants be used to fund the construction of the Family Services Center. With today’s construction costs, the money does not go as far as it could have once gone. No matter how much has been allocated for the Family Services Center, things happen when you are building. To know there are funds left over in these categories, she would like to see those funds be designated for DSS. Then we do not have to worry about it. We grant the grants through the committee/Council process, but then we know where the funds are going, and they are going to a good cause and will make a difference in the community for years to come. She noted the only exception to the recommendation would be for the category of “Youth and Recreation Services.” She has been an advocate for those dollars that were set aside. The committee felt the applications received were not targeted toward the youth. She would like to set aside those funds and have Council determine later how to award those funds to benefit the youth specifically. Finally, the recommendation is to award a small portion of the unawarded ARPA funds to Midlands Technical College for some of the workforce development they are doing and to fill the gap we cannot address through the budget process.

Mr. Weaver stated for clarification, we have not spent any of the \$4M for Affordable Housing but only designated the funds.

Ms. Terracio stated in general; she supports Ms. Newton’s recommendations. She thinks allocating funding to Midlands Technical College for workforce development is great. She strongly supports the Family Services Center allocation. In regards to the Senior Assistance category, she is still concerned.

Ms. Lori Thomas indicated once the funds are awarded for the project, they will be making quarterly reports to the County on the programs and be spending throughout. On June 30, 2024, we will have to determine if the group will be able to expend all funds, within the guidelines, by December 31, 2024. If by December 31, 2024, a group has been awarded funds, but they have not been spent, they could not be reallocated by the County. Sometime before December 31<sup>st</sup>, we would have to come back and recommend ceasing the reimbursements to groups who have not expended the funding so that Council could reallocate the funds.

Ms. Barron expressed that, theoretically, she supports what Ms. Newton said. She addressed her concerns during the budget process. She inquired if the funds for Midlands Technical College are going specifically toward their workforce development or the deficit brought up during the budget.

Ms. Newton stated her motion intends to cover the deficit. If we can provide them with ARPA funds, workforce development fits neatly into that category and meets the qualifications of the federal guidelines. The motion will not specifically mention workforce development. Midlands Technical College will be responsible for ensuring they utilize the funds appropriately.

Mr. Livingston supports the idea of trying to make Midlands Tech whole. If we are going to give them ARPA funds, we need to do it the same way we did the last time we provided ARPA funds to them and allow them to decide how to expend the funds. He noted he would prefer to make up the difference from the General Fund, or we will be at the same point next year.

Ms. Newton moved to award \$274,867 of the unassigned ARPA funds from the “Broadband” category to Midlands Technical College, seconded by Ms. Barron.

Ms. Barron stated that when we start looking at making other organizations whole, a couple of others also have deficits. She does not understand how we can support one without supporting the others. She agrees with Mr. Livingston that we have somewhat created something by giving Midlands Technical College these funds. Now that we have created this, we are forced to clean it up. We might not be here now if we had not given those funds. Now we are forced to make a decision. We can give them ARPA funds now, but we will be at this same point next year. It is not that she does not value the work Midlands Tech is doing. It is about the other millage agencies in similar situations. She does not know how we can justify pulling one out over the others. She also stated she is not a big fan of increasing taxes.

Ms. Newton wholeheartedly disagreed with the assertion that we are responsible for putting Midlands Tech, or any other agency, in a deficit.

Ms. Barron stated for clarification, we have given Midlands Tech additional funds they have not had in the past, and now they are missing those funds if we do not give them more.

Ms. Terracio asserted that, as a member of Council, she would be nervous about the full balance going toward the Family Services Center.

Mr. Livingston stated to him the issue is not Midlands Tech but how we treat the millage agencies. In his opinion, we have an irresponsible budget process. When we say we are going to hold all millage agencies to no mill, that means we treat them differently. For example, they all have different carryover funds that affect their budget. Some have one-time expenditures, so when you carte blanche, say, we are going to give everyone a no-mill increase, you treat them differently. You are not meeting their needs. You must treat them differently because they are different. The idea that we give everybody the same thing is irresponsible. Midlands Tech's budget is the only one funded at less than the previous year. We need to look at the millage agencies more holistically.

In Favor: Newton

Opposed: Barron

Not Present: Branham

The motion failed.

Ms. Newton moved to set aside the \$1,000,000 ARPA allocation for Youth and Recreation Services to specifically fund recreation activities for youth using a process to be determined by County Council. Any remaining funds from this category that are not committed by June 30, 2024, and expended by October 31, 2024, will be used to fund the construction of the Family Services Center, seconded by Ms. Barron.

As stated before, Ms. Newton mentioned we reviewed the applications for the "Youth and Recreation Services" category and did not feel the applications received were consistent with the goal. This is to set the funds aside to be utilized for that purpose but to ensure we do so in a timely manner so we do not lose the funding. If the funds are not used, the remaining funds will go toward the funding of the Family Services Center.

In Favor: Barron and Newton

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

Ms. Newton moved that any unawarded funds from the 16M dollar ARPA grant process be used to fund the construction of the Family Services Center. This would include unawarded funds from the following categories: Non-Profit Assistance, Workforce Training, Education Assistance, Senior Assistance, Food Insecurity, Broadband Services, and Unhoused Persons. It would not include funding from the Youth and Recreation Services or Affordable Housing allocation categories. Ms. Barron seconded the motion.

Ms. Barron indicated she has concerns about allocating the total amount toward the Family Services Center. As she mentioned, she believes we can utilize some of the funds for the non-profits listed in the budget. There were Councilmembers who made motions for non-profits that might not have submitted applications. She thinks this is an opportunity to extend these funds further to organizations presented as a part of the budget process. She noted those organizations should have been weeded out of the budget process and channeled elsewhere. She asserted that we owe it to the general public to do something with them, whether it is to fund them or not. She stated she could support the motion with this slight amendment.

Ms. Newton stated to her we would end up in the same situation next year with the non-profits. She noted some non-profits feel it is the County's job to fund them. For her, these dollars were allocated for specific purposes. Now that we are not necessarily going to do that in all the categories because some of the applications do not meet the criteria, she does not have a problem giving it all to the Family Services Center. She indicated she feels the process is cleaner by providing the funds to the Family Services Center instead of several non-profits.

Ms. Barron specified she was referring to the non-profits listed in the budget motion list. She acknowledged the non-profits could still apply for the Community Impact Grants, but she is concerned we will not have enough funding in that pot. She noted last year, we funded non-profits out of ARPA funds. Some of the non-profits did not like it, but it did give us a reprieve in the budget. Likely, we will never have this opportunity again. She declared the percentage(s) established by the Community Impact Grants were palatable to her. Therefore, she would be amenable to providing a portion of the ARPA funds to the Community Impact Grants for disbursement.

Ms. Newton stated the County needs to define what type of organization and what makes them eligible to get taxpayer dollars. There are tons of non-profits, but we are not funding them all. Anyone can get their checkbook out and write a contribution to a non-profit they want to support. If we are asking every taxpayer to support one specific non-profit, to the exclusion of the other 999 others, there must be some bar that says why we are doing this. While she is sorry that an organization did not get the funds they expected, at the same time, we are obligated for the Family Services Center, our roads, etc.

Ms. Barron requested the balance of the funds that have not been awarded for categories where we have previously awarded funding.

Ms. Thomas responded the balance is \$2,110,172.

Ms. Barron offered a friendly amendment to provide up to \$400,000 to the Community Impact Grants Committee to be set aside for the non-profits listed on the FY23-24 budget motion list. Those non-profits will be invited to apply and participate in that process. Ms. Newton seconded the amendment.

Ms. Thomas inquired if the amended motion would still cover all the categories referenced in Ms. Newton's motion.

Ms. Barron indicated that was her intent.

Ms. Terracio inquired if we are prepared to expend the funds allocated for the Family Service Center within the timeframe.

The County Administrator, Leonardo Brown, responded in the affirmative.

In Favor: Barron and Newton

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

**POINT OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE** – Ms. Barron thanked Ms. Newton and her colleagues for “talking this out” and ensuring we do what is best for the community.

5. **ADJOURNMENT** – Ms. Newton moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Barron.

In Favor: Barron and Newton

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:05 PM.