



Richland County  
 Coronavirus Ad Hoc Committee  
 June 9, 2021 – 4:00 PM  
 Zoom Meeting  
 2020 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29204

Yvonne McBride District 3	Paul Livingston District 4	Gretchen Barron, Chair District 7	Joe Walker District 6	Chakisse Newton District 10
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Committee Members Present: Gretchen Barron, Chair; Yvonne McBride, Paul Livingston, and Chakisse Newton

Others Present: Bill Malinowski, Allison Terracio, Jesica Mackey, Cheryl English, Michelle Onley, Angela Weathersby, Kyle Holsclaw, Tamar Black, Ashiya Myers, Leonardo Brown, Denise Teasdell, James Hayes, Lori Thomas, Mike King, Randy Pruitt, Ronaldo Myers, Zachary Cavanaugh, Michael Byrd, Katie Marr, Jennifer Wladischkin, Brittney Hoyle-Terry and Michael Maloney

1. **Call to Order** – Ms. Barron called the meeting to order at approximately 4:00 PM.
2. **Approval of Minutes: May 24, 2021** – Ms. McBride moved, seconded by Ms. Barron, to approve the minutes as distributed.

In Favor: McBride, Barron

Not Present: Livingston, J. Walker

Abstained: Newton

The vote in favor was unanimous.

3. **Adoption of Agenda** – Ms. McBride moved, seconded by Ms. Newton, to adopt the agenda as published.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Barron and Newton

Not Present: J. Walker

The vote in favor was unanimous.

4. **Items for Action** –

- a. **Essential Workers Pay** – Mr. Brown stated he wanted to share information with the committee and receive feedback, in order to prepare a recommendation, based on that input. The Essential Worker’s Pay, under the American Rescue Plan, is an applicable usage of those funds. In an effort to capture those essential workers throughout Richland County, as well as workers who may not be routinely thought of as essential in terms of their services, but during the pandemic their work was essential for County operations to continue to respond and mitigate

COVID-19. He noted they have reached out to departments to make sure the criteria was met, and individuals were able to continue to work at their workstations throughout a substantial portion of the pandemic. This would preclude individuals who were largely working remotely. They are trying to figure out whether or not it was going to be a one-size fits all scenario. For example, EMS routinely responded to calls and put on protective gear while potentially exposing themselves to COVID-19. Let's also consider, for example, the Finance Department may not have had to physically go out and put themselves in known exposure areas of COVID-19, but employees did have to report to work in order to make sure the financial dealings of the County (i.e. payroll) were handled. They are talking about making a recommendation to the committee, and ultimately Council, to provide a one-time stipend for these workers. The question is should they treat them in a tiered approach, and how they would provide a stipend. With the EMS example, they would recommend those workers get the same amount versus a worker who had to come into work because they could not work remotely and potentially could have been exposed to COVID-19.

Ms. Newton inquired if the federal guidelines about the stipend been finalized, and what qualifies under the criteria.

Mr. Brown responded the guidelines for essential works are pretty solid. The guidance communicated there were certain sectors identified where there was a need for services to continue and workers had to provide those services. That particular section of the "ARP" is solid and we feel confident we can make a recommendation and be within the guidelines before the Federal Government gave their final guidance.

Ms. Newton noted this was a wonderful opportunity to recognize our employees. She likes the idea we are expanding what an essential worker is. We want to reward the EMS workers who took on a yeoman's task to do the work. At the same time, she knows the IT Department was burning candles at both ends to ensure the County could continue to do County functions.

Mr. Livingston stated he was not clear on how they would set the criteria for different categories if we do not want to do a one-size fits all.

Mr. Brown stated that was something they were working through. He wanted to hear from other minds. Administration is trying to make sure there is equity in what they do and not take something intended for good and offend people because they do not feel the County appropriately recognized them. Earlier on in the pandemic, when employees had to quarantine for 14-days, we had to call Operational Services staff to come in, deep clean, and electrostatic spray the areas where we believe there is suspected COVID-19 exposure. Those individuals are not routinely considered essential works, but during the pandemic they became essential workers. The question becomes would we treat Operational Services the same as we would the Alvin S. Glenn Detention Center, EMS, Sheriff's Department, or the Coroner's Office. S, or Patrol, or the Coroner's office? It is not an easy answer.

Ms. McBride stated she believes workers that were actually exposed to a high risk of contact with COVID-19 were essential workers. (i.e. EMS, Detention Center and Operational Services). The professional staff that had to come in were not at a high risk of contact, so she is concerned with them being categorized as essential workers. The employees still got paid their regular salary. She has a problem with an across the board incentive pay. There were those who were at home who may have wanted to come into work, but were told to stay home, will not receive incentive pay. We need to identify those essential workers who were at a high risk of exposure to COVID-19 first.

Mr. Brown noted, based on conversations with various officials, the employees view themselves as being put in a position to carry out functions of the County during a time when their health was put at risk. If they stopped working, the County would not be able to fulfill its obligations to the citizens.

Ms. McBride stated that was true, but they were hired to perform the tasks and responsibilities on behalf of the County.

Ms. Barron stated she spoke with Mr. Brown about the essential workers, and what that defines. She noted, professional workers reported to work every day while everyone else was working remotely, so they placed themselves at risk in order for the business of the County to continue. She requested the committee to be open to non-traditional essential workers and to look at how this pandemic has changed how we do business and how those individuals we did not see as frontline workers became those individuals for us during this time.

Mr. Malinowski inquired if this was strictly for County employees or would it also extend to contract workers for the County.

Mr. Brown responded, his understanding is, it is both direct and indirect employees.

Ms. McBride suggested having different categories, and to look at the different categories to determine the stipends.

Ms. Barron stated the purpose of this conversation was to merely flush out some things. She noted Administration is working to provide more structure as far as regulations and the tiered approach.

Ms. Mackey noted she is in favor of a tiered approach.

Mr. Brown stated he appreciated the conversation. There are a lot of individuals interested in the way the County addresses this particular opportunity. In conversations with staff, one of the things he addressed were questions about hazard pay. One of the reasons why the County did not provide hazard pay earlier was because of the guidelines. For the County to be reimbursed, you had to have a hazard pay policy you utilize, in the event a hazard is being mitigated, and the County does not have such a policy. The County will be looking into instituting a hazard policy that would help provide future guidelines, so we will not find ourselves in this position in the future.

Ms. McBride stated, if the County does hazard pay, we should take into consideration how we determine the pay, based on the salaries, as many of the essential workers have low salaries.

- b. Reopening Plan – Mr. Brown noted what is the packet is largely the confines we were working under throughout the pandemic. Some of the guidance from the federal government, CDC and local providers has changed. The committee has a draft of what they used to begin to provide a safe environment for the employees to work in during the pandemic and to try to give them some guidance on what we thought would happen over time. As we look at coming back into the workspace, and take from what we have learned and the updates from the CDC and OSHA, we are going to update this document to reflect something that can be a living document which can be applied in the future. He noted they would listen to any comments or feedback on what should be included as a part of the living document going forward.

Ms. Barron stated, for clarification, the documents in the packet are the current document we are currently working from, and when we are fully operational on July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mr. Brown responded they will update the document to reflect current guidance, and structure the language so that it will be a living document. Some of the constraints will be used in the foreseeable future, such as screening protocols, temperature checks, social distancing and partitions.

Ms. Barron inquired about a date for final document review.

Mr. Brown responded he could have a completed document for Council to review by the end of next week.

Ms. Newton inquired about where the 25% maximum occupancy capacity for a facility came from and if it would be applied on July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mr. Brown responded, at the time the document was created, there were guidelines on capacity from the federal level, and recommended capacity from the state level. As of July 1<sup>st</sup>, the only time they would be talking about specified capacity limits would be while in Council Chambers because it is an enclosed space. There would not be a general capacity limit for access to County facilities effective July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Ms. Newton inquired if telecommuting and staggered shifts would go away since we are opening up to full capacity.

Mr. Brown responded it would go away as a blanket rule. There are individuals who have high risk conditions, and according to CDC guidelines and ADA accommodations, those things should be taken into consideration on a case-by-case basis and not dealt with from a blanket perspective.

Ms. Newton requested an overview of the re-opening plan.

Mr. Brown responded anyone that walks into the building(s) on July 1<sup>st</sup> will be asked to be screened, and if unvaccinated to continue to wear a mask. The County will not be doing vaccination card screening, but will be following CDC guidance to ask unvaccinated persons not to congregate unmasked with other people in confined spaces. There will be signage communicating these guidelines.

Ms. Newton inquired if p. 15 of the agenda represents the re-opening plan for July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mr. Brown responded we are at the phases of the plan that allows us to move forward with our re-opening. In those openings, you still have mitigation strategies in place. The document does not include vaccinations, but it includes the downward trend of COVID-19 in the community if it meets those criteria. They will be updating information that reflects we are still asking people to wear masks. For example, employees that interact with the persons who might not be vaccinated will be asked to wear a mask when in a confined space. We will still be communicating that if you are not vaccinated you are supposed to have a mask on for public health purposes. He noted they do not plan to require employees to be vaccinated as a condition of their employment.

- 1) In-Person Council Meetings – Ms. Barron stated the County buildings will be re-opening on July 1<sup>st</sup>, and the first in-person Council meeting will be July 13<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Brown stated we will be requesting individuals coming into Council Chambers because of the enclosed space, and the length of time we spend in that space, to wear masks. We do not know who is vaccinated, so this will be a way to mitigate the continued spread of COVID-19 amongst those participants in the meeting. Council Chambers can hold 141 people. We may want to consider limiting capacity by 50% (70 persons) during a Council meeting. He noted that less than 43% of Richland County is vaccinated, so one out of every two people coming into Chambers could potentially be unvaccinated. Until DHEC or the CDC provides new guidance on the mitigation of COVID-19, based on vaccination or other tools, then we monitor the percent vaccinated to determine participation in Council Chambers. Councilmembers will have partitions that will cover the front and both sides so they are protected from individuals speaking to and around them. Staff sitting in front of them, and the podiums will have a similar set up, so that anytime people are addressing Council they will have a protective barrier. He noted the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room has been used for committee meetings, and they are going to get portable stations to provide the same protection for all the participants. They are working with IT to allow individuals who cannot come into Chambers to be able to access the meetings remotely to participate via Zoom. The County is getting new equipment that will allow us to have off-site meetings and to stream the meetings so individuals can have participate.

Ms. Mackey inquired about Executive Session.

Mr. Brown responded he would recommend Council exit the Chambers and use the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room with security staff outside the room for privacy.

Ms. Mackey inquired if there were any recommendations related to public comments, if we are offering streaming and in-person attendance, will that change how constituents submit comments.

Mr. Brown responded, if individuals want to participate and speak to Council, they will have the opportunity to do so in-person. They would also have the opportunity to have their comments submitted through the medium we are using now. He stated he would welcome input and/or recommendations from Council.

Ms. Barron stated she agreed Zoom has allowed us to engage at another level, and to encourage us to expand on the technology services to serve the citizens.

Mr. Malinowski inquired if other entities would be allowed to use Chambers knowing it would cause additional work for staff to disinfect between meetings.

Mr. Brown responded as long as we coordinated the meetings and limit the use of Chambers on dates Council meetings are held.

c. Program Updates

- 1) Relief Funds – Mr. Brown stated all guidance has not been rendered. They believe that some areas have been identified where we want to Council to weigh in, so when we get final guidance things that are eligible and applicable can be addressed. He has received questions concerning how the County can use funds for sewer, water, and current facilities' infrastructure needs that would be applicable to "ARP" funding. We are trying to vet this process to see what we can use. He noted, under some of the lump sum appropriation groups Council has considered for FY22, we believe we will

have an opportunity to utilize that funding which would increase flexibility of the General Fund. The committee was requested to move to use available COVID-19 preparation, mitigation, response and recovery financial resources to fund FY22 Council approved lump sum appropriation groups where eligible and applicable.

Mr. Livingston stated he wants to ensure those lump sums were prioritized so they will not have to come back next year without the rescue funds. There are some one year requests, so if we do those first we will be better off in future years.

Mr. Brown responded this would be specifically for FY22.

Mr. Livingston stated he wanted to ensure that is clear. He noted it would be easier for the entities to come back next year and request funding.

Mr. Brown stated, for clarification, Mr. Livingston was referring to groups who have requested multi-year funding and them thinking they would automatically receive funding for FY23.

Ms. Barron inquired if the individuals and organizations that were not approved in the FY22 budget would have an opportunity to seek these funds.

Mr. Brown responded staff plans to come back to Council with recommendations, based on the "ARP" guidelines, for the groups that are eligible. Council would determine if they want to fund any of the groups. Based on Council's decision, staff would go back to the eligible groups to notify them Council is interested in providing funding, and request supporting documentation.

Ms. McBride stated she was concerned about approving groups during the budget process, when they can get federal funding in lieu of County funds.

Mr. Brown responded they were limiting this to what Council has approved.

Ms. Terracio inquired if there could be a mechanism by which we know there is an entity we want to fund, but the best way to fund them would be through "ARP" funds.

Mr. Brown responded, if there is a group Council members are looking at funding, he would suggest they run them through the prism of the criteria. We will then be able to share whether Administration believes those groups are applicable.

Ms. Terracio stated, for clarification, if Council members feel an entity could be funded through "ARP", the Council member could submit a request to staff for vetting.

Mr. Brown responded in the affirmative.

Ms. McBride stated she was concerned with how we are spending the "ARP" funds. She does not want staff to come up with the recommendations to submit to Council. She believes there needs to be a planning process, in terms of the priorities, based on the guidelines in determining how we are going to use the funds and active input.

Mr. Brown noted there were some steps the County would want to take in using the funds, which will require public input.

Mr. Livingston stated he wanted to see some broad categories, such as food insecurity, trauma, mental health, etc., and prioritize the needs.

Mr. Brown inquired if the categories should be come from staff.

Mr. Livingston responded Council should think of some broad categories for staff could review.

Ms. Terracio inquired about holding work sessions with the stakeholders being brought to the table.

Mr. Brown responded it might be part of it, but for a larger context, it would be better to get greater clarity from Ms. McBride's perspective.

Ms. McBride stated we need more stakeholder involvement in the process, similar to what we did with the flood. Council will make the final decision, in conjunction with Administration. She requested the guidelines on the funding.

Ms. Barron stated the Association of Counties sent out a briefing document about some of the guidelines, and they are hosting work sessions to give updates.

2) ERAP – Ms. Barron noted this was discussed at a previous meeting.

3) FEMA – Mr. Brown stated the FEMA coordination part at the site has ended. DHEC has continued to administer the second doses. The final numbers, as of June 8<sup>th</sup>, were 21,295, with 17,392 or 81.67% were Richland County residents.

Ms. Barron stated she wanted to do a press release or social media post to encapsulate the FEMA project, so the community knows the great things Richland County was able to accomplish by partnering with FEMA and DHEC.

Ms. McBride inquired if there are going to be efforts to vaccinate citizens in high-risk areas that are not being vaccinated. In addition, she inquired about the type of outreach in these areas.

Mr. Brown responded the County is willing to partner with anyone. There had been some messaging with some of our partners that said they would be going into the targeted areas and utilizing mobile sites. He noted the County would have to partner with someone because the County does not administer shots.

5. **Adjournment** – The meeting adjourned at approximately 5:31PM.