



Richland County  
 Coronavirus Ad Hoc Committee  
 September 13, 2021 – 3:00 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: Overture Walker, Michelle Onley, Angela Weathersby, Kyle Holsclaw, Tamar Black, Ashiya Myers, Lori Thomas, Leonardo Brown, Zachary Cavanaugh, Justin Landy, Allison Steele, Dale Welch, Beverly Harris, Kela Thomas, Lori Elrod, Matt Drawdy, Michael Byrd, Judy Carter, Paul Brawley, Michael Maloney, Randy Pruitt, Ronaldo Myers, Sandra Haynes, Stacey Hamm, Syndi Castelluccio, Jeannette McBride, John Thompson, Lori Thomas, James Hayes, Nadia Rutherford, Byron Gipson, Christa Sheehan, Aric Jensen, Geo Price, Dante Roberts and Jeff Ruble.

1. **Call to Order** – Ms. Barron called the meeting to order at approximately 3:00 PM.
2. **Approval of Minutes: July 12, 2021** – Mr. Livingston moved, seconded by Ms. Newton, to approve the minutes as distributed.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Barron, and Newton

Not Present: J. Walker

The vote in favor was unanimous.

3. **Adoption of Agenda** – Ms. McBride moved, seconded by Mr. Livingston, to approve the agenda as published.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Barron, and Newton

Not Present: J. Walker

The vote in favor was unanimous.

4. **Emergency Rental Assistance Program (2) Update** – Ms. Barron thanked Mr. Brown and his staff for their efforts and noted they have gained national recognition. She noted some of the staff members are going to be a part of a presentation with The U.S. Department of Treasury.

Mr. Brown stated for ERAP2 the County has approved over \$2M of the initial amount received. He noted we requested the additional 60% and the U.S. Treasury did approve the County to apply, and we have received the additional funding. He noted Richland County expended the \$12M in ERAP-1 funds, and have been awarded approximately \$9M in ERAP-2 funding. He stated they are still looking for

different opportunities for community outreach and more engagement from community partners.

Ms. Newton inquired about the total allotment of funds that Richland County has, or will, receive.

Mr. Brown responded \$12.573M for ERAP-1 and \$9.9M for ERAP-2.

Ms. McBride requested a final report to determine where the funds from ERAP-1 went and a demographic breakdown.

Mr. Brown responded he could provide a report, which includes a breakdown by zip code, by race and by ethnicity.

Ms. Newton noted there are some citizens who are computer savvy and have all of their documentation, while there are others, particularly the elderly who are not able to navigate the application process.

Ms. Barron noted, when citizens have challenges with computers, there are places they can go. For example, the library, to get assistance with the process. She stated they needed to explain better what to bring to an appointment, when applying for the funds, and where they can go to get help. She suggested doing a brief video because people are more drawn to pictures and videos.

Ms. Newton noted, in some cases, the applicants themselves had to create the documentation to prove they had been negatively impacted by COVID. There needed to be education to explain what kinds of documents are applicable and how to get or create those documents.

Ms. McBride inquired if we learned anything from ERAP-1 to make ERAP-2's distribution faster.

Mr. Brown replied in the affirmative. He noted, internally, they changed some of the processes, specifically dealing with information flow from departments from approval to payment.

Ms. Barron inquired about the average turnaround time for an applicant applying with the necessary documentation and having a check cut.

Mr. Brown responded, after all the proper documentation is submitted, it takes approximately 5-7 days to vet and approve the application for payment. The check then goes out in the mail. There have been some issues with the US Postal Service, and it is something the County is working on.

5. **Mask Ordinance** – Mr. Brown noted he previously reported on the metrics to highlight the spread of COVID in the community. When the numbers were below 5%, it indicated a slowing of the spread. Richland County has been above 5% for a while. He noted, when the County previously put the mask ordinance in place, the percent positive, and the number of confirmed cases per 100,000 were substantially lower than they are currently.

Ms. Newton suggested having a conversation with someone like Dr. Linda Bell, or someone from PRISMA Health, to give a regular update and allow for questions and discussion.

Ms. Barron noted they are getting email updates from PRISMA, but it would be great to have someone that could answer medical questions.

Mr. Livingston noted, in the Council meeting agenda packet, there was a draft of the mask ordinance for review.

Ms. Barron noted we previously put a mask ordinance in place when the numbers were much lower.

Ms. Rutherford stated she reached out to the Public Information Office about doing a PSA to show how many cases and deaths they are seeing. She noted people have relaxed in wearing their masks, washing their hands and social distancing. She noted the Coroner's Office does not receive every COVID case. She is requesting to be notified of all COVID cases, in order to protect the staff.

6. **COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate for County Staff** – Mr. Brown noted other cities and counties have taken this step. He has talked about this item during his weekly department meetings and had them start to consider the potential reality if COVID continues to be so prevalent in the communities. He noted the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission discussed the employers having the ability to implement this action. OSHA added vaccine to their suggested guidance to fight COVID. There was a lot of information from healthcare providers and experts about the effectiveness of vaccines. He noted the private sector, and now the public sector, are requiring vaccines. He would like to hear from Council on what they want the experience of “the customers”, as it relates to people who serve the citizens of Richland County, as well as, the citizens of Richland County, who you have charge over.

Ms. Barron inquired about the impact of the President's vaccine mandates on County government.

Mr. Brown responded he was not sure how it would affect County Government yet, or if it would affect Federal funding, such as the ERAP funds, which come from the Federal Government.

Ms. Barron stated, before Council could give any guidance, they need to know how the President's mandate would affect us.

Mr. Livingston stated they should look at a process similar to what USC has with a vaccine mandate, or required two-week testing. He inquired about the implications, legality and enforcement, if the County did something similar.

Ms. Newton inquired about protected health information, and how it would be stored and treated.

Ms. McBride noted she liked the idea of the vaccine mandate. Those that did not want to take it would have the option of being tested. She inquired if other counties have implemented the vaccine mandate, and if there is any feedback.

Mr. Brown stated, as we look at it, and consider it, one of the things we will talk about is some sort of metric, like we did with the percent positive numbers that speak to some level of effectiveness.

Ms. Barron stated, with both the mask mandate and the vaccine mandate, this is an emergency health crisis. She stated she would like them to move quickly with the research to see how Richland County could do its part to slow the spread of COVID.

Ms. Newton stated, for clarification, we are considering a vaccine mandate for County employees only.

7. **Community Outreach and Awareness Efforts**

- a. **Incentive Program** – Mr. Brown stated we would potentially be using American Rescue Plan funds. He noted an incentive program would come from an approval of Council. It would require feedback from Council on acceptable practices. The County could potentially incentivize employees to get the vaccine, give employees paid level if they contract COVID, they need time to recover from the vaccine, or have been exposed to the virus. He noted the City of Columbia recently incentivized their employees to get vaccinated.

Ms. McBride stated her concern is within the communities with the escalating number of COVID cases. She suggested incentivizing the vulnerable communities to get vaccinated. She noted other places have used monetary incentives. She would like to explore holding vaccination events in hard to reach communities to give them an extra push to get the vaccine. She noted it was not a reward to get vaccinated, but for the safety of everyone.

Ms. Barron inquired how the incentive would be given. Would it be on an individual basis or would there be a drawing from a pool of names to receive a reward.

Ms. McBride responded each individual would receive an incentive at the time of their vaccination. She noted some places gave away debit cards.

Ms. Barron inquired if the incentive would be held for the second shot.

Ms. McBride responded they would get it during their first shot.

Ms. Barron inquired if a gift card is an allowable expenditure of the ERAP funds.

Mr. Brown responded in the affirmative. He noted individuals have inquired about an incentive program, if they have already been vaccinated. He inquired if it would be retroactive or only going forward.

Ms. McBride responded it is not retroactive, but moving forward.

Ms. Newton inquired about having additional COVID testing sites and vaccination clinics to provide more access.

Mr. Livingston inquired if there were any attempts to engage trusted community leaders like the County's Neighborhood Council and community leaders in an attempt to provide information.

Ms. Newton inquired if we could partner with the local association of medical professionals, and have them present at some of the vaccination sites.

Ms. Barron noted we should find the zip codes in the County that are the hardest hit, and find trusted community leaders to host several events through those communities with an incentive to be vaccinated or tested. She noted, with the vaccination, people still need to be tested regularly.

Ms. Rutherford stated she would be meeting with a company that is looking to bring mobile vaccination trucks to the areas the Coroner's Office has deemed underserved or are hotspots. She noted this would not be a drain on County resources.

- b. Infomercial** – Mr. Brown suggested partnering County Council partnering with City and State representative to produce infomercials to discuss the vaccination for their specific areas. He and the other city managers could also come together and do the same thing. The idea is for the Richland County community to come together to support steps to improve health and the quality of life versus Richland County government.

Ms. McBride stated she liked the idea of partnering with other elected officials.

Ms. Newton stated she was in favor of the infomercial, but she was concerned about the distribution plan and making sure it would reach people.

Ms. McBride stated she heard that having celebrity spokespersons was not as effective as having local laypersons that citizens trust, not just elected officials.

Ms. Barron stated, if funding would allow, we could have an outside team help produce and distribute the infomercial. She suggested all Councilmembers aware of community leaders should provide recommendations to Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brawley stated the Auditor's Office sends out 25,000 – 30,000 automobile tax notices each month, and it would be an excellent opportunity for the County to insert information, as it relates to the vaccination.

## 8. **American Rescue Plan Funding**

- b. **Safety and Security Equipment** – Mr. Brown noted this item is specifically about the Alvin S. Glenn Detention Center and the American Rescue Plan being the funding mechanism. He wanted to address this with the Coronavirus Ad Committee before it is discussed at the Detention Center Ad Hoc Committee. He noted we are looking at purchasing body scanners to reduce physical contact and reduce transmissibility. In addition, we are considering a separate entrance for employees, secure parking, body cameras, and interior and exterior cameras.

Ms. Barron inquired if the committee needs to take any action at this time.

Mr. Brown responded the Detention Center Ad Hoc Committee will need to approve the equipment. He will provide documentation, at a later time, and request the Coronavirus Ad Hoc Committee to approve the funding.

- a. **Premium Pay** – Mr. Brown noted he has received feedback from elected officials and departments since the initial premium payout. Some individuals feel there were options Council did not consider because they were not put them before them. When the premium pay was initially presented, it was noted there was a cap of 150% of the average median income, which equated to \$82,150. Most department heads were at the cap. He inquired if department heads and elected officials should be included in the premium pay stipend since many of them worked in-person.

Ms. Newton inquired about the \$82,150 cap, and the rules from Treasury.

Mr. Brown responded the cap plays in the utilization of the funds. There were two (2) pots of money. There is the straight money, which the premium pay came from. Then there is the other pot for lost revenues.

Ms. Newton inquired if the \$40M already received the “straight funding” being referenced.

Mr. Brown responded in the affirmative.

Ms. Newton inquired if the lost revenue could be used over the \$82,150 cap.

Mr. Brown responded in the affirmative.

Ms. McBride stated she did not have enough time to process the information about giving funds to elected officials and departments. She did not have any numbers before her to process. She noted she supported a flat amount versus a percentage pay.

Ms. Newton inquired if the County previously approved a flat amount.

Mr. Brown responded in the affirmative.

Ms. Newton stated she welcomed this conversation being brought back because there were people working in the County building across the entire wage scale, and she would like to recognize them.

Ms. Barron stated she agreed with Ms. Newton about the conversation being brought back to the committee, so they can make an informed decision. She noted they had a plan they voted on. They are open to exploring another plan, but they need additional details.

Mr. Brawly stated about half of his staff telecommuted and came into the office depending on the time of the month and the tax bills. Based on the initial information for premium pay, it left out a lot his employees. He noted he would like Council to consider another premium pay option for those employees.

Mr. Gipson noted he is advocating for his employees. He noted, based on the number of employees, they came in at different times of the week. It would have been irresponsible to bring the whole staff in at the same time. He noted anytime any amount of money is offered there is an unrest created because it looks like there is a delineation. Many of the staff came back upset because they thought they personally made decisions to prevent them from qualifying. If there was another way to distribute funds, he would love to see it. He inquired about the loss revenue aspect, and if it was being looked at under the premium pay, or an additional pot of money where we may be able to petition for additional funds because they were not able to collect revenues (i.e. court fees and fines).

Ms. Barron responded the lost revenue fund pertains to the overall County, not a specific department.

Mr. Brown noted a lot of people work some remote schedule, with an in-person setting and out of office setting. The stipend that was paid was for those who worked in-person, just like before the pandemic. He inquired if the body would like to provide a level of compensation, in the form of a stipend, for individuals that worked in-person some days and remotely others. In the future, he would recommend a stipend for \$1,250. There will be two (2) separate items: whether to include department heads/elected officials and whether to do another level of stipend for in-person/remote employees.

9. **Adjournment** – The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:35PM.