



Richland County
Coronavirus Ad Hoc Committee
September 29, 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: Allison Terracio, Cheryl English, Leonardo Brown, Lori Thomas, John Thompson, Aric Jensen, Tamar Black, Hayden Davis, Bill Davis, Justin Landy, Kyle Holsclaw, Ashiya Myers, Jennifer Wladisckin, Matt Drawdy, Shane Kitchen, Stacey Hamm, Dale Welch, James Hayes, Steven Gaither and Dante Roberts

1. **Call to Order** – Ms. Barron called the meeting to order at approximately 4:00 PM.
2. **Approval of Minutes: September 13, 2021** – Mr. Livingston moved, seconded by Ms. McBride, 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** – Mr. Brown noted two items were not listed in the agenda packet under the American Rescue Plan Funding. He added item 7(c) Grants Management System and 7(d) Utilities Delinquent Receivables. He noted the information regarding these items were in the agenda.

Ms. Newton moved, seconded by Ms. McBride, to approve the agenda as amended.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Barron, and Newton

Not Present: J. Walker

The vote in favor was unanimous.

4. **Emergency Rental Assistance Program (2) Update** – Mr. Brown stated the County has currently obligated more than 45% of the allotted money in ERA 2, which is over \$3.3 M and serving a little less than 600 residents. He noted he would have additional information in the Council’s packet that will speak to the information the Treasury has released concerning what they plan to do for organizations that have allocated the funding and are considered fast spenders.

Ms. Barron noted they previously spoke about creative ways to reach the community and possibly engaging the NAACP or the Navigators. She inquired if the County has engaged in any new community

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outreach.

Mr. Brown responded they have not. In part, because there were over 14,000 applicants and on average the award was about \$5,200 dollars per applicant for rental and/or utilities assistance and they were concerned about running out of funds before they ran out of applicants. He noted they were doing a good job of getting the funds out and they are going to run out of funds again.

Ms. McBride stated she wanted to know about the time it was taking to get the funds out. She requested a report about how ERA 1 funds were dispersed and the demographics of who received those funds.

Mr. Brown responded it would be in the agenda packets.

Ms. McBride requested it be highlighted in the next Report of The Administrator.

Ms. Barron stated they should share the demographics with the public in the PIO Weekly Review because the County needs to do a better job of informing people of the great things the County is doing.

Ms. Newton inquired, if like they previously did, would the County coordinate with the State when someone did not qualify for County aid, but might qualify for aid from the State, and vice versa. She also inquired if they exhausted the funds, would they still have the applicant's data and information to give to other programs available in the County to assist citizens.

Mr. Brown responded they were still coordinating with the State. He noted the Treasury was intending to take money from slow spenders and award it to fast spenders, but they recently stated they were going to try to keep the funding within states. They should be able to retain the data of the applicants and there should not be a reason why they cannot use that information for future applicants. He noted they may not be using the same vendor, but they would still be able to access the data.

Ms. Barron inquired, once they spend all of the funds, the Treasury could re-allocate funds from other counties and give it to Richland County.

Mr. Brown responded in the affirmative. He noted the guidelines from the beginning were if counties did not spend 65% of their funds by September 30, the Treasury reserved the right to take funding back and redistribute it. He noted the potential is the County will obligate all of their funds and there will be a break between receiving additional funds. He inquired how the process would work with the vendor that allocates the funds because their services have been rendered.

5. **COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate for County Staff** – Mr. Brown noted the Federal Government is planning to require all employers with 100 or more employees to ensure workers are vaccinated or tested weekly. He noted OSHA is planning on issuing an emergency temporary standard to implement this requirement. He noted currently what they did would be implemented as an agency, and not mandated by the Federal Government through OSHA. He stated, after OSHA gave its guidance on a Federal level, the states could do what they want, but it would have to meet the OSHA standard or above.

Ms. Newton inquired if there were other vaccinations the County mandated.

Mr. Brown responded he was not aware of any employment requirements in Richland County.

Ms. McBride stated, for clarification, the County is waiting on OSHA's guidance before moving forwards with vaccination.

Mr. Brown responded in the affirmative.

Mr. Livingston inquired about his previous comments about vaccinating and weekly tests of unvaccinated employees.

6. **Community Outreach and Awareness Efforts**

- a. **Incentive Program** – Mr. Brown stated County staff already gets paid time off to recover and get vaccinated. He noted he did not have any additional recommendations to incentivize employees. He inquired how the committee would like to use the funds available under the ARP. He noted he did not have any specific recommendations.

Mr. Livingston suggested looking at locations that have implemented incentive programs to determine what would work in Richland County.

Ms. McBride stated incentive programs work for those individuals that are hesitant about taking the vaccine, not those completely against vaccination. She recommended doing a monetary incentive by using debit cards, on a first come, first serve basis. She suggested partnering with the Meeting Place Church and the University of South Carolina to do a vaccination drive on October 30th.

Mr. Brown inquired about the amount of the debit card value.

Ms. McBride responded \$100 gift cards for the first 250 people.

Ms. Barron stated she was a fan of the gift cards. She noted in Wyoming they had weekly lotteries for people who were vaccinated and/or tested for COVID-19. One of the prizes was a hotel stay and dinner for two. She stated she wanted to encourage people and gain momentum by doing a reoccurring incentive up to the October 30th event.

Ms. Newton stated that if The County was going to do an incentive program it should be a pilot program that is time bound and financially bound. She stated that the program should also reach rural areas as not to geographically de-incentivize people.

Mr. Livingston noted DeKalb County is doing \$100 gift cards and he would like to see how their program worked.

Ms. McBride noted, if the program was unsuccessful, they could move it around the County.

Ms. Barron noted, if they know of other events, they could easily attach themselves to something already planned versus creating events. She inquired if staff could find other mass vaccination events to provide incentives. She noted they would need to create a budget for incentives and create standards to track data.

Ms. McBride moved, seconded by Ms. Livingston, to implement a pilot program by October 30th to incentivize the vaccination program, and to coordinate with the University of South Carolina and The Meeting Place to incentivize vaccination of 250 persons with a \$100 debit gift card.

Mr. Brown inquired if they wanted to include the weekly giveaways programs and gift cards for those that were tested.

Ms. McBride stated they would need a budgeted amount that would allow them to expand the incentive program, so as to not have to return to Council each time.

Mr. Brown stated, after the pilot program, they could decide how to move forward with other incentive programs. He noted he could provide the committee guidance on an incentive budget, but it would be a separate motion for those programs.

Ms. Barron stated it would be best to go with the pilot program, and the weekly testing incentives could be revisited at a later date.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Barron, and Newton

Not Present: J. Walker

The vote in favor was unanimous.

- b. **Infomercial** – Mr. Brown noted he should be hearing from the PIO Office soon regarding this item. He noted it would include Councilmembers who are interested in participating and should be distributed across different platforms.

7. **American Rescue Plan Funding**

- a. **Premium Pay** – Mr. Brown noted Council previously approved premium pay and there were departments across the County that wanted employees who worked remotely and in-person to be considered eligible. He noted the amount would be different for these employees. He recommended \$1,250 stipend.

Ms. Barron noted the stipend would total \$660,000 from the ARP funding and would impact 490 employees.

Mr. Livingston inquired if it would include elected and appointed officials.

Mr. Brown responded it would include their staff, but not any department heads or elected officials.

Ms. McBride inquired if there was a minimum number of days they were required to come to the office.

Mr. Brown responded that there was not, but the committee could add that stipulation.

Ms. Newton noted she was in support of this premium pay. She inquired about employees that were required to work remotely full-time.

Mr. Brown responded, in order to follow the ARP funding guidelines, they had to have in-person services.

Ms. Newton noted she would ask the committee and/or the body to take up the issue of how their employees were recognized and rewarded during the pandemic. She inquired how the County was tracking everything they were using ARP funding for, and when Administration was going to bring forward their overall recommendation for ARP funding. She also inquired about the community input and how to spend the funds for benefit of the community.

Mr. Brown responded the US Treasury had not issued final guidance for ARP funding. He stated they would provide the information from the community input in the Council packet as a part of the Administrator's report, unless the committee would prefer for it to go through the committee

first. If everything on the agenda is approved, they will have spent \$19.15M, which would leave approximately \$60M remaining.

Ms. Newton noted \$60M is not a lot compared to the great needs of the community. She wants to ensure they are not allocating piecemeal and not address a lot of the community's needs.

Mr. Brown noted, prior to the ARP funding, the County and the community had a large need. The funding was designed to try to provide support to all of those areas.

Ms. Newton moved, seconded by Mr. Livingston, to approve staff's recommendation to use ARP funding to pay stipends, in the amount of \$1,250, for those employees who worked in-person, on a modified schedule, during the pandemic.

In Favor: McBride, Livingston, Barron, and Newton

Not Present: J. Walker

The vote in favor was unanimous.

- b. Safety and Security Equipment** – Mr. Brown noted this item is specific to Alvin S. Glenn Detention Center. He noted on p. 20 there is a breakdown of the recommendation of the items, the funding levels, and the goals of what the recommendation requests. He noted they are looking at body scanners, secured employee parking, body cameras, tasers, and interior and exterior security cameras. He noted staff is requesting approval of these items.

Ms. Barron inquired if the price was \$3,338,000 dollars.

Mr. Livingston moved, seconded by Ms. Newton, to approve the use of ARP funds to purchase equipment for the health and safety of employees and the population of Alvin S. Glenn Detention Center.

Ms. McBride inquired if the detainees had the opportunity to get the COVID vaccine, and if they were aware of it.

Mr. Brown responded in the affirmative.

Ms. Newton noted she was concerned about the tasers, but that could be addressed later. She noted the ARP funds are one-time funds, and the request involved recurring charges. She inquired how those recurring fees would be addressed.

Mr. Brown noted they could absorb the recurring costs in the budget, if need be.

Ms. Terracio noted there were other improvements they needed to look at down the road to enhance detainees visiting with their counsel.

In Favor: Livingston, Barron and Newton

Opposed: McBride

Not Present: J. Walker

The vote was in favor.

- c. **Grant Management System** – Mr. Brown stated the County did not have unified software that allows the County to track the different information. The Grant Management Software would be used to track information and how funds are spent to improve efficiency.
 - d. **Utilities Delinquent Receivable** – Mr. Brown stated, at the beginning of the pandemic, the State stopped utilities from being cut off. Richland County still has not turned off delinquent utilities. The Utilities System is something that mainly sustains itself. He noted the committee would need to decide to start delinquent turnoffs again. This item would address individuals affected by COVID who could not pay those funds for Richland County's Utilities System. He noted the ventilation is something looked at in a COVID environment and the HVAC needs to be updated to increase the airflow, which could be done using ARP funding.
8. **Adjournment** – The meeting adjourned at approximately 5:16PM.