



Richland County Council  
Coronavirus AD Hoc Committee Meeting  
**MINUTES**  
October 17, 2023 – 3:00 PM  
Council Chambers  
2020 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29204

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Gretchen Barron, Chair, Jason Branham, and Chakisse Newton (via zoom)

OTHERS PRESENT: Yvonne McBride, Allison Terracio, Michelle Onley, Leonardo Brown, Anette Kirylo, Patrick Wright, Stacey Hamm, Angela Weathersby, Kyle Holsclaw, Chelsea Bennett, Lori Thomas, Aric Jensen, Tamar Black, Dale Welch, Susan O’Cain, Jennifer Wladischkin, and Ashiya Myers

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – Chairwoman Gretchen Barron called the meeting to order at approximately 3:00 PM.

Ms. Barron acknowledged that Ms. Newton was traveling for work but was joining the meeting via Zoom.

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. September 19, 2023 – Ms. Newton moved to approve the minutes as distributed, seconded by Mr. Branham.

In Favor: Branham, Barron, and Newton

The vote in favor was unanimous.

3. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA** – Mr. Branham moved to adopt the agenda as published, seconded by Ms. Barron.

In Favor: Branham, Barron, and Newton

The vote in favor was unanimous.

4. **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

Ms. Barron stated that Council put \$16M in American Rescue Plan funds out to the community and for local non-profits and small businesses. Many of those categories have already been awarded. We are in the process of making final awards and contacting the applicants. We still have two categories we have not awarded (i.e., Affordable Housing and Youth and Recreation). The funding for Affordable Housing was moved to the General Fund; therefore, they no longer fall under ARPA. However, that is a category that was a part of this process. The \$1M in Youth and Recreation was held in committee.

Ms. McBride and Ms. Barron recently attended a community event where the area of youth services was discussed, so we know there is a need in our community.

- a. Youth and Recreation Category – Ms. Newton stated it is her understanding we have until December 2024 to commit the funds. From her perspective, one of the conversations we need to have is, “Are we looking at things that will have a one-time impact or sustainability?” As we look at our community, there are many needs for recreation and supporting our youth (i.e., summer camps). She does not know if there are organizations that serve the entire county that could benefit from doing more sustainable things. She felt the applicants we had previously were targeted adults. When she thinks of youth, she thinks of those in their teens who could benefit from having structured activities so they are being enriched and given opportunities to grow and stay out of trouble. For her, she is looking at a footprint across the County.

Assistant County Administrator Lori Thomas stated, in her conversations with Ms. Newton, that she was interested in finding out a couple of options relative to how we could disburse funds to benefit youth.

She noted she was able to speak with our consultants today and confirm her thoughts. While every child is important, it does not remove the process for us to identify how COVID-19 negatively impacted these people. Any program we support must encompass those individuals most negatively affected by the pandemic. If we were to do summer camps, we could have a beneficiary relationship, meaning the County would have to provide checks to individuals. That would also mean the County would have to determine how to qualify these individuals. One of the examples the consultant gave was that you can typically look at family income. Families with free and reduced lunch would usually be eligible. This option has a lot of expense and work that goes along with it. If you choose to support a group that supports these programs, they must ensure their expenditures qualify. By the same token, as they select youth to be in the programs, they will have to do the same thing the County would do by showing the people they are assisting qualify as those most negatively impacted by COVID-19.

Mr. Branham stated he was thinking about education and the reports we have seen about children scoring poorly throughout COVID-19. He wondered if tutoring would qualify.

Ms. Thomas replied that it possibly could be a use that would be sanctioned as qualified, but when you select the individuals that participate, there would have to be a qualifier for that group.

Mr. Branham inquired if it would be too broad if we had a statistic that indicated that 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders' overall scores dropped on standardized testing throughout the pandemic.

Ms. Thomas responded she would have to discuss that scenario with the consultants. Keep in mind the rules and regulations did not address prolonged initiatives, like the education component. They addressed specific COVID-19 impacts.

Mr. Branham indicated that when thinking about recreation, he feels it is more ambiguous. If someone could provide data that shows a direct connection and the benefits that could be realized right now, that would help. He believes the test scores are something that clearly demonstrates a negative impact.

Ms. McBride indicated we have already done the Coronavirus Ad Hoc grants, so we know the requirements for ARPA funding. The same guidelines apply to what we are currently discussing. The "Youth and Recreation" category could encompass many things. The category is based on what Council approved, even though we did not define it, which leaves us with some room to determine what it is. She noted we have Federal, State, and local data that shows the students lost learning during that period. From her perspective, she does not think that will be a significant hurdle. As we begin to look at the "Youth and Recreation" category, we must look at the data we have at our disposal to determine which communities were directly impacted by COVID-19.

Ms. Newton stated one of the reasons the broad category of recreation was chosen was due to the impacts on our physical and mental health. We all collectively experienced trauma as a part of the pandemic. She inquired if the census tracts or income were the only ways to determine the children who would be eligible to be served.

Mr. Brown replied that some general information is available, which states there are some standard socio-determinates. Organizations could also look at data in their communities to more define a group, but we have to ensure we are aware of what we are doing that complies. The guidance did say you could do a subgroup impact, but you have to be able to justify that information. You have the ability to do more research (i.e., mortality rates). He noted a program in Idaho that addresses the negative economic impacts that focuses on a healthy childhood environment and home visiting. Because of education, they provided a resource where persons went into the homes of individuals who were more disparately impacted and provided educational assistance.

Ms. Barron indicated we talked about individuals, but communities can also be identified. If we have a community that has been identified as a high-risk community that COVID-19 negatively impacted, they would qualify for that particular programming.

Mr. Brown responded in the affirmative. By way of example, if you look at the health information for our community, one of the things you will see is the life expectancy from one zip code to the next and how COVID-19 exacerbated that.

Ms. Newton stated she is curious to hear what the body has to say regarding this category. For her, when you look at the youth, it is complicated. There is their mental health, physical health, education, environment, family structure, etc. While she is not opposed to tutoring or education assistance, even though we did have an education assistance category, where her heart naturally leads her are things that are going to engage our youth.

Ms. Barron indicated she would like us to walk away from this meeting with the next steps to get the funds back into motion so we can have the organizations out there get the funds [i.e., an application process]. We may want to have an agreement with a particular organization.

Ms. McBride maintained we need to look at the data and include the communities to define our needs. She noted we do not need to have another open process where people working in the community are not getting the funding. She would like to see a totally integrated process where we have community input, analyze the data, and determine how the funds will be used.

Ms. Barron inquired if Ms. McBride was suggesting we conduct a survey to assess the community specific to this category.

Ms. McBride indicated more than a survey is needed. Often, when we do a survey, the people we need to hear from do not respond to surveys. She noted there are many coalitions and people that specialize in youth and recreation in the communities that could garner the community's input. We can look at the data collected through the CDBG Program.

Ms. Barron stated we want to stay good to what we said, but she cannot help but have her filter, which is her community. There is a crisis in her community, and what they are saying is they need youth and recreation. She is okay with doing a survey and hearing from the community. However, we need to note that as we do the work, life is still happening. There is still a lack of services. She stressed we saw how fast the government can move when we started moving with Scout. Scout is economic development, and we are talking about children. What we are hearing from the community is to stop giving them programs they do not need, so we need to determine what the needs are. Council's job is to decide how we get the funds to the community.

Ms. Newton stated for her, there is a need to look at the data, but she believes we already have some data. She wondered if there was more specific information we could give staff and if there was other data staff could share with us. She believes the next step is looking at the data, which could help them be more targeted and compliant. Before she made a motion, she asked if there was any specific data we wanted to mention in the motion. We may also want to direct the Clerk to Council to reach out to full Council and find out what they want to see.

Ms. Barron noted this is also one of those areas where we could see what data is available that we could begin to hone in on, even though we may not have the category specific. She suggested having staff begin researching the County's data related to youth and recreation services. Once we receive information from Councilmembers, we can take that data and see if there are any corresponding categories (i.e., academics).

Ms. McBride requested the Sheriff's Department to provide data on youth crimes.

Ms. Terracio stated that isolation from COVID-19 has affected people, so getting them together in a meaningful way will be helpful.

Ms. Newton requested the Clerk of Council contact all Councilmembers to inform them that staff will be gathering data about community needs for youth and recreation services and inquire if they have any input they would like to share. The information should be provided by November 1<sup>st</sup>.

Ms. Newton moved to direct the Administrator to gather COVID-related impact data pertaining to youth and recreation services for committee and Council consideration to award ARPA grant funds. This research should include any areas submitted by Councilmembers where there is data, input from the Sheriff's Department where applicable, and examples of other community programs in these areas. Ms. Barron seconded the motion.

Ms. Barron indicated that DHEC, CDBG, and the Sheriff's Department data should be used as a baseline. As we get input from Councilmembers, it will be filtered into the existing data.

Mr. Brown acknowledged the directive.

Ms. Newton noted staff should be free to explore matters relative to this discussion.

In Favor: Barron and Newton

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

- b. Affordable Housing – Ms. Barron stated we have reallocated the \$4M for affordable housing. It now lies in the General Fund Budget. Although it has passed on through Council, she felt the need for this committee to discuss the recommended framework and provide such to Council. Her thoughts are the recommendation would be forwarded to the Development and Services Committee. We have had high-level conversations about the matter but have not gotten into the trenches of what it looks like. Many of us have studied it and had meetings about it. Organizations are encouraging us to address it. Most importantly, Council needs to feel comfortable with the framework and what we put forth. In one of our previous meetings, Mr. Livingston brought up the point of what affordable housing could be defined as. When we say \$4M, it is nearly impossible for us to award these funds to an organization to acquire land, build, and get permitting within the period we had set forth as a part of the ARPA guidelines. To that point, Mr. Livingston inquired if we could not define affordable housing as taking a home that was not on the market, refurbishing it, and then placing it back on the market at a particular price point. For her, we would identify affordable housing as such. She suggested having a dialogue on the matter so we do not have a blank slate saying we are going to address affordable, but we have not identified what affordable housing looks like. She proposed holding a work session or hiring a consultant but noted anything we do

externally could be an additional cost. We could partner with existing organizations that are in the affordable housing industry.

Ms. Newton stated at the SCAC Annual Conference, Councilwoman Terracio, Councilman Livingston, and she had an opportunity to meet with Guidehouse to talk through some things on affordable housing. She felt the conversation was fruitful. For her, she does not see an affordable housing framework coming out of this committee in the near future. Her feeling is that this is a conversation for the whole body to have and think through together. Even if we were to make a recommendation, we still have to bring it to Council. She would like to start by feeling like she has a clear picture of what the market looks like in Richland County. Is there a particular type of housing we need the most? Is there a specific area that has the most need? Is there a particular workforce group that needs it most? We know that no community in the United States has a sufficient stock of affordable housing.

Ms. Barron indicated the framework coming out of committee could be to hold a work session on identifying what affordable housing is and is not driven by data. If we do not bring something forward, the \$4M just sits, and there is no conversation.

Ms. Thomas noted the consultant felt there was a need to understand what the existing place in the market was, what our future place should be in the market, and how that helps to develop a housing strategy for long-range planning. One component would be workforce and/or affordable housing. They do have an arm that does these kinds of studies. The studies can be as broad or narrow as you would like them to be. There are approximately six different categories they have listed to look at, including assessing the existing studies and data, engaging local stakeholders, doing trend forecasting, identifying national best practices, developing policy and program solutions to address the housing need, and a housing strategy and policy. She noted we would be looking at a six to twelve-month timeframe, and the cost would be \$300,000-\$600,000.

Ms. Barron acknowledged having Guidehouse as a resource is helpful; however, sometimes, the overuse of a particular vendor could lend different results.

Ms. McBride noted that Councilwoman Terracio has been involved in this area and suggested utilizing the existing data instead of paying the consultant. She wants to look at the data we have, use the expertise we have, and come up with something that helps Council understand what affordable housing is, our options, and best practices so we can make the most informed decision.

Ms. Terracio stated over the last couple of years, the City of Columbia has had an Affordable Housing Task Force in place. They have been presented with a lot of information about where the opportunities are and where the needs are. She believes they have a finger on the complete picture of Richland County. It would not take much for us to take the data and extrapolate on it.

Ms. Newton indicated we can glean a lot from data we already have available, which then can tell us what we need to do next, where we need more data, and where we need more stakeholder input. It still might make sense to have an outside facilitator. She suggested either holding a work session or discussing this at the upcoming Strategic Planning Forum in January.

Mr. Brown pointed out that Ms. Terracio stated this happening over an extended period. One of the things that we might want to consider is how much time we want to invest in determining what that means for Richland County. For example, there was a request for the Administrator to develop a plan and bring it back to the committee. Still, there were different questions about what affordable housing was for the County (i.e., trust fund, rehabilitating a unit, or construction of new units). As you just highlighted, all of those things can be components, but you may not be able to focus on all of them. He believes we may need multiple work sessions where Council hears from entities involved in affordable housing about the impact they have had on the local community.

Ms. McBride inquired if CDBG Grants has affordable housing in it.

Mr. Brown responded they provide funding for housing and have components related to affordable housing.

Ms. McBride requested the funding availability of the CDBG Grants, the expiration, and requirements. In addition, some of the research they have conducted.

Ms. Barron stated if the County has identified how we address affordable housing, even if it is through the CDBG Grants, that could be a place to start.

The County Attorney Patrick Wright, as Ms. Terracio has stated, the City of Columbia's Task Force took a lot of time to get definitions for affordable and workforce housing. There were a number of stakeholders in the City of Columbia and Richland County who were a part of the task force. A lot of the information already exists because the work was already done. If we can obtain that information, it would save the County months.

Ms. Barron requested when we move forward with these conversations that, the information is presented to us and not just included in a packet.

Ms. Newton expressed that the City of Columbia is not Richland County, but a small part of Richland County. While the data the task force has is valuable, we make sure we are not putting square pegs in round holes. For her, she thinks it is worth investing a significant amount of time, so we are not just throwing \$4M at housing without establishing a policy. There are things we need to look at as it relates to economic development and the Land Development Code. She wants to ensure we give staff the latitude and resources they need when other people need to facilitate the conversation. She inquired if there was somebody who could look at the data we already have and summarize the information so it is presented in the most helpful way.

Ms. Barron moved to direct staff to research all available data through the City and the County to begin the initial process of discussing affordable housing through work sessions, seconded by Ms. Newton.

Ms. Newton requested the data include identified needs. For example, if we know that a 1<sup>st</sup> level Sheriff's deputy or a teacher fresh out of college cannot afford a house.

Mr. Wright stated, for the record, that the task force was not solely the City of Columbia. It also included Lexington County, the Housing Authority, and State and local entities.

Ms. Barron acknowledged she does not want to rush the process, but she also does not want us to be silent and stay on pause.

In Favor: Barron and Newton

Not Present: Branham

The vote in favor was unanimous.

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 3:31 PM.