



Richland County Council  
Transportation Ad Hoc Committee  
**MINUTES**  
March 26, 2024 – 4:00 PM  
Council Chambers  
2020 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29204

COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Overture Walker, Chair; Paul Livingston, Don Weaver, and Jesica Mackey.

Not Present: Yvonne McBride.

OTHERS PRESENT: Allison Terracio, Cheryl English, Jason Branham, Derrek Pugh, Gretchen Barron, Michelle Onley, Michael Maloney, Angela Weathersby, Anette Kirylo, Patrick Wright, Ashiya Myers, Susan O’Cain, Chelsea Bennett, Stacey Hamm, Tamar Black, Lori Thomas, John Thompson, Kyle Holsclaw, Leonardo Brown, Jackie Hancock, and Jennifer Wladischkin

1. **CALL TO ORDER** - Chairman Overture Walker called the meeting to order at approximately 4:00 PM.

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

a. December 14, 2023 – Mr. Weaver moved to approve the minutes as distributed, seconded by Ms. Mackey.

In Favor: Livingston, Weaver, Walker, and Mackey

Not Present: McBride

The vote in favor was unanimous.

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

In Favor: Livingston, Weaver, Walker, and Mackey

Not Present: McBride

The vote in favor was unanimous.

4. **ELECTION OF CHAIR** – Ms. Mackey moved to nominate Mr. Walker for the position of Chair, seconded by Mr. Livingston.

In Favor: Livingston, Weaver, Walker, and Mackey

Not Present: McBride

The vote in favor was unanimous.

5. **ITEM FOR DISCUSSION/ACTION**

a. Atlas Road Re-Scoping – Mr. Michael Maloney, Transportation Director, stated that staff’s request is to restore the scope of Atlas Road from Bluff Road to Shop Road with a project budget of \$12M. He noted that \$3M has already been utilized for right-of-ways. If the project is re-scoped, there will be a continuation of sidewalks on both sides, bike lanes adjacent to the travel lanes, and 3 or 5-lane configurations.

Mr. Weaver inquired what a rescope and descope are.

Mr. Maloney responded that descoping reduces the scope of a specific project, and rescoping is restoring the project to what was in the referendum.

Ms. Mackey inquired if funding is being pulled from the program or project reserve to fund this project.

Mr. Maloney replied that we would utilize approximately \$1M from the project reserve.

Mr. Walker inquired if the project reserve was the dollars saved when the state took over the Broad River Widening.

Mr. Maloney responded in the affirmative.

Ms. Newton maintained the safety and quality of life will be enhanced by doing this, and it is a part of our commitment to smart growth.

Ms. English noted this is the gateway into her district's tourism area. She thanked the staff for diligently working to get this accomplished.

Mr. Walker inquired about the referendum amount for this project.

Mr. Maloney responded that the construction costs are \$44,246,000, requiring them to draw down \$19M from the project reserve fund. The balance remaining in the project reserve fund will be \$16.5M.

Ms. Mackey moved to forward to Council with a recommendation to restore the scope of Atlas Road from Bluff Road to Shop Road with a project budget of \$12M, seconded by Mr. Livingston.

In Favor: Livingston, Weaver, Walker, and Mackey

Not Present: McBride

The vote in favor was unanimous.

- b. Award of Construction – Atlas Road Widening – Mr. Maloney stated staff recommends the award of the construction contract for the Atlas Road Widening project to Palmetto Corp of Conway in the amount of \$44,246,229.20, to include a 5% construction contingency, for a total approved amount of \$46,458,540.66.

Mr. Walker stated that in light of the challenges we have heard regarding Hardscrabble, he has concerns about Palmetto Corp taking on additional work, especially with a job of this magnitude. He inquired as to when we anticipate them beginning on this project.

Mr. Maloney responded in the spring. There will be 18 months of utility construction before construction will begin.

Mr. Branham questioned what factors go into the analysis of the bids.

Mr. Maloney responded that the factors are responsive and responsible bidders.

The Procurement Director, Jennifer Wladischkin, affirmed the bid would be awarded to the lowest responsive and responsible bidder. She indicated that procurement does not have evidence that the vendor cannot perform the additional work; therefore, they would be considered responsive and responsible. The vendor has been awarded many projects over the past several years.

Mr. Walker expressed that the delays on Hardscrabble Road are causing an impact on the constituent's quality of life, and they may hold their elected officials responsible.

Ms. Newton inquired how staff expects this additional work to affect the projected timeline(s).

Mr. Maloney responded that when the larger part is in road construction, the new section could be underway.

Ms. Newton further inquired if the part in District 11 would be on the same schedule.

Mr. Maloney replied that a new contractor would bid on this new section.

Mr. Weaver asked if there are penalties levied on the vendors if they do not complete the project on time.

Mr. Maloney stated we have liquidated damages.

Ms. Wladischkin indicated that the county utilizes the SCDOT schedule. It is a sliding schedule based on the project's dollar value. The penalty is per day and ranges from \$250 to \$1,000.

Mr. Weaver maintained the penalties should be stiffer.

Ms. Mackey requested Mr. Maloney to ask for SCDOT's position on the review of the plans in writing.

Mr. Wright noted legally that since Palmetto Corp is the lowest responsive bidder and has been deemed able to do the job, the only option is to accept them or not do the project.

Mr. Walker inquired if the vote fails, will the bidding process start over again?  
Mr. Wright responded you could, but there would likely be repercussions.

Mr. Branham inquired if there is a timeliness factor or other factors that define "responsible."

Ms. Wladischkin indicated that when we talk about "responsible," we are talking about whether they can perform the work. With a project of this magnitude, we would look at the staff, equipment, funding, etc. Nothing would lead us to believe that they do not have that. Where someone would use those resources is another issue. In our due diligence, we are looking to establish if they can perform the work.

Mr. Branham inquired if prior performance could be factored in to determine whether they were responsible.

Ms. Wladischkin responded it could be factored in if you have an objective way to record their performance history.

Ms. Mackey moved to forward to Council with a recommendation to award the construction contract for the Atlas Road Widening project to Palmetto Corp of Conway based on the bid received in the amount of \$44,246,299.20, to include a 5% construction contingency, for a total approved amount of \$46,458,540.66, seconded by Mr. Livingston.

In Favor: Livingston, Walker, and Mackey

Opposed: Weaver

Not Present: McBride

The vote in favor was unanimous.

- c. Transportation Penny Update – The County Administrator, Mr. Leonardo Brown, stated in October 2023 that Council authorized staff to prepare for a potential Transportation Penny referendum. As a part of that, we received questions about what the "Penny" has done.

Ms. Susan O'Cain, Communications/Public Information Director, stated that the provided Q&A document will be ever-evolving. Please share any questions that may come about with her office so they can be added to the document. There is also a brochure highlighting the Transportation Penny's progress to date. This brochure can be tailored to the respective communities.

In 2012, the residents made a significant decision to invest in the future of their community by supporting infrastructure and public transportation with the aim of enhancing safety, economic growth, mobility, and overall quality of life.

The Penny built a stronger, safer, and more vibrant Richland County and the neighborhoods within it. Residents have better access to workplaces, local businesses, and other amenities. They have increased walkability to greenspaces, entertainment, and local businesses, as well as new intersections and miles of new sidewalks contributing to health and safety. Over the last decade, our local economy has experienced remarkable growth. While we cannot attribute this success solely to our Penny investment, it undoubtedly contributed to the energy and dynamics.

The Penny has been a major contributor to economic development, delivering an outstanding return on investment. We have seen nearly 4,000 new businesses, 20,000 new jobs, a 60% decrease in unemployment, over \$4.7 billion in investments, and 2.5 million new visitors.

The Penny is responsible for significant economic investment deals. Direct impacts include more than \$1 billion in investments and 1,100 new jobs through five projects.

Of the \$1 billion from the Penny that was utilized, \$24 million was allocated to support the extension of Shop Road. By proxy, that aided several other projects in the area. Those projects include Mark Anthony Brewing, City Roots, and Cirba Solutions.

Everyone can understand the importance of having safer and better roads. This leads to fewer accidents, smoother commutes, and avoids wear and tear to vehicles. The current summary of improvements is as follows:

- 120+ miles of roads resurfaced;
- 500+ roadways, bikeways, and greenways completed;
- 11 new intersections constructed; and
- 85 dirt roads paved

Projects like those have translated into remarkable improvements. For example, the Clemson Road widening, where we have seen a 25% reduction in reported accidents and an expected 46% less wait time at each Penny improved intersection. Another example is North Springs Road at Harrington Road, where recent statistics show a 40% reduction in all accidents and a 60% reduction in vehicle rear-end accidents.

With one-third of the Penny, Richland residents have invested in a modern, efficient, and broad-reaching public transit system known as the COMET.

- Miles traveled have increased 41% from nearly 1.7 million in 2012 to almost 2.4 million in 2021;
- 29 new routes have been added to connect more people to their destinations;
- In 2012, there were zero bus shelters; now, there are 160 bus shelters and 114 new benches;
- 29 buses have been added to COMET's fleet; and
- Ridership has doubled from 1.4 million in 2012 to 2.8 million in 2021

The Penny impacts every part of the County, as demonstrated by these examples. It is important to note that COMET has been consistently recognized over the years for its financial management.

The citizens are receiving an even greater for their investment, which equates to about a billion in revenue, 60% of which is generated from within Richland County. To date, the Penny has collected \$710 million, which was leveraged by an additional 10% through federal grants, matching funding, and other sources, valuing about \$67 million.

Not only has the Transportation Penny directly impacted growth throughout Richland County, but the construction and improvement of roads, pedestrian pathways, and greenways have also set in motion better avenues for businesses to connect with their customers while improving the quality of life and safety in all of the communities we serve.

Mr. Ray Jones, Parker Poe Law Firm, stated the roadmap incorporated 19 public meetings. One of which was held on March 19<sup>th</sup>, when the Council adopted a resolution giving TPAC a charge. This meeting and the guidance that has already been given to TPAC by virtue of the resolution will hopefully put TPAC in a position where it can start deliberations it has been requested to have in order to provide Council with additional information and guidance.

The role of TPAC, as stated in the March 19<sup>th</sup> resolution, is to start to dig into the questions, but with guidance. The project principles are a set of guidelines for Council to determine which of the needs identified by Stantec are projects that need to be undertaken by the next penny. For example:

- How to divide the penny among the various categories? We have discussed community improvement, county advancement, and COMET enhancement projects.

Along the way, we also have to decide what is important. We have heard Council talk about safety, projects not completed, and equality of projects countywide.

Ms. Mackey indicated looking at the projects not completed, if the project is still needed, to make those projects a priority.

Mr. Walker inquired if Mr. Jones was referring to unfunded projects, incomplete projects, or both.

Mr. Jones responded he was leaving that open to Council to determine which they would like to focus on.

Mr. Walker asserted it is his understanding that under the current penny, there is enough funding to finish all the funded projects. So when he hears something is incomplete, it appears we do not have enough money to finish the projects they said they would complete. Something that is unfunded is a part of the referendum, but they were not the projects that were prioritized. He does not want the public to be confused if we use the terms "incomplete" and "unfunded" interchangeably.

From her perspective, Ms. Newton stated that whatever makes the experience of living in Richland County safer and easier is a category she would like us to discuss. She wanted to be clear on the process and whether citizens or council members still wanted to share feedback.

Mr. Weaver requested a document that backs out the COMET funding and the funding we have already committed to see how much new money would be left. He expressed he is hearing from his district that we need to have geographical equity with this next round.

Mr. Jones responded that he believes that can be provided as we walk through this process.

Mr. Branham requested that we stay in contact with the Central Midlands Council of Governments (CMCOG) to ensure there is no duplication of projects. He noted he is not sure there is a need to provide one-third of the funding to the COMET this round. He would like a more data-based analysis of their needs versus an assumption.

Ms. Terracio maintained with no funding source from the Penny, the COMET is essentially charged with no bus system or finding another funding mechanism. She knows there is an appropriate request from the COMET with staff now or about to be delivered to staff. As she talks with neighborhoods and constituents regarding transportation, she notes that 98% of their concerns are pedestrian safety. It has to do with a walkway, sidewalks, or crumbling roads. The people we serve desperately want and need more ways for them to walk and bike safely.

Ms. Mackey believes we need to take a holistic approach to the County and, where we have seen a large amount of growth. When discussing our future needs and economic development, how do we have more foresight and plan for that? She understands we all represent districts but represent the County as a body. It is not always equal. Some of us have municipalities, and some do not. The municipalities may be able to put their hand in three or four different pots. Whereas, other districts may only have the county pot. Our infrastructure needs may sometimes be in one part of the county because we have not done anything in that area for twenty or more years.

Mr. Jones assured the committee there are three categories we anticipate to present to the voters: community improvement projects, county advancement projects, and COMET enhancement.

Mr. Livingston inquired if there are things that have changed since the last Penny that we may be able to implement differently this time.

Mr. Jones replied the statute itself has not changed. We have had a fair amount of guidance issued on the statute. We have watched other counties embark on transportation penny programs. Part of his role has been to look around the state, figure out the best practices, and bring them to the table for our penny. For example, the concept of having categories that speak more to the voters and less to words on the ballot. The idea of having a fixed time period on your penny, but not necessarily a fixed dollar amount, to give you more flexibility is being discussed. Lastly, having percentages assigned to where the money is going rather than hard dollar amounts. They recommend having maximum flexibility around the projects themselves and not having a long list of projects set in stone. Instead, they are recommending a list of projects and principles on how to prioritize those projects that will be living and breathing even beyond the time the penny is approved to enable Council, staff, and the Transportation Department to manage the needs more easily. In addition, they have suggested setting aside funds in each category for anticipated needs.

Ms. Mackey requested an update on where we are with the current Penny projects and an anticipated timeline.

6. **ADJOURNMENT** – Ms. Mackey moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Weaver.

In Favor: Livingston, Weaver, Walker, and Mackey

Not Present: McBride

The vote in favor was unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 5:05 PM.