

CALLED MEETING

COMMISSION CHAMBER  
March 14, 2023

Augusta Richmond County Commission convened at 11:00 a.m., Tuesday, March 14, 2023, the Honorable Garnett Johnson, Mayor, presiding.

PRESENT: Hons. Johnson, Williams, Mason, Frantom, Garrett, Scott, McKnight, Pulliam, Lewis and Guilfoyle, members of Augusta Richmond County Commission.

The Mayor called the meeting to order.

**1. LEGAL MEETING**

**A. Pending and potential litigation**

**B. Real estate**

**C. Personnel**

**Mr. Brown: Good morning, Mayor Johnson and Commissioners. We request a motion to go into executive session for the discussion of pending and potential litigation, real estate and personnel.**

**Ms. McKnight: So move.**

Mr. Johnson: Second.

Mr. Mayor: Madam Clerk, I have a motion and a second. Voting.

**Mr. Williams, Mr. Frantom and Ms. Scott out.**  
**Motion carries 7-0.**

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Madam Clerk. We'll now go into legal. Thank you.

[EXECUTIVE SESSION]

**2. Motion to authorize execution by the Mayor of the affidavit of compliance with Georgia's Open Meeting Act.**

**Mr. Brown: We request a motion to execute the closed meeting affidavit.**

**Mr. Frantom: So move.**

Ms. Scott: Second.

**Mr. Williams out.**  
**Motion carries 9-0.**

3. **SE-23-01 Motion to approve request for concurrence with the Augusta Georgia Planning Commission to approve a petition by L. Elizabeth Giles on behalf of Augusta Regional Airport requesting a Special Exception to expand fuel farm per Section 24-2(a)(25) of the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance affecting property located at 1505 Aviation Way. Zoned HI (Heavy Industrial). Tax Map # 159-0-002-04-0. District 1. (Approved by the Planning Commission's Special Called Meeting held February 23, 2023)**

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Madam Clerk. The Chair recognizes the commissioner from the 7<sup>th</sup>, Commissioner Frantom.

**Mr. Frantom: Motion to approve.**

Ms. McKnight: Second.

Mr. Mayor: Madam Clerk, there is a motion and a second by the commissioner from the 3<sup>rd</sup>. If there is no further discussion, voting.

**Motion carries 10-0.**

4. **Motion to consider approving the appointment of the following positions on the 2023 Augusta Emergency Management Subcommittee: Administrator, General Counsel, Fire Chief and Director of Augusta's E-911 and representatives from the health care community.**

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Madam Clerk. The Chair recognizes the commissioner from the 7<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Frantom: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Just before we vote on this, I just think that as far as Chair and whatnot ought to be determined by this committee. I also think that the meetings ought to be in an open forum as well where the public is invited. Thank you.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Commissioner. The Chair recognizes the commissioner from the 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I want to add to this list of committee members the Procurement Director and I want also to just make the recommendation that the Administrator chairs it. It may not need to be in the motion but I want to make the recommendation that the Administrator chairs this committee but most definitely adding Procurement to the committee.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, commissioner from the 1<sup>st</sup>. There is a couple of people in the medical community that have also expressed an interest in being a part of this committee. One is Lily Henson who is the new CEO of Piedmont Healthcare System. Her name is Dr. Lily Henson. There is another, her name is Dr. Abell. She is an EMS physician with AU Medical Center and for clarity I want to make sure I get her name correct. We did call her today asking her if she was

still interested in serving and she did. Her name is Becky Abell and she is an EMS physician with Augusta University Medical Center.

Mr. Brown: Mayor.

Mr. Mayor: Yes, sir.

Mr. Brown: Are these medical providers, are they sitting on as advisory members as they are not part of Augusta's staff?

Mr. Mayor: I would imagine they are serving as advisory members to this committee to provide their input and expertise from the medical community. The Chair now recognizes the commissioner from the 5h, Commissioner Williams.

Mr. Williams: Yes, sir. Mr. Garrett, I think that the people that the Mayor mentioned, is that enough hospital or do we need more hospital people?

Mr. Mayor: Yes, Dr. Abell is with the Augusta University Medical Center and Dr. Lily Henson is CEO of Piedmont Healthcare System.

Mr. Garrett: Should we have somebody from Doctors also represented?

Mr. Mayor: I think that would be prudent.

Mr. Williams: Yes, somebody from Doctors and also we have to make sure they have to be Augusta residents, am I right, Mr. Brown?

Mr. Brown: Actually, in an advisory capacity there wouldn't be any residential, residency requirement.

Mr. Williams: I'm in agreement with what everybody said so far and add the person from Doctors Hospital.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Commissioner. The Chair recognizes the commissioner from the 7<sup>th</sup>, Commissioner Frantom.

**Mr. Frantom: Motion to approve as stated.**

Ms. McKnight: Second.

Mr. Mayor: All right, Madam Clerk, there's a motion and a second. Commissioner from the 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mr. Johnson: Just want to get it restated because we added a few things.

**The Clerk: The motion is to approve appointing the following positions on the 2023 Augusta Emergency Management sub-committee: the Administrator, General Counsel, Fire Chief, the Director of 911, Procurement, I'm sorry, CEO of the Piedmont Medical Center, Augusta University Medical Center Dr. Abell and members from Doctors and these will be advisory positions.**

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Mayor: And are the meetings going to be open to the public? Was that part of –

The Clerk: I don't know.

Mr. Johnson: Can we get a determination from legal on that one?

The Clerk: Yeah.

Mr. Johnson: Before we make that decision. I understand the premise, but I want to make sure that we don't get ourselves into a mess.

Mr. Brown: That would be the will of the Commission. Whatever the will of the Commission would be whether that's a public sub-committee or even though normally I will say that negotiating committee is treated as a staff function to which the public would not be, neither the public nor the Commission would be entitled to be present.

Mr. Mayor: Commissioner from the 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mr. Johnson: And that is a concern. I'll never advocate for the community not to be involved in things of this nature because the community should be but I think that in meetings like this where staff is deliberating, I don't know if having it in that type of forum is going to be helpful to the conversation. I mean certainly if any of us would like to attend, I'm not sure if anything would stop that but I don't understand the premise of the ask. I mean when our staff is going to the table to really fight on behalf of the citizens of Augusta, I think that they should have the full time to do that without commissioners or sub-groups or anyone breathing down their neck. So I would caution against the open forum although again it's the will of the Commission. But I just wanted to get a little clarity on what the intent there is.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Commissioner. I think the intent would be initially while we start the progress, the process, that we keep it open to the public but certainly once contract negotiations begin, that should be a closed process. I think having our medical professionals and our medical community involved in the input and the information being related from both sides is a benefit to the city as a whole but you're right and correct in that once the negotiations begin, that process should be done with the committee that represents Augusta Richmond County.

Mr. Johnson: Would the negotiations not be what this group is going to the table to do originally?

Mr. Mayor: I think this group is probably going to the table to understand what information is needed by Central EMS as well as trying to understand the needs of the community from a number of ambulances perspectives, understand the needs once they arrive at our medical facilities, how can we best get them away from there instead to wasting time there so I would imagine there should be some discussion initially about how we build a program and then from that point once we've done that, I think the discussions will get a little bit more specific regarding costs.

Mr. Johnson: Okay, just one last question. I'm done, Mr. Mayor, thank you. So just for my personal clarity so the negotiations will be done by a different committee or would this committee still be doing the negotiations?

Mr. Mayor: It's my understanding this committee will continue to do negotiations. I think the medical professionals are needed just to provide some input as to how we build a program that benefits the City. Once we get to specific terms on contractual terms, I think that's a decision that should be made by the City.

Mr. Johnson: Okay, thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mr. Mayor: The Chair recognizes the commissioner from the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Ms. McKnight: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I just want to say that I believe that with what we've been through in the past it is very important for us to be transparent and to allow the citizens of Augusta and have the community be able to have this open and have them be able to come in and listen. That's my stance. Thank you.

Mr. Mayor: Commissioner from the 5<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Williams: Yes, sir, I see Mr. Coker in the back. Can we have him come up and give us the purpose of this committee? And the second thing since we've got this back and forth about should it be public and not public or whatever I think that should be put in the form of a motion.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, sir, I appreciate it. We'll entertain that motion just as soon as Mr. Coker addresses us. If you will, sir, for the record, please state your name and address.

Mr. Coker: Sure. Gary Coker, Marble Hill, Georgia. I'm the president of Central EMS. Mr. Mayor and commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, thank you. So, Mayor, did you have a question for me, sir?

Mr. Mayor: No, sir, I didn't.

Mr. Williams: I did. You know we're going back for what's the purpose of your committee. Can you tell us what's the purpose of your committee?

Mr. Coker: Yes, sir. Number one, as your provider going forward, we need to be able to develop a system that's going to work for you. As I've said before, I think your system currently is broken and together let's sit down and build a system that will work. In order to do that, we're

going to need the help. We're going to need the help that you've given us this committee to work with. It seems to me that that's a very talented committee that actually has people that understand ambulance and EMS systems and they should be able to come to some good decisions. So we're going to need to get the information that says things like this. What do you think the response time should be for your community? What do you think your citizens would want? What do you want? What number of ambulances will that take in order to provide that? What type of system do you want? Do you want an all-paramedic system? Do you want it to be blended to be paramedic and ambulance EMT or do you want the quick response vehicles with paramedics that can go out into the field and assist? A lot of specific things, criteria, that private ambulance service and public ambulance service both will work to aspire and we're going to put a private/public together. We need to have this data so we can decide what type of system you want built, number one. Number two, then we'll come in and say all right, here are the costs for this. Those will be completely transparent almost like your county budget, line item by line item by line item for everybody to see. This is what it costs to build the system and then of course this is the question that I'm asked 24 times, what is the cost. Right. Once we get these laid out on the table by your committee, we will then develop the cost and say here is the cost that it's going to be. And we want the cost to be where the government gets the best that they can for the dollars they spend for the citizens' dollars and so that the company can maintain and be profitable so that it will be here the next year and the next. That's what we need, sir.

Mr. Williams: Just surmising what you were saying is that that will be where you build consensus as to what we want but that won't necessarily be where the full negotiating will be. That will be with Procurement and whatever we deem necessary, correct?

Mr. Coker: We will negotiate with whoever you tell us to negotiate with. You, being the government, will assign someone to negotiate with us and then that's when we will negotiate with full transparency.

Mr. Williams: Thank you.

Mr. Mayor: The Chair recognizes the commissioner from the 7<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Frantom: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Number one, this should absolutely be open. The history of what has happened with this issue is the reason that I'm so adamant about it. I just think it's the right thing to do. The second piece is I would hope that this committee with the fact that we're on a May 8 deadline would be able to do the entire thing. We've already talked about how only our staff would be able to vote or however or whatever that is but there's not really time to kick the can down the road to make sure that this group isn't having the full discussion on what it's going to take for the ambulance service and to get a contract with Central so I'm in support. Hopefully if the motion is to open, I'm ready to vote. If it's to close, I'm going to make a substitute motion. Thank you.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, commissioner. The Chair recognizes the commissioner from the 1<sup>st</sup>.

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I have clarity now. I was under the impression that

this committee was going to be doing the negotiations, but if this is just a meeting to where we're just having a conversation as to what it is going to take to get us to negotiations, I don't have a problem with the meeting being open. I just want to make sure that when we get into negotiations that we're out of the equation and that ya'll don't have the press and just folks down your throat, down your neck, you know what I mean so with that being said my concern has been addressed properly and I don't have an issue with this meeting being open.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Commissioner. So with that being said, Madam Clerk, do we need to entertain a motion to have this open or are we clear as a body?

The Clerk: Well, if you're adding it to the motion with no objection, we can do it without a separate motion.

**Mr. Mayor: All right. Are there any objections to making this process open on the dias? All right. So it's unanimous.**

**The Clerk: Okay, it's added to the motion.**

Mr. Mayor: All right, so we have a motion. Well, we don't have a motion.

The Clerk: Yeah, we do.

Mr. Mayor: We have a motion and a second. Madam Clerk, voting. All right, is that it for the special called?

The Clerk: Just call for the vote, sir.

Mr. Mayor: We're voting.

Motion carries 10-0.

Mr. Mayor: Thank you, Madam Clerk. With that, these proceedings are now closed and I guess we're prepared to move forward with the committee part of our agenda. Thank you so much.

[MEETING ADJOURNED]

Lena J. Bonner  
Clerk of Commission

CERTIFICATION:

I, Lena J. Bonner, Clerk of Commission, hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Called Meeting of the Augusta Richmond County Commission held on March 14, 2023.

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Clerk of Commission

