

WORKSESSION  
DARLINGTON COUNTY COUNCIL  
DARLINGTON, SC

OCTOBER 14, 2015

A worksession of the County Council of Darlington County was held this 14<sup>th</sup> day of October 2015, at 4 p.m., at the Darlington County Courthouse Annex/EMS Building, 1625 Harry Byrd Highway, Darlington, South Carolina, to receive information from Michael Baker International relating to the county's proposed courthouse project.

NOTICE OF MEETING

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, a copy of the meeting notice, giving the date, time, and place of the meeting was mailed in advance to the local newspapers, County Council members and staff, Darlington City Council members and staff, persons requesting notification, and posted on the bulletin board at the entrance to the County Administrator's.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

Chairman Bobby Hudson, Vice Chairman Robbin Brock, Mrs. Wilhelmina P. Johnson, Ms. Mozella Nicholson, and Mr. Robert L. Kilgo, Jr.

COUNCIL MEMBERS ~~PRESENT~~ ABSENT

Chaplain Dannie Douglas, Jr., Mr. David Coker, and Mr. Marvin Le Flowers.

ALSO PRESENT

County Administrator Terence Arrington, Clerk to Council J. JaNet Bishop, Clerk of Court Scott Suggs, Tax Collector Mae Helen Burch, Recreation Director Ken McRae, Tax Assessor Kyle Johnson, Planning Director Doug Reimold, Building Maintenance Director Andrew Smith, Darlington City Administrator Howard Garland, Darlington City Mayor Tony Watkins, Darlington County Superintendent of Education Eddie Ingram, Members of Darlington County Board of Education, members of Darlington City Council and staff, Retired Judge John Milling, Michael Baker International Representatives Andy Busbee, John Walsh, and David Willoughby, and others.

REPORTERS PRESENT

Ms. Samantha Lyles of the News and Press.

Chairman Hudson called the worksession to order at 4:09 p.m.

Mr. Arrington presented a brief history on the location of the courthouse, the county, the City of Darlington, the former courthouses, and the present courthouse. He provided a PowerPoint presentation and talked about various problems in the courthouse. Mr. Arrington explained that after the recent rains, the courthouse roof leaked in multiple areas, which resulted in mold, mildew, carpet damage, etc.

Mr. Arrington presented a copy of two newspaper articles (one dated September 6, 1973 from the Florence Morning News) about Darlington County filing suit against the company that constructed the courthouse. The lawsuit involved infrastructure related issues that attributed to cracks in the courthouse foundation, leaks in the buildings, etc. Mr. Arrington read the newspaper article which stated, *"Darlington County wants \$75,000 from the architects, contractor and construction under writing firm for what it says are flaws in its county government building. The County Commission claims in its suit filed this week there are leaks, and the plaster is loose and flaking, because of faulty design and construction in windows and heating 'louvres. Each of the three firms is being sued for \$25,000. The five story county courthouse, located on the Public Square in the middle of Darlington, was opened in 1966 at a cost of \$1.2 million..."* The second article stated, *"Courthouse suit settled out of court. A \$27,000 out-of-court settlement stemming from a \$50,000 damage suit by Darlington County against the architect and contractor of the courthouse was made last week, according to County Attorney Ken Baker..."* *"Constructed in 1964 at a cost of \$1,200,000, the county courthouse had been plagued since infancy by water leaks which caused considerable damage to interior walls. To combat the problem, a firm was hired last spring to waterproof the structure, an operation which took about six weeks."*

Mr. Arrington stated that the courthouse has had issues since it was constructed. At this point, the staff was continuously looking for ways to patch up problems. He also mentioned problems with the layout of the building wherein judges have to ride the elevators with inmates and are in close proximity of inmates during court sessions. Therefore, he was talking with Council to find out what will be done in terms of a courthouse and whether Council wants to talk about designs and how important a courthouse is to the future of Downtown Darlington. Therefore, this joint meeting was scheduled to talk about how Michael Baker International would play a role in this project, as well as County Council's role in identifying the plan going forward.

Mr. Arrington stated that the courthouse would play a key role in economic growth in the future of Darlington County. He presented a map prepared by the Planning Department showing all the vacant lands that the county owns in the downtown area.

Mr. Arrington also showed more pictures of problem areas in the courthouse as Building Maintenance Director Andrew Smith provided a brief overview of the issues. Mr. Smith reported that all the interior walls near the windows had been damaged and was beginning to crack, deteriorate, etc. He also mentioned that the windows had never been sealed. Therefore, water enters the building whenever there is a "blowing" rain. Mr. Smith talked about the walls beginning to peel along with other cosmetic problems. Mr. Arrington talked about water damage to the roof, ceiling tiles, interior walls, floor, and carpet, which leads to mold and mildew. He said the staff was continuously patching something that was in awful shape.

Clerk to Court Scott Suggs talked about the problems caused by over crowdedness during court sessions, etc. He also mentioned that judges are surprised at the lack of security and the poor design of the court area on the fifth floor of the courthouse.

Mr. Smith then talked about problems with the obsolete air conditioning system and the fact that there are only two vendors to work on it. He also mentioned that the air handlers had rusted and pans had to be built and placed under them. Sometimes the pans overflow and the water drains into the courtroom. Mr. Arrington stated that he had a picture of an air conditioning unit that has mold in it. However, air was flowing out of it.

A map was presented indicating county owned property in the downtown area. In reference to available county owned property in the downtown area, Mr. Arrington stated that the county was trying to figure out a solution and concept of what can be done. He mentioned the possibility of a judicial center, a municipal complex, etc. Therefore, the discussion today would be to identify if there was a way to build a mixed-use facility that meets the needs of the City and the County, consolidates resources, and supports economic activities in the downtown area. He commended the staff for working continuously to patch up the current building and encouraged Council to think about the future of the courthouse.

Mr. Arrington reported that the county recently solicited Requests for Proposal for architectural and engineering services and several firms responded. After going through the exercise and talking to the responders, Michael Baker International was selected to walk the county through this process. This company has also performed work at the County Airport.

Mr. Andy Busbee, Project Manager and primary contact, indicated that he had served the county in the capacity as engineers for the airport project. He reported that Michael Baker International was a full service consulting firm that provides many services. He introduced Mr. John Walsh, Office Executive, and Mr. David Willoughby, Senior Project Manager and Architect.

Mr. John Walsh talked about Michael Baker International, who they are, what they do, and how they will support the county and the city during this project. He also talked about the full service needs surrounding the project.

Mr. David Willoughby, Architect, also talked about Michael Baker International and what they can do to help Darlington move forward and plan for the future. He presented pictures of similar projects and talked about urban design planning, stormwater controls, public outreach and education, the number of employees and professionals, and the various accreditations held by their staff members.

Mr. Willoughby presented several conceptual plans for courtroom and judicial facilities. He also presented diagrams of how the public, staff, judges, prisoners, and services would access and used a proposed judicial facility. He showed several models for Darlington

County and other similar projects. He also talked about getting the staff out of and studying the viability of the existing building.

Mr. Arrington talked about the traffic supporting neighboring businesses, a proposed joint city/county complex, and pooling resources and mix uses in the downtown area. He also mentioned the concept of a recreation center in the area. He suggested that the City and the County talk about the vision of the Downtown Darlington area, which would be guided by Michael Baker International. He thanked everyone for attending the worksession.

Chairman Hudson opened the Question and Answer Period. Darlington City Administrator Howard Garland asked the cost for Michael Baker and how much the county wanted from the City to help with the design. He felt that Michael Baker Group was making a sales pitch without the City knowing a dollar amount for a design.

Mr. Arrington explained that this was preliminary discussion. He explained that it was his directive to invite the City of Darlington for a joint discussion to find out whether the City would be interested in a joint effort. Currently, the discussion was about concepts. He also pointed out that Michael Baker International was not making a sales pitch because the County had already committed to them to come up with a design.

Mr. Garland indicated that the City could not make a decision until their new Council and Mayor are in place. Mr. Arrington explained that the City does not have to play a role in this project. However, if the City were interested, City and County officials would discuss the matter in executive session.

Former Judge John Milling questioned how long this project would take. Mr. Willoughby indicated that it could take from 50 to 60 days for a programming study to define what it is that will be built and nine months for construction documents to support the new courthouse. If there is a desire to start a second study on the existing courthouse, that would begin simultaneously to save time and money. He indicated that the project could possibly take eighteen months from start to finish. However, the county must get through the preliminary phase first.

Mr. Arrington added that the courthouse study committee would be resurrected to sort out things.

After individuals from the audience asked questions and presented their concerns, Chairman Hudson confirmed that a committee would be appointed to review the previous study and other aspects of the project. Council would discuss the appointment of a joint committee after the elections.

There being no further discussion, the worksession was adjourned at 5:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

---

J. JaNet Bishop  
Clerk to Council

---

Bobby Hudson, Chairman  
Darlington County Council

Approved at meeting of November 2, 2015, as amended on page 1 to change the second *COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT* heading to *COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT*.