

SPECIAL MEETING
DARLINGTON COUNTY COUNCIL
DARLINGTON, SC

April 16, 2024

A Special Meeting of the County Council of Darlington County was held this 16th day of April 2025, at 8:30 a.m., at Pee Dee Regional Council of Governments Conference Center, 2314 Pisgah Road, Florence, South Carolina.

NOTICE OF MEETING

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, a copy of the agenda providing the date, time, and place of the meeting was emailed to the local newspapers, persons requesting notification, and posted on the county's website and the bulletin board in the lobby of the Darlington County Government Building located at 1 Public Square in Darlington.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

Chairman Bobby Hudson, Vice-Chairman Marvin Le Flowers, Chaplain Dannie Douglas, Jr., Mr. Michael Kirk Askins, Mr. David Coker, Mr. Albert Davis, III, and Mrs. Angie Stone Godbold.

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT

Ms. Joyce W. Thomas.

ALSO PRESENT

County Administrator Marion Charles Stewart, III, County Attorney Adam Gainey, Clerk to Council J. JaNet Bishop, Central Communications Director Michelle Hall, Emergency Management Director Molly Odom, Finance Director Sherman Dibble, Interim Fire Chief John Shoemake, Human Resources Director Ginger Winburn, Prison Farm Director James Hudson, Sheriff Michael August, and others.

REPORTERS PRESENT

None

Call To Order / Invocation / Pledge Of Allegiance

Chairman Hudson called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. Mr. Douglas presented the invocation, and Mr. Davis led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ordinances

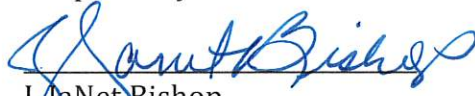
Ordinance No. 25-14, An Ordinance To Amend Darlington County Code Of Ordinances, Chapter 2 (Administration), Article V. (Finance), Division 7 (Fees), Section 2-412 (Fee Schedule), To Amend Certain Fees And Establish The Effective Date Of This Ordinance - FIRST READING - BY TITLE ONLY

Chairman Hudson read the title of Ordinance No. 25-14 for first reading. No action required.

Adjournment

MOTION made by Mr. Davis and seconded by Mr. Askins to adjourn the meeting. There being no further comments, the meeting was adjourned at 8:32 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Janet Bishop
Clerk to Council



Bobby Hudson, Chairman
Darlington County Council

Approved at meeting of May 5, 2025.

BUDGET WORKSESSION
DARLINGTON COUNTY COUNCIL
DARLINGTON, SC

April 16, 2024

A Budget Worksession of the County Council of Darlington County was held this 16th day of April 2025, at 8:32 a.m., at Pee Dee Regional Council of Governments Conference Center, 2314 Pisgah Road, Florence, South Carolina.

NOTICE OF MEETING

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COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT

Ms. Joyce W. Thomas.

ALSO PRESENT

County Administrator Marion Charles Stewart, III, County Attorney Adam Gainey, Clerk to Council J. JaNet Bishop, Central Communications Director Michelle Hall, Emergency Management Director Molly Odom, Finance Director Sherman Dibble, Interim Fire Chief John Shoemake, Human Resources Director Ginger Winburn, Prison Farm Director James Hudson, Sheriff Michael August, and others.

REPORTERS PRESENT

None

Budget Worksession

Chairman Hudson called the budget worksession to order at 8:02 a.m.

Each Council member received the budget ordinance document (Ordinance No. 25-09); FY25/26 Budget Notice of Public Hearing document; the Administrator's proposed budget presentation; the Administrator's proposed FY25/26 budget; the FY2026-2031 Capital Improvement Outlook; and Outside/Other Budget Requests that were not included in the Administrator's proposed budget.

Mr. Stewart presented an overview of the Administrator's FY25/26 proposed budget. The overview included a review of the Fund Balance policy; the current and proposed General Fund operating expenditures; the minimal unassigned Fund Balance; the General Fund balance breakdown from FY14/15 through FY23/24 for assigned, committed, nonspendable, restricted, and unassigned funds; and statements from the county audit indicating there were no weaknesses, deficiencies, or non-compliance. He highlighted the sources and amounts of county revenue and changes in the proposed budget.

Mr. Stewart explained that the county is now responsible for levying tax millage to support FDTC (Florence Darlington Technical College), which was previously levied by the Darlington County School District. Therefore, the county has created a FDTC Special Revenue Fund.

Highlights in the Administrator's proposed budget included numerous variations in insurance premiums; variations in wage/salary, professional services, contracts, cyclic needs, etc. in departmental line items; a 4.6 percent increase on employer for employee health insurance premiums; absorbing \$100 of the employee/retiree portion of health insurance premiums from the employee side (an increase from \$250 per month to \$350 per month for retirees); six additional firefighters for fire protection/emergency response; two additional CDL operators for Environmental Services; reclassifying a part time position to a full time position at the Library (within the library's budgeted funds); a cost of living increase in the Humane Society contract; an annual increase in the Detention Center food service contract; an increase in the cost for legal services for the county attorney and outside legal services; capital requests; an increase in funds to PDRTA (Pee Dee Regional Transportation Authority) from \$19,000 to \$60,000 annually; an increase in funds to the Solicitor's Office from \$140,000 to \$260,000; an increase in funds to the Public Defender's Office from \$140,000 to \$236,000; a salary adjustment from Economic Development to Administration as per the County Council Chairman; a three percent cost of living adjustment across all funds for all employees at a cost of about \$830,220 including the pluses; and a recap of employee cost of living adjustments/bonuses from FY07/08 through FY24/25.

Mr. Stewart explained that the proposed budget will cause a 2.0-mill tax increase on county general operations (from 74.4 mills to 76.4 mills in the County General Fund). The mills would remain the same for County Bonds (3.3 Mills), the Library Fund (6.0 Mills), Environmental Services Fund (2.1 mills), and County Fire Fund (19 mills). The county will add a Florence Darlington Technical College Fund at 9.7 mills, decreasing from 11.7 mills, but producing no overall tax increase for the citizens. It was pointed out that Darlington County citizens have been paying \$62.44 per capita (\$3,896,117) to FDTC when Florence County citizens were paying only \$20.85 per capita (\$2,871,385). Other counties with larger populations were also paying much less than Darlington County to the technical college in their county. Mr. Stewart then compared the county's General Fund millage with that of surrounding counties. At 87.8 mills, Darlington County's mills will still be the lowest.

As for Environmental Service, Mr. Stewart proposed no increase in the millage; an increase in the landfill household fee (Recycling/Solid Waste Service Charge) from \$60 to \$70 per household; an increase in the C&D fee from \$38.50 per ton to a flat rate of \$42 per ton; an increase in the tonnage for commercial garbage from \$50.75 per ton to \$60 per ton; and two addition CDL drivers. With these adjustments, the Environmental Services Fund should be self-sufficient. In comparing the household fee with surrounding counties, Darlington County fee of \$60 was the lowest, with the exception of Chesterfield County, where people pay each time they dump trash.

In reference to the proposed budget timeline, it will be updated to schedule the budget public hearing at third reading on June 2, 2025, instead of May 5, 2025, at second reading. This will allow the notice to comply with the requirements for publication in the local newspapers.

For second reading of the budget, the budget ordinance document (Ordinance No. 25-09) will list the totals and the millage for each fund. The budget book containing all the budget details will be posted on the county website (Finance Department webpage). The budget Notice of Public Hearing lists the current and projected revenues, expenditures, and millage (where applicable), and the percent of change for each fund. This notice will be published in the local newspapers.

Mr. Stewart highlighted information in the Administrator's Proposed Budget book, such as the sources of revenue, the expenses, the positions and proposed changes to positions, capital requests, etc. for departments and the minor funds (Emergency Telephone Fund, Library Fund, Environmental Services Fund, Fire District, Accommodations Tax, Airport Fund, Roads Maintenance Fund, Emergency Services Fund, Hospitality Tax Fund, and the Hartsville Fire District Fund).

Although the mills (19 mills) for the Fire Board Fund will not increase, there will be a shift of 2 mills from capital (decrease from 5 mills to 3 mills) to operations (increase from 14 mills to 16 mills). The costs for the additional six employees are within the millage already assessed for the Fire District and will allow the Fire District to have a two-man engine crew for each shift.

The Accommodations Tax Fund is composed of revenue the county expects to receive and appropriate during the Accommodations Tax process. It was noted that the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee will meet on Thursday, April 17, 2025, at 6 p.m. to make funding recommendations to submit to County Council for approval.

Councilman Coker left at 9:24 a.m.

As for the five-year (2026-2031) Capital Improvement reports, it was noted that County Council would not be approving all the capital items listed. County Council would only consider the capital items listed in the Administrator's FY25/26 Proposed Budget.

As for the Hospitality Tax Fund, all requests for Hospitality Funds are presented to and approved by County Council.

Hartsville Fire Protection District Fund revenue represents the millage collected within the five-mile zone for Hartsville Fire District, including the bond millage.

The Outside Requests booklet contained the following budget requests that were not included in the Administrator's proposed budget: a request from Elections/Voter Registration for paving their facility's parking lot; the Solicitor and Public Defender's request for an increase in funds; the Sheriff's request for items that were not included in the proposed budget; the Animal Shelter's request for a 3.1 percent contract increase (a 3 percent cost of living contract adjustment was included in the proposed budget), the Economic Development Partnership Board's request for additional positions; and the City of Hartsville's request for an annual payment of \$150,000 for the City to operate recreation programs on the County's behalf in Hartsville area and allow county residents to register at in-city rates. The City of Darlington was contacted about providing similar services, but the staff had not received an official response.

After briefly discussing the City of Hartsville's proposal, Council members suggested that the county recreation budget remain as presented, and the county wait to see what the City of Hartsville implements. If the City of Hartsville moves forward with its proposed program, the county will have to reassign two recreation employees who are currently assigned to the Hartsville area.

Mrs. Godbold asked about the status of the 80/20 Intergovernmental Agreement with the City of Hartsville.

Mr. Stewart confirmed that the 80/20 Intergovernmental Park Agreement with the City of Hartsville that allows taxes to be reapportioned will end on June 25th. However, the park will still exist, the money will continue to come in, and there will be a portion based on millage for that district. Of the total millage, Lee County, the City of Hartsville, Darlington County School District, and the county will each receive a certain percentage. This was already calculated as income in the General Fund. There will not be any extra funds.

Mr. Stewart asked for questions, comments, and/or suggested amendments.

Mr. Davis suggested a five percent cost-of-living increase for employees.

Mr. Stewart explained that with the health insurance change and the three percent cost-of-living adjustment, employees making \$30,000 to \$40,000 will see almost a five percent increase because they will not be paying \$100 every month towards their health insurance.

Mr. Davis expressed concerns about employees driving county vehicles every day and after hours.

Mrs. Godbold suggested that the county pay a monthly stipend instead of giving some employees a county vehicle to drive, which the county has to pay for maintenance, repairs, etc.

Mr. Stewart responded that a stipend could work for a very few positions, but would not be a possibility for operational, recreation, and emergency response employees. In some instances, time would be lost if an employee had to go to a location to pick up and drop off a county vehicle. He also stated that county vehicles should not be used for personal use, and such use should be reported to the County Administrator. Mr. Stewart will develop a list of people who currently drive a county vehicle and list their job position.

Mr. Askins talked about the amount of millage Darlington County has been paying to Florence Darlington Technical College for so many years and having only one-third of the population. He felt that the mills should be decreased further.

Mr. Stewart responded that this would be up to County Council.

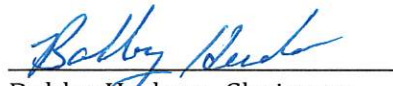
Mr. Flowers suggested that Council members take time to go through the budget information individually and, if needed, talk with Mr. Stewart, and be prepared to make any adjustments/amendments on May 5th.

There being no further questions or comments, Chairman Hudson adjourned the worksession at 9:51 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



J. Janet Bishop
Clerk to Council



Bobby Hudson, Chairman
Darlington County Council

Approved at meeting of May 5, 2025.