



JASPER COUNTY COUNCIL
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
Jasper County Clementa C. Pinckney Government Bldg
358 3rd Avenue Ridgeland, SC 29936
Monday, June 30, 2025
Minutes

Officials Present: Chairman John Kemp, Vice Chairman Joey Rowell, Councilman Chris VanGeison, Councilman Joe Arzillo

Staff Present: County Administrator Andrew Fulghum, Clerk to Council Wanda Giles, County Attorney David Tedder, Kimberly Burgess, James Iwanicki, and Videographer Jonathan Dunham.

1. Call to Order of the Jasper County Council Meeting by Chairman Kemp

Chairman Kemp called the meeting to order. The Report of Compliance with the Freedom of Information Act was read for the records as follows: *In accordance with South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Section 30-4-80(d), as amended, notification of the meeting and the meeting agenda were posted at least 24 hours prior to the meeting on the County Council Building at a publicly accessible place, on the county website, and a copy of the agenda was provided to the local news media and all person's or organizations requesting notification.*

2. Pledge to the Flag:

The Pledge to the Flag was given and the Invocation was given by Councilman Rowell.

3. Approval of the agenda:

Chairman Kemp noted that they needed to add Executive Session Item #2 for the 2025 – 2026 budget as Item # 3A. Councilman Rowell noted a correction to the parenthetical wording on Item # 7 on the agenda to include the following: (Public hearing and 2nd reading on 06.16.2025).

Motion to approve: Chairman Kemp

Second: Councilman Rowell

Vote: Unanimous

The motion passed.

Citizen Comments

Debbie Cooler noted that she was coming as a native of Jasper County and also as the current President of the JC Historical Society.

3A) Executive Session SECTION 30-4-70.

(a) A public body may hold a meeting closed to the public for one or more of the following reasons:

(2) Discussion of negotiations incident to proposed contract arrangements and proposed purchase or sale of property, the receipt of legal advice where the legal advice related to pending, threatened, or potential claim or other matters covered by the attorney-client privilege, settlement of legal claims, or the position of the public agency in other adversary situations involving the assertion against the agency of a claim – **2025-2026 Jasper County Budget**

ANY EXECUTIVE SESSION MATTER ON WHICH DISCUSSION HAS NOT BEEN COMPLETED MAY HAVE DISCUSSION SUSPENDED FOR PURPOSES OF BEGINNING THE OPEN SESSION AT ITS SCHEDULED TIME, AND COUNCIL MAY RETURN TO EXECUTIVE SESSION DISCUSSION AFTER THE CONCLUSION OF THE OPEN SESSION AGENDA ITEMS. PLEASE BE ADVISED THERE MAY BE VOTES BASED ON ITEMS FROM THE EXECUTIVE SESSION.

Motion to go into Executive Session: Councilman Rowell

Second: Councilman Arzillo

Vote: Unanimous

The motion passed.

3: Return to Open Session:

Motion to return from Executive Session: Councilman Rowell

Second: Councilman Arzillo

Vote: Unanimous

The motion passed.

- **3.1 Action coming out of Executive Session** – No action came out of Executive Session.

4. Kimberly Burgess – Consideration of Resolution **#R-2025-39** a Resolution Authorizing the Award of Funds For Requests for Local Accommodations and Hospitality Taxes. (Tabled at the 06.16.2025 meeting)

Kimberly Burgess was present to address and review the consideration of Resolution #R-2025-39 authorizing the Award of Funds for requests for Local Accommodations and Hospitality Taxes.

Motion to approve: Councilman Rowell

Second: Councilman VanGeison

Vote: Unanimous

The motion passed.

5. Kimberly Burgess – Consideration of Resolution **#R-2025-43** approving positions and pay grades within Jasper County as follows:

1. *Project Manager for Engineering Services (Engineering Services Dept. 83)*
2. *Code Enforcement Generalist (Community Risk Reduction Dept. 47)*
3. *Paralegal (County Attorney Dept. 102)*
4. *Cyber Security Engineer (Information Technology Dept. 49)*
5. *Deputy County Administrator (Administration Dept. 51)*
6. *Administrative Assistant (Veterans Affairs Dep. 68)*
7. *Two Deputies for Security at Government Complex (Sheriff Office Dept. 57)*
8. *Recreation Program Coordinator, PT or FT (Parks & Recreation Dept. 78)*

Kimberly Burgess was present to address and review the consideration of Resolution #R-2025-43 approving positions and pay grades within Jasper County for a *Project Manager for Engineering Services (Engineering Services Dept. 83); Code Enforcement Generalist (Community Risk Reduction Dept. 47); Paralegal (County Attorney Dept. 102); Cyber Security Engineer (Information Technology Dept. 49); Deputy County Administrator (Administration Dept. 51); Administrative Assistant (Veterans Affairs Dep. 68); Two Deputies for Security at Government Complex (Sheriff Office Dept. 57); and Recreation Program Coordinator, PT or FT (Parks & Recreation Dept. 78)*

Motion to approve: Councilman VanGeison

Second: Councilman Rowell

Vote: Unanimous

The motion passed.

6. Wanda Giles – Consideration of Resolution #R-2025-44 to Reappoint Two Representatives to Serve on the Lowcountry Workforce Development Board.

Wanda Giles was present to address and review the consideration of Resolution R-2025-44 to reappoint two Representatives to serve on the Lowcountry Workforce Development Board. She noted that they had two Jasper County Representatives currently up for re-appointment on the Lowcountry Workforce Board. Executive Director, Sabrena Graham of the Lowcountry Council of Governments wrote a letter formally requesting the Jasper County Council's approval to re-appoint current members Greggory Gilbert and Roy Dupont to continue to serve in their capacity as members on the Lowcountry Workforce Board. A copy of her letter was included in the e-packet agenda. Ms. Giles noted that the staff request asked that Council consider reappointing Greggory Gilbert and Roy Dupont, for an appointment to the Lowcountry Workforce Board as the newest member of the Lowcountry Workforce Board for 3-year terms for each member as set forth by the Lowcountry Workforce Board governing documents for a term of 07.01.2025 thru 06.30.2028. Chairman Kemp noted that as long as he is the Chairman that all Boards and Commission members will be appointed through a resolution so it can be recorded and be on record.

Motion to approve: Councilman Rowell

Second: Councilman Arzillo

Vote: Unanimous

The motion passed.

7. Kimberly Burgess – Consideration of the 3rd reading of Ordinance #O-2025-14 to provide for the levy of tax for public purposes in Jasper County for the fiscal year beginning July 1st, 2025 and ending June 30th 2026 and to make appropriations for said purposes; to adopt and approve the Jasper County capital and operations budget for fiscal year 2025-2026, to adopt and approve the Jasper County School District capital and operations budget for fiscal year 2025-2026; to provide for the levy of taxation for fiscal year 2025-2026; to limit the disbursements by the county treasurer to those appropriated by law; to provide that expenditures not exceed appropriations; to authorize tax anticipation notes; to make authorization of certain transfers; to provide for additional appropriations and borrowing; to codify Jasper County rates and fees; to provide for lapsing funds and continuing appropriations for subsequent years; to require certain agencies and departments to file accountings; to require the treasurer to sign general fund checks; to provide special rules for travel and training disbursements; to provide for travel reimbursements; to provide compliance with act no. 317 of 1990; to provide certain benefits to council members; to provide for county commission and committee stipends; to provide for jury mileage; to adopt property values; and to provide

for effective date of this ordinance, and matters related thereto. (1st reading 05.19.2025; Public Hearing 06.02.2025; 2nd reading 06.16.2025; 2nd Public Hearing 06.16.2025)

Ms. Burges was present to address and review this request with Council on the FY2025-2026 Budget. Chairman Kemp made the following statement:

In early 2024, the Jasper County School Board hired an auditing firm with the approval of the State Board of Education. On December 20, 2024, the State declared the Jasper County School System status of Financial Emergency. When the Jasper Council heard this, they inquired how this would affect the upcoming 2025-2026 Budget. The Council was informed this would not have any effect on the completion of the budget. To this point Jasper County has not been updated on the happenings of the School Board other than their own inquiries.

On March 10th Mr. Zimmerman stated that it was not a takeover, but the state was offering technical assistance. On May 15th Jasper County Treasurer Mike Skinner at a public-school board meeting stated that with the money on hand, the board should consider reducing the millage. No figure was given, and the board did not ask, ending with the statement that they were intending to ask for the same millage as last year. In June the Council requested the school board to present their budget on June 11th at a Council Workshop. On June 9th the Council was informed that the school board would not attend. The Council felt the school board should have come before them to give an explanation of their absence. Subsequently correspondence with the Chair of the School Board told the Council that Ms. Norris had been hired by the Board at the request of the State to write a tenable budget. The Chairperson gave Council a timeline for the second reading on June 23rd via ZOOM, a public meeting on the 25th and after the public meeting, a special meeting to approve the third reading. After the third reading the School Board would meet with Council at the scheduled workshop.

The June 25th Workshop started with a school board Chairperson introducing the attending Board Members and Ms. Norris. Ms. Norris made it very clear she was only on the job for two weeks and was not in any position to support the new budget without completing the two previous budget audits. Although Ms. Norris had only two weeks, the Council was expected to pass a budget with only a one-hour presentation. Ms. Norris did mention an \$8 million dollar contingency. The meeting was contentious at best. The Council was given a generalization of the school budget in seven pages of detail just before the presentation. The Council had previously informed the School Board Chair that they would have questions, and the Council would be prepared. When Council asked about the debt no information was provided and Ms. Norris told Council it was not part of the budget. The County Council was asked to keep the same mileage as last year, at the 166 mills.

On June 26th Chairman Kemp called Melissa Crosby who is a representative from the State. He expressed a feeling that Council was having a difficult time justifying the School Board budget, after being told of the financial problems of the school, the lack of information to justify the budget as it was presented, and the feeling that the Council was made to be complicit in the problems of the School Board. After the discussion, Ms. Crosby said she would call the Secretary of Education and express his concerns. She called Chairman Kemp back and said the state was going to talk to the previous audit firm and provide Council with a letter giving Council assurances of the budget. She also stated that she was going to suggest the state call him, to review the letter. He also called the State Board Member to inform him of the problem the Council was having.

On Friday the 27th at 2:30pm he received an email from Kendra Hunt, Deputy Administrator of the State School Board supporting the Auditor's recommendation to approve the budget and strongly suggested Council approve the budget. This email did not offer any assurances or state support other than supporting the

Auditor's report. The Council wanted the state to take ownership on the solution of the school problem. No call was received to discuss what Council had received or if the wording was what the Council required to pass the budget. It was mentioned the South Carolina Department of education had an active role in the affairs of the School Board. From Council's perspective they had not put anything in writing to the County on what the active involvement was. Crosby prepared the audit with the suggestion from the State. Previously, Council had been informed that the State was assisting and not controlling the school's physical operation. The state has been dealing with the situation for 5 months in one statement they made. In another statement the school Board states early 2024. With this ongoing the Council wants the state to take ownership. Not once did the state think of calling the County and advise them of the situation. The Council is now taking the position that enough is enough. This situation is not new and has been ongoing for at least 10 years. The state has put Jasper County in a tenuous position. They want the County to pass the budget, but the Council knows little about it.

Chairman Kemp read a statement where the audit firm stated:

"In my past experience over 26 of working with local governments and more specifically numerous school districts, when a school district gets behind in closing out their fiscal year and having their audit completed, it usually means that fiscal condition is not good. When we performed a cursory review, we found material errors in the trial balance with so much unknown for 2023 thru the 2025 fiscal years. I think it is very appropriate for the district to have significant contingency included in the 2025 2026 budget, which I have heard Ms. Norris reference in our presentation". That was a quote from the Auditor.

The Council understands the need but does feel it is well enough informed to proceed without an ironclad assurance from the state that this matter will be concluded, and the residents of Jasper will be informed, made right in approving the budget, and will be instrumental in providing a path to a better school system. On Friday, June 27th the Administrator, Andy Fulghum and Chairman Kemp expressed this to the state. The Council wants the state to be a partner in action in writing as well as action. The justification to pass the budget for the betterment of the kids is an idle justification. If this were true and believable, we would not be in this situation. The County, the State has given us what we feel are assurances that this budget as presented is needed. They have and will support us in our budget approval and will keep us informed and allow us to be a part in improving our schools. Chairman Kemp then read a letter from State Superintendent of Education, Ellen Weaver dated June 30, 2025, for the record. (See Attachment "A"). He said he brought this out because of the budget and that they were caught in a fight between the state and the Jasper Board of Education. He noted that Council were the ones to say yes or no; and they don't want to be complicit, but rather that they wanted to help. He noted that going forward they are going to pass the budget with an amendment.

Chairman Kemp made an amendment to the school board budget by decreasing the school millage from 166 to 164. He asked for a motion to approve, disapprove or amend.

Motion to amend the Jasper County School Board mills from 166 down to 164: Councilman Rowell

Second: Councilman VanGeison

Vote:

Councilman VanGeison – Yes

Councilman Arzillo – Yes

Councilman Rowell – Yes

Chairman Kemp – Yes

The motion passed.

Motion to approve the 3rd reading of the Budget with the amendment to the School Board mills as noted in the above motion: Councilman Rowell

Second: Councilman VanGeison

Vote: Unanimous

The motion passed.

8. Andrew Fulghum – Consideration of the **1st reading** of an ordinance to authorize a Comprehensive Agreement and Lease between Jasper County and Jasper Animal Rescue Mission (JARM) for the use of that real property located at 401 Carters Mill Road, Ridgeland, South Carolina, and provision of services to operate the County animal shelter.

Mr. Fulghum was present to address and review the 1st reading of an ordinance to authorize a Comprehensive Agreement and Lease between Jasper County and Jasper Animal Rescue Mission (JARM) for the use of that real property located at 401 Carters Mill Road, Ridgeland, South Carolina, and provision of services to operate the County animal shelter with Council.

Motion to approve: Councilman VanGeison

Second: Councilman Arzillo

Vote: Unanimous

The motion passed.

9. Kimberly Burgess – Consideration of a Special Services Contract with Crowley, Wechsler & Associates, LLC for the Compilation and Preparation of the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Year Ended June 30, 2025.

Ms. Burgess was present to address and review the request for consideration of a Special Services Contract with Crowley, Wechsler & Associates, LLC for the Compilation and Preparation of the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Year Ended June 30, 2025. Ms. Burgess discussed the need for this and noted the engagement letter and reviewed that information. She noted Section 2-415 (b) of the Jasper County Purchasing and Contracting Ordinance exempt certain items from the requirement of competitive bidding “even though they exceed the normal dollar amount”. Included in the exempt items are consulting and management fees and special services. She noted that the services provided by Crowley Wechsler & Associates LLC are both consulting and special services. Section 2-404 states that services provided by accounts are considered special service. The services of Crowley Wechsler & Associates LLC in the preparation of the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report are essential for the completion of the annual financial audit, as well as the receipt of the annual Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting, which is a favorable factor considered by the bond rating service. She noted that staff recommended that the Council accept the engagement letter from Crowley Wechsler & Associates, LLC for the preparation of the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the year ended 06.30.2025 and allow the County Administrator to execute the document.

Motion to approve: Councilman Arzillo

Second: Councilman Rowell

Vote: 3 yes to 1 no vote by Chairman Kemp

The motion passed.

10. Chairman Kemp – Consideration of the **1st reading** of an ordinance to amend and add a new subsection to the Jasper County SC Code of Ordinances, Chapter 26 Taxation, Article 1 in General.

Mr. Tedder was asked by Chairman Kemp to address this item for the consideration of the 1st reading of an ordinance to amend and add a new subsection to the Jasper County SC Code of Ordinances, Chapter 26 Taxation, Article 1 in General. Mr. Tedder gave a review of this information and discussed the overview of the ordinance.

Motion to approve: Councilman Rowell

Second: Councilman VanGeison

Vote: Unanimous

The motion passed.

11. Adjourn

Motion to approve: Councilman VanGeison

Second: Councilman Rowell

Vote: Unanimous

The motion passed and the meeting adjourned.

For more information on this meeting please go to our YouTube Channel for the video go to https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBmloqX05cKAsHm_ggXCJIA . There are also Closed Captions available for all of our County Council videos. Just click the "CC" button to follow along.

Respectfully Submitted:



Wanda H. Giles, Clerk to Council



John A. Kemp, Chairman

June 30, 2025

The Honorable John Kemp
Chairman, Jasper County Council
Transmitted via email

Dear Chairman Kemp:

Thank you again for the opportunity to follow up on the communication previously shared by Deputy Superintendent and SCDE Chief Financial Officer, Kendra Hunt, as well as our Chief of Staff, Rebecca Gunnlaugsson.

As you know, the South Carolina Department of Education has received the attached recommendation from Mr. Larry Finney, Partner at Greene Finney Cauley, LLP and the external auditor for Jasper County School District. His assessment reflects the District's current Fiscal Emergency status and the challenges that have developed over several years. We recognize that the County Council faces a difficult decision as it considers how to move forward with the millage rate under such uncertain conditions.

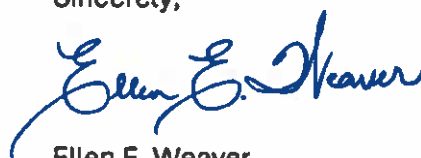
We fully understand the weight of this responsibility, particularly given the competing demands you must balance in serving the county's residents. While SCDE is not in a position to make a specific recommendation regarding the millage rate, we want to ensure you have a clear understanding of our role and ongoing efforts.

With the recent placement of a full-time interim CFO and the continued oversight by SCDE, we are focused on rebuilding the District's financial foundation. This includes strengthening internal processes, improving transparency, and ensuring more reliable reporting to all stakeholders. Additionally, the findings of the State Inspector General's investigation, once complete, will help inform a more comprehensive plan to move the District toward long-term stability.

We are committed to maintaining open lines of communication with County Council as we work through this transition. We believe that continued coordination and mutual understanding between the county and SCDE will be essential to support the students and families of Jasper County in the months and years ahead.

Thank you again for your partnership and your continued commitment to the success of the community. Please don't hesitate to reach out if there's anything we can clarify or provide.

Sincerely,



Ellen E. Weaver
State Superintendent of Education