



**SPECIAL MEETING OF FLORENCE CITY COUNCIL
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2021 – 3:00 P.M.
CITY CENTER – COUNCIL CHAMBERS
324 WEST EVANS STREET
FLORENCE, SOUTH CAROLINA**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Teresa Myers Ervin, Mayor Pro Tempore George Jebaily, Councilwoman Pat Gibson-Hye Moore, Councilwoman Lethonia Barnes, Councilman Chaquez T. McCall, Councilman Bryan A. Braddock and Councilman C. William Schofield.

ALSO PRESENT

Mr. Randall S. Osterman, City Manager; Mr. James W. Peterson, Jr., City Attorney; Mrs. Casey Moore, Municipal Clerk; Mr. Scotty Davis, Deputy City Manager; Mr. Clint Moore, Assistant City Manager of Development; Mr. Kevin Yokim, Assistant City Manager of Administration/Finance; Chief Allen Heidler, Florence Police Department; Chief Shannon Tanner, Florence Fire Department; Mr. Michael Hemingway, Director of Utilities; Mrs. Jennifer Krawiec, Director of Human Resources; Mrs. Amanda P. Pope, Director of Marketing/Communications and Municipal Services; Mr. Chuck Pope, Director of Public Works

MEDIA PRESENT

Mr. Matthew Christian of the Florence Morning News, Mr. Curtis Graham of WBTW News, and Mr. Carlos Flores of WPDE-TV were present for the meeting.

Notices of this regular meeting of City Council were provided to the media and individuals requesting a copy of the agenda informing them of the date, location and time of the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Ervin called the September 21, 2021 special meeting of Florence City Council to order at 3:04 p.m.

INVOCATION

Mayor Ervin gave the invocation for the meeting. The pledge of allegiance to the American Flag followed the invocation.

INTRODUCTION OF RESOLUTIONS

Resolution No. 2021-15

A Resolution to strongly recommend and encourage all citizens to get one of the FDA approved or authorized vaccinations for COVID-19.



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Pro tem Jebaily made a motion to adopt Resolution No. 2021-15 and Councilwoman Barnes seconded the motion.

Mr. Randy Osterman, City Manager, said the Resolution before Council follows the guidance of South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Both agencies have advised that a vaccination rate of 70-80% is necessary to effectively combat the spread of COVID-19.

Councilwoman Moore said President Biden mandated that employers with more than 100 employees require their employees to get the vaccine or be tested weekly and asked what the city is doing in response to this mandate. Mr. Osterman said they have been instructed by South Carolina Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to standby for guidance and wait before beginning any action. The city is currently offering an incentive to employees that have received a vaccine by allocating hours to their sick leave bank.

Councilwoman Moore asked what percentage of employees are vaccinated and how often are they being tested for COVID. Mr. Osterman replied employees are tested upon the recommendation of the Nurse Practitioner and just under 40% are vaccinated.

Pro tem Jebaily said they have received information from local, regional, and national medical professionals, as well as the CDC, that the way out of the pandemic is through vaccinations. The data indicates that only 50% of those eligible have been vaccinated in Florence County. He said he believes in Patriotic action and doing things for the greater good and made a request that all the citizens get the vaccine and encourage others to get vaccinated.

Councilwoman Barnes said vaccinations have always been a part of people's lives and every generation has had something they needed to be vaccinated from. There is a lot of misinformation going around and the issue has become political. She said the issue is about saving lives and people need to listen to medical professionals.

Councilman Braddock expressed his support of the Resolution. As Executive Director of House of Hope, he did not want his staff to use him as an excuse to not get vaccinated.

Councilman McCall said pandemics have been defeated before by listening to doctors and getting vaccines. He said the city is gearing up to do a vaccination campaign to help get more people vaccinated and get the community to the 70% vaccinated range.

Mayor Ervin said the way out of the pandemic is through masks and vaccinations. She said a willingness to wear masks to protect each other and a willingness to get the vaccine to build immunity will save lives. The pandemic is not political, it is a public health care crisis.

Council voted unanimously (7-0) to adopt Resolution 2021-15.

INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCES

Bill No. 2021-32

Two options for an Emergency Ordinance to replace the existing Ordinance 2021-08 and Resolution No. 2021-15 and to extend emergency measures put in place previously by Emergency Ordinance No. 2020-28, which consolidated Emergency Ordinance Nos. 2020-12, 2020-13 and 2020-20 in response to the COVID-19 emergency.



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Pro tem Jebaily made a motion to enter into Executive Session to receive legal advice from the City Attorney and Councilman Braddock seconded the motion. Without objection, Council entered into Executive Session at 3:28 p.m. to receive legal advice relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Council resumed Open Session at 3:50 p.m.

Pro tem Jebaily made a motion to adopt “Option 2” of Bill No. 2021-32 and Councilman Braddock seconded the motion. “Option 2” strongly encourages individuals to wear face coverings while inside establishments open to the public or food service establishments, to include schools and daycares, and requires face coverings to be worn while inside city buildings.

Councilwoman Moore made a motion to amend the motion to adopt “Option 1” of Bill No. 2021-32 and Mayor Ervin seconded the motion. She said “Option 2” is political and is not about keeping people safe. More people are dying now than before, and they have to do what it takes to keep people safe. She said she hopes it won’t be for long, but “Option 1” is necessary right now.

Councilwoman Barnes acknowledged that masks are important, but she is concerned because people are using the mask as an excuse to not get vaccinated and wearing masks alone will not stop COVID. She said people are getting COVID when they are at home with their families and not wearing masks.

Councilman Braddock said he believes in personal liberties and freedoms, but people are hiding behind the mask and using it as an excuse to not get vaccinated. The rates of infection continuously ebb and flow as people get together for holidays. He said the holiday season is approaching and posed an incentive for residents. Come November, if there is not an increase in the vaccination rates and a decrease in infestation rates, he will support a 60-day mask mandate ordinance. Councilman Braddock said he wants to give people the opportunity to get the vaccine so that Council is not put in the position to force a mask mandate. He said he trusts the citizens of Florence to do the right thing without having to be told what to do.

Councilman McCall said he wants to give the people the opportunity to respond and do the right thing and he also does not want to be in the position to make mandates. He said this goes hand in hand with the vaccination campaign to get people vaccinated and move the vaccination rate to 70%.

Discussion on masks and vaccinations continued among Councilmembers. Pro tem Jebaily said both options of the Ordinance are a statement of the importance of wearing a face mask. He pointed out some differences in the Ordinances regarding section 6(a). “Option 1” mandates masks in “establishments open to the public” and “food service establishments” and specifically excludes schools and daycare. Pro tem Jebaily said victims are getting younger in South Carolina and “Option 2” specifically includes and strongly encourages the use of face masks in schools and daycares.

Mayor Ervin said “Option 2” is continuing to do what the city is already doing. She said the schools were not addressed in “Option 1” because the school board is their governing body, and all schools are not located in the city. She said, medically speaking, a combination of vaccinations and wearing masks is the answer to get out of the pandemic.

The motion to amend the principal motion and adopt “Option 1” of Bill No. 2021-32 failed with a vote of 2-5, with Mayor Ervin and Councilwoman Moore voting in favor and Pro tem Jebaily, Councilman Schofield, Councilman McCall, Councilwoman Barnes and Councilman Braddock voting against.



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The motion to adopt “Option 2” of Bill No. 2021-32 passed. Council voted 5-2 in favor of the motion to adopt “Option 2” of the Ordinance, with Pro tem Jebaily, Councilman Schofield, Councilman McCall, Councilwoman Barnes and Councilman Braddock voting in favor and Mayor Ervin and Councilwoman Moore voting against.

ADJOURN

Without objection, the September 21, 2021 Special meeting of City Council was adjourned at 4:27 p.m.

Dated this 11th day of October 2021.


Casey C. Moore, Municipal Clerk


Teresa Myers Ervin, Mayor