

Laurens County Council nixes bid for transfer station

By John Clayton
Editor

After objections from Laurens County Council Vice-Chairman Joe Wood, council members decided Tuesday to forego a plan to build a \$1.375 million solid waste transfer station.

County Purchasing Director Billy Wilson and Solid Waste and Recycling Manager Chris Gurga asked council to accept a bid from Sossaman Construction in Gaffney, but Wood, a retired professional contractor who had asked to review the plans, said the plans were not detailed enough for the county to know what it is getting for its money.

"This building needs to be safe and usable for many years," Wood said. "In my opinion, this is not ready to bid. What we have here is a concept."

Wilson said the county has worked with Sossaman Construction in the past, and he was confident in the company's ability to deliver the design-build project.

Instead, staff will start over on the project from square one after being advised to hire a structural engineer, acquire a design and then bid out the project again. In a design-build agreement, the contractor would have taken care of design, permitting and construction for the entire project.

The county decided to build a transfer station after a contract for solid waste removal with a private firm ended this past December and was not renewed. The Solid Waste and Recycling

Department is currently carrying waste to Twin Chimney in Greenville County, which it will continue to do after the transfer station is built.

But Gurga told council members that doing so is putting stress on equipment and workers. The extra mileage on trucks and additional time needed to get to and from Twin Chimney could become untenable.

"It's a miracle we've been able to keep up," he said.

Fire services budget approved, final budget vote Thursday

The Laurens County budget process was expected to draw to a close this week as council members put their final stamper on the 2019-20 budgets.

At Tuesday night's regular meeting, council held third and final reading of the county's fire services budget for the next fiscal year. The proposed \$3,000,080 fire services budget is a special purpose tax district and separate from the county's general fund budget.

Council also voted 5-1 to approve an annual renewal of the Local Option Sales Tax, which

lowers property tax bills, while supplying up to 29% of collected money to the county's general fund. That results in about \$800,000 annually into county coffers.

Council members were scheduled to meet again at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 27, to approve the 2019-20 budget for the county. Spending is up 2.4% – about \$800,000 – from the 2018-19 budget, but requires no tax increase. The overall budget is up about 5.4% from the \$23 million of 2018-19.

Laurens County Administrator Jon Caime said increased revenues have made up the difference between the two budgets.

He said about half the budget has been approved by council by consent votes because the funding from department to department has remained constant from this past budget to this one.

"A lot of this is because our team has been conservative and have done things more efficiently," Caime said. "All the credit goes to them. They've been able to hold the line on spending."

Caime said the county has been able to replenish its reserve funds, which had dipped below

10% following the last economic recession, back to 25% now.

Since taking over in 2016, Caime has revamped the county's budget process, breaking out county EMS into its own tax district, which will require a 2-mil increase for 2019-20.

"EMS is the last piece of the puzzle," Caime said. "EMS has been broken."

He said EMS has been operating at a deficit of about \$100,000 for the past decade or more, borrowing from the general fund each year.

Caime said EMS Director Matt Pennington and his officers have been able to create savings with efficiencies. Over the past year, EMS has started a non-emergency transport service that operates to generate funds for the agency.

The additional two mils on top of the 7.3 mils charged to taxpayers will go to capital purchases for EMS.

Caime said many of the county's ambulances and necessary equipment such as heart monitors are being used beyond their normal usage period and need to be replaced. The extra millage is expected to fund at least partially an estimated \$1 million in needed equipment.

EMS transport policy changed

Council members voted 6-0 to accept a committee recommendation to no longer allow transport patients to automatically choose which hospital they will be taken to unless it is justified by needed medical treatment.

Otherwise, the patient will be taken to the nearest hospital or medical facility. For instance, a patient in Cross Hill or Waterloo could go to Self while a patient in Fountain Inn could go to Simpsonville.

Caime said the updated policy could save the county as much as \$100,000 per year and stop undue burdens on employees and equipment.

Councilman Jeff Carroll, who is also Spartanburg County's EMS Director, said the new rule just makes sense.

"It makes no sense to send our resources 40 minutes out of the county for a laceration," Carroll said. "This will not keep patients from getting the care they need, and it makes us better stewards of the resources we have in the county."



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Clinton revises sanitation schedule

The City of Clinton Department of Public Works Sanitation Division has revised its garbage collection schedule for the week of June 30, due to the city's observation of the July 4 holiday on Thursday, July 4, and Friday, July 5.

There is no change to the regular schedule for Monday and Tuesday, July 1-2. On July 3, the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday routes will be collected and there will be no collection on Thursday and Friday, July 4-5 due to the July 4 holiday.

Clinton's Department of Public Works reminds all customers to have their garbage carts on the curb by midnight prior to their collection day.

For more information please contact the Department of Public Works by calling 864-833-7520.

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Dr. Jenifer Dixon & Dr. Julie James would like to welcome **Dr. Bess Pierce** to the **Clinton Animal Hospital family.**



Dr. Pierce is a Clinton native & graduate of Mississippi State University. She is looking forward to serving the surrounding community and becoming an integral part of Clinton Animal Hospital.

IMPORTANT UPDATE!

There has been some concern that Family Eye Care Center is merging with Montgomery and Riddle Eye Associates to become part of Clemson Eye. Nothing could be further from the truth! Dr. Bernadine Donaldson and Dr. Tom MacMillan have never been in any discussion and will continue to be a doctor-owned private practice, which we feel best meets our patient's needs.

The confusion was brought to our attention because Montgomery and Riddle, Clemson Eye and Donelson Eye Associates (which is located in Greenville) are merging together to form one group called Clemson Eye. Some of our patients thought our own Dr. Donaldson was going to be working with this group.

Donelson sounds an awful lot like Donaldson, doesn't it? But never fear! You will still see her and Dr. MacMillan on the Square in Laurens and Clinton.

Did you know we offer comprehensive eye exams, but also emergency care, glaucoma treatment and dry eye treatment? We will try to work with your schedule and keep wait times to a minimum! Please call us at 864-984-2020 (Laurens office) or 864-833-5555 (Clinton office) for more information.

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