

CALLED EDGEFIELD COUNTY COUNCIL

July 12, 2016

6:00 PM

Sweetwater Baptist Church Family Life Center

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The Edgefield County Council held a called meeting at 6:00 P. M. Tuesday, July 12, 2016, in the Sweetwater Baptist Church Family Life Center, 198 Sweetwater Road, North Augusta, SC. Notice of this meeting was provided to Edgefielddaily.com, The Edgefield Advertiser and others as requested.

**Members present**

Dean Campbell, Chairman  
Genia Blackwell, Vice Chairwoman  
Rodney Ashcraft, Councilman  
Betty Butler, Councilwoman  
Albert Talbert, Councilman

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**Others present**

Tommy Paradise, County Administrator  
Jennifer Gilley, Clerk to Council  
Andrew Marine, County Attorney  
Joey Smith, Merriwether Fire Chief  
Will Williams, President/CEO Economic Development Partnership  
Bill Hixon, State Representative  
Shane Massey, South Carolina Senator  
Todd Glover, City of North Augusta Administrator  
Lark Jones, City of North Augusta Mayor  
Hart Clark, Edgefield County Building and Planning Director  
Dr. Robert Maddox, Edgefield County School District Superintendent  
John Hare, ECWSA Director  
Roger LeDuc, Facilitator  
and others as per list attached

Councilman Campbell called the meeting to order. The invocation was given by Dr. Paul Noe.

**Discussion of Annexation and Development in Merriwether Area**

Councilman Campbell then told everyone in attendance this meeting was for a better understanding of annexation and the process behind it. He went on to say that everyone would have their turn to ask questions and give comments. He asked that everyone sign in with their name and email address. He explained that anyone that gave an email address would receive an email with the map, the minutes from this meeting and a copy of the questions asked with the answers. The rest of County Council welcomed and thanked everyone for coming to the meeting to clarify the annexation information. Chairman Campbell turned the meeting over to Roger LeDuc.

Mr. LeDuc started by saying that he would start by clearing up some misleading questions and comments that had been circulating on social media and throughout the community, then he would take questions, write them down as they were asked and then have the appropriate party go back and answer the questions. He explained that if there were any questions left unanswered he would find the answer and it would be emailed out like Chairman Campbell stated earlier. He went on to say that more questions would be taken throughout the meeting.

Mr. LeDuc then started talking about some of the misleading questions and comments.

**1. Is Edgefield County Council voting on annexation at this meeting tonight?**

No, Edgefield County Council doesn't vote on annexation. The only party that can approve an annexation request is the City of North Augusta. They will not be voting tonight as there are no pending annexation requests.

**2. Will Merriwether (Districts 1 & 2) be annexed in totality?**

Mr. LeDuc stated that in order for Merriwether to be annexed in totality 75% or more of the signature holders of the property in Merriwether would have to sign a petition to be annexed after a formal request was made to the City of North Augusta. He went on to say the property would also have to be contiguous to property that is already in the City of North Augusta.

**3. Was Oak Creek Subdivision taken by the City of North Augusta without the permission of the residents in Oak Creek Subdivision?**

No, the developer requested that Oak Creek Subdivision be annexed prior to the sales of the lots.

**4. Is Edgefield County Council being sneaky and working with the City of North Augusta to have Merriwether annexed?**

No, Mr. LeDuc explained that there have been no meetings or discussion with the City of North Augusta to annex Merriwether.

The public then came forward with questions that they wanted answered during the discussion of this meeting. These questions were answered over the duration of the meeting. The questions were:

**1. How does the annexation of property effect future grants for Law Enforcement?**

None

**2. What freedoms will the property owners lose if their property is annexed?**

A property owner would be required to comply with the City of North Augusta's ordinances which includes zoning, land development regulations, business license fees, etc.

**3. How annexation takes place?**

Three main ways of annexation:

**1) 100% Percent Petition Method**

- When all of the property owners request annexation

**2) 75% Petition Method**

- 75% of the freeholders owning at least 75% of the assessed value of the property in the area to be annexed requests the annexation

**3) 25% Petition and Election Method**

- 25% of the qualified electors who are residents in the area petition the area to be annexed
- Property owners must be informed by certified mail of the petition

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- If the freeholder does not reply at least 10 days prior to the election the area is included in the area to be annexed
- If the freeholder files a written notice with the municipal clerk objecting to the annexation, the freeholder's property must be excluded from the area annexed
- Special election is conducted to determine if the area will be annexed or not

4. **How will annexation affect the enrollment of students into the Edgefield School District?**

The students will attend the school district in the county they reside. If Edgefield County resident they will attend Edgefield County Public Schools.

5. **What other means can North Augusta use to annex land other than the 75% rule?**

Yes, see #3.

6. **What services or benefits will property receive other than more taxes?**

As a city resident you would receive the services of the city as well as the county. These include police, fire, garbage, in-city sewer rates, yard waste, recycling, zoning and recreation from North Augusta. The County would still continue to provide water and EMS.

7. **Will SC Bill 848-34 affect the annexations?**

According to the Assistant Clerk of House Research and Constituent Services, Don Hottel, the Local Government Efficiency Act failed to be approved by the General Assembly. It would have allowed a municipality to annex up to 25 acres if it is completely surrounded by the City, thereby eliminating some doughnut holes in cities. For a period of not less than 5 years this area would have to be either:

- (1) completely surrounded by the municipality; or
- (2) completely surrounded by the municipality except for the area's border with one or more of the following:
  - (a) a state line;
  - (b) a military installation;
  - (c) a state or national park or forest; or
  - (d) a lake or river.

8. **If annexed will we be Aiken County?**

No, annexation does not change county lines.

9. **Is this a done deal?**

There is no "deal" involved. The City of North Augusta has said they are not aggressively annexing but will consider annexing anyone who comes to them.

10. **Is the ECWSA, working with North Augusta on an EPA grant?**

Administrator John Hare with Edgefield County Water Sewer Authority states, "ECWSA is not currently working on any joint grant projects with the City of North Augusta. We did cooperate

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with the City in the early 2000's on a grant to eliminate a bottle neck in the Regional Sewer system that would ultimately increase capacity in the system.”

11. **Where did the annexation of Merriwether start and when?**  
North Augusta has annexed several large parcels in the Merriwether area. These annexations occurred in 1986, 1989, 1994, and 2016.
12. **Why does NA want to annex portions of Edgefield County?**  
The property owners of large tracts of land typically request annexation from North Augusta in order to get sewer service which allows for a higher density of residential house to be developed. Also some areas in the Merriwether area do not perk adequately and therefore septic systems for residential property are not available.
13. **Why does the Edgefield County Council not invest more resources in Merriwether such as recreation/storm water/sewer etc.?**  
In 2012 Edgefield County Council entered into an agreement where sewer service would be brought to the North Augusta Country Club which was going to be developed. The developer did not proceed with the development so there was not a need for the sewer line. Edgefield County has also worked with ECWSA on proposing other projects to developers where the County and Authority would jointly bring sewer service to the area. However, none of the potential developers decided to pursue the project. Edgefield County Council will continue to look for opportunities to partner with ECWSA. In 2015, Edgefield County completed the reconstruction of the Sweetwater Community Center. In June 2015 they entered into an agreement with the Mount Vintage developer on completing the roads and infrastructure. The Edgefield County Sheriff's Department also maintains a Sheriff's Department substation and Edgefield County EMS maintains and EMS substation in the Merriwether area.
14. **Does the map represent annexation?**  
The map shows those areas of Edgefield County that are already in the city limits of North Augusta.
15. **For those of us owning farmland, why would we want to annex into North Augusta and pay more taxes?**  
Typically, farmland is not annexed until it is ready to be developed for some other use.
16. **What is the process for annexation especially concerning the school notification, Planning Commission and County Council?**  
See #3 above.
17. **Is North Augusta required to provide sewer when annexing property in Edgefield County?**  
Sewer is usually the reason that property requests annexation. However, a property owner could request annexation and not need sewer.

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18. **If sewer is available to a property does North Augusta require connection and for them to sign an agreement to annex?**

Connection to the sewer is usually not required if the property has an operable septic tank. However, when the tank fails connection to the sewer is usually required. In order to receive sewer service, North Augusta, like most cities, require annexation or if the property is not contiguous an agreement to annex when it becomes contiguous.

19. **Is Natural Gas available in the Merriweather area and how do the citizens petition to receive it?**

According to SCE&G they are committed to providing natural gas service to communities in their service territory where they can. They use an established process to carefully evaluate each natural gas service growth opportunity. Some of the factors that help determine whether natural gas expansion is right for a community include: proximity to existing natural gas pipelines, interest among local homeowners and businesses, and the cost of adding or extending natural gas infrastructure. SCE&G's comprehensive approach helps ensure that clean, safe natural gas is available in as many communities as possible. For questions about natural gas service, please call SCE&G at 800-251-7234.

Andrew Marine, the Edgefield County Attorney briefly went over the State Laws regarding ways to annex property. See the answer to question 2 above for his presentation regarding the laws and methods on annexation. He also stated that in order for a property or properties (like Mt. Vintage) to be annexed they would have to be contiguous to another parcel already in the City of North Augusta. He stated that Mt. Vintage wasn't close enough to be annexed at this time. He went on to say when citizens request water and sewer from the City of North Augusta they sign an annexation agreement.

Next, John Hare addressed the meeting on behalf of the Edgefield County Water and Sewer Authority. He starting by saying the ECWSA is a special purpose district established by the State of South Carolina in 1967. He went on to say they provide water to Edgefield County and a small portion of Aiken County. He stated ECWSA does not have any waste water treatment facilities on the lower end of the County and that all of the waste water has to go through the City of North Augusta and then goes to the treatment facility in Aiken County. All of Edgefield County's wastewater ends up going through the City of North Augusta and then to Aiken County. He explained the City of North Augusta already has lines close to Merriwether and it is more economical to be annexed in for sewer than for ECWSA to run lines to properties adjacent to the City of North Augusta. He stated ECWSA doesn't have the funding to put sewer lines all the way through Merriwether. He went on to say the rates for the citizens are much lower if they are able to tie in the sewer with the City of North Augusta. He stated if ECWSA were able to put lines out that far the rates would most likely be double due to the cost of the infrastructure that would be necessary. Mr. Hare finished his presentation by briefly answered the questions above that were related to his field.

Lark Jones, the City of North Augusta Mayor, gave the next presentation. Mayor Jones started by reviewing what properties are located in the City of North Augusta. Then he reviewed the properties in Edgefield County that have been annexed into the City of North Augusta. He went on to say that with the

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exception of portion near Sweetwater Creek Drive all of the annexations that have occurred were done with 100% support of the property owners. He stated the portion of annexation near Sweetwater Creek Drive was done with the 75% method but was accepted with almost 95% support of the property owners. Mayor Jones also told the audience that there have been requests to be annexed into the City of North Augusta that have been denied. He also told everyone that not only do 75% of the property owners have to be in favor of an annexation but they also must represent 75% of the property value for the annexation to be approved. Mayor Jones then asked the audience if anyone in attendance had received anything that appeared to be official from the City of North Augusta regarding annexation or asking property owners to consider annexing into the City of North Augusta. No one raised their hand. He went on to say that the City of North Augusta is not trying to annex property. He explained they only consider it when a formal request is submitted. There was brief mention of the land the City of North Augusta owns in Edgefield County. The City of North Augusta planned to turn it into a park but haven't done so yet. Chairman Campbell clarified that particular piece of property is not contiguous to the City of North Augusta and cannot be annexed at this time.

Mr. LeDuc reiterated that this meeting was for information only and there are no proposed annexations at this time. He also went over the process for annexation. See the answer to question number 3.

A member of the public asked Mayor Jones if the City of North Augusta was going to sell the property or move forward with the park project in the future. Mayor Jones stated they would still like to move forward with that project but are focused on another project at this time. He stated that if they are able to develop a park in the future they would like to annex the property owned by the City of North Augusta. He explained the City of North Augusta would want their Recreation and Police Department to be over the park and not have that burden land on Edgefield County.

Another member of the public asked why it was cheaper for the City of North Augusta to provide sewer to the citizens that are close to the County Line. John Hare stated Aiken County owns the treatment facility and the lines that carry the waste water from Edgefield County to the treatment facility have to run through the City of North Augusta. He explained ECWSA has to pay the City of North Augusta and Aiken County while the City of North Augusta only has to pay Aiken County cutting the cost in half.

One citizen briefly asked questions about zoning. She wanted to know if there were set back regulations in place for a developer to follow if they were to build a commercial building. Mr. Paradise stated there are set back policies in place along with other regulations. She went on to ask what the least restrictive zoning designation was in Edgefield County. Mr. Paradise told her General Development has the least restrictions. Chairman Campbell stepped in and told the citizen that if she would like further explanation on the zoning regulations in Edgefield County she should attend the next zoning meeting.

Another citizen asked about a specific piece of property and whether or not it was being considered for annexation. Mayor Jones told the citizen that there were no pending requests for annexation and that she would need to contact the land owner to see if they were interested in putting in a formal request to be annexed.

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A lady from the audience asked Mayor Jones that if the City of North Augusta were to develop the property they bought in Edgefield County as a City of North Augusta park would the children of Edgefield County be able to utilize the park. Mayor Jones told her that all of the City of North Augusta's parks are open to everyone but the fees are higher for children that do not live in the City of North Augusta. Mayor Jones went on to say that the City of North Augusta would consider a partnership with Edgefield County Recreation for that park since it would actually be sitting in Edgefield County.

Next, a citizen asked if there had been a study done to determine the amount of acreage in the Merriwether area won't perk. Mr. Hare stated the ECWSA has not conducted a study to determine the answer to his question. He stated a project that large would probably include a partnership with Edgefield County Government. He went on to say they would have to determine the cost associated with a project that large.

State Representative Bill Hixon clarified some of the rumors that he had heard regarding annexation between Edgefield County and the City of North Augusta. He stated he lives in Edgefield County in the Merriwether area and that if anyone heard any further rumors to please give him a call. He stated he would clear up any confusion for any of the citizens with questions. He stated these rumors were blown out of proportion and that he would like to be a part of the solution.

Closing remarks were made by the officials. They thanked the citizens for being involved with the community. Chairman Campbell went on to say that the citizens that signed in with an email address would be getting a copy of the map, a list of answers to all of the questions that were asked at the meeting tonight and the minutes from this meeting.

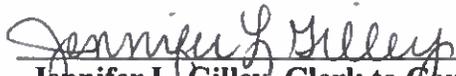
**Adjourn**

Councilwoman Blackwell made the motion to adjourn, seconded by Councilman Ashcraft. Motion passed unanimously.

**Edgefield County Council**

  
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Dean Campbell, Chairman

**ATTEST**

  
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Jennifer L. Gilley, Clerk to Council