

Edgefield County Council Chairman's Update December 9, 2011

E911 Center Update Approved by County Council

The County Council has begun the process to update the E911 Center, which has become less reliable with systems that are becoming obsolete. While it will cost approximately \$441,000 to give the system a necessary upgrade, it will not come out of County Operating funds. More than one-third of the funds will come from a state grant. The rest comes from money collected from a small fee in your phone bill each month that goes toward upgrades to the 911 system. This upgrade includes new radios as well.

The work on the E911 Center should begin in January and be completed by April. There will be no lapse in 911 during the changeover. This overhaul of the system is overdue and is a big step forward for our County's law enforcement and your continued safety. Stay tuned for updates!

More Meetings with Public Officials

In November, the County Council met with the Edgefield County Legislative Delegation: Sen. Shane Massey, Rep. Bill Clyburn and Rep. Bill Hixon.

In that meeting, the Legislative Delegation and County Council agreed that economic development was a key component in the County's future. In addition, all agreed to work together to ensure that the County can grow.

It may not seem like such a big deal to hear this news where elected officials meet with each other, but keep in mind many public bodies in many counties keep to themselves. This "stovepipe" approach would be detrimental to our County moving forward. That's why I have been holding these "field trips" for County Council to visit with the various elected and appointed bodies that have a stake in the future of our County. As elected and appointed leaders, I believe it is incumbent on all of us to work together much more than we have in the past. Understanding each other's issues and how we impact County residents and businesses is key to planning a future course for success in our County.

I'm pleased to report to you that all have been willing to work together for the common goals we all want to pursue – a greater quality of life, reasonable taxes, good places to live and work, and economic growth.

I thank them all for the dedication to our citizens. And we've only just begun!

On December 13, the County Council makes its final "field trip" of the year to meet with the Edgefield County School Board.

Awarding Employees for Money-Saving or Safety Suggestions

Front-line employees know best where we may waste money and where savings can be found.

With that in mind, the County Council passed on Tuesday a program to reward County employees for suggestions that save taxpayers' money. The details of the program can be found on the County website. However, it essentially allows an employee to receive up to \$1,000 for an adopted suggestion.

Also, to better promote safety in County employees' jobs, the program allows employees to get a \$25 award for submitting safety suggestions that are approved. We want our employees to go home in the same condition that they arrived at work, so working safely should be at the heart of all their work. Also, increased vigilance in safety will continue to reduce the amount of Workers' Compensation money the County now pays, saving your tax dollars.

Both these programs are a win for the employees, a win for the County and a win for taxpayers.

Giving Citizens Better EMS Coverage at Local Events

When you see an ambulance at an Edgefield County event, you may not have the medical coverage you think you do.

Under the old County policy, an ambulance would attend local events, sporting events, etc., to provide medical coverage in case of injuries or health issues. However, if an ambulance was needed in another part of the County during the event, it would leave the event – and take the emergency medical personnel with it. That meant there was no coverage at all. This scenario happens at STHS football games, for example.

County Council adopted a new policy on Tuesday, which sends emergency medical personnel to games and events without an ambulance. That way, if an ambulance is needed, they would call for it. But they will stay to ensure emergency workers will be available to all.

It's a smarter, safer way to ensure citizens have coverage for medical needs.

Coming to Council: A Proposal to Build a local Animal Control Shelter

In January, County Council is scheduled to take up a proposal to build our own Edgefield County Animal Control Shelter. We discussed it and hear public input about it Tuesday.

Currently, any animal picked up by a Sheriff's Deputy today is taken to the Aiken County Animal Control Shelter. We believe the adoption rate of our animals is very low in Aiken, which means more animals are euthanized. In addition, having the current animal control shelter in Aiken is inconvenient at best for citizens. Finally, it has gotten very expensive to send our animals there – it has increased from about \$23,000 annually seven years ago to an estimated \$67,000 this year.

From a pure financial standpoint, considering building cost, maintenance, reduced travel to Aiken, etc., building our own shelter will likely pay for itself in 5-6 years or so. From a convenience standpoint, citizens can more easily retrieve their animals since the shelter will be located on County land near our maintenance shop. And we will have a much better system for animal adoption.

I certainly hope you provide any input you have on this topic to Council, the Administrator or me so we can make the best decision for our County.

Edgefield County Strategic Plan Begins Taking Shape

On November 10 and November 15, public input was received on the Edgefield County Strategic Plan. My thanks to the many who turned out! We received some awesome input. The areas that were identified by the Strategic Plan Steering Committee for input included Education, Economic Development, Infrastructure and Quality of Life.

On November 29, the Steering Committee met to review the plan and design a path forward.

The Committee combined the four areas into two: Economic Development/Infrastructure and Quality of Life/Education. Steering Committee members have chosen one or both areas to be involved. Now, the two subcommittees will hold meetings to begin making important decisions on short-, medium- and long-term goals.

The group discussing Quality of Life/Education will be meeting at the County Council Chambers (225 Jeter Street, Edgefield) on Monday, December 12, 6 p.m.

The group discussing Infrastructure/Economic Development will be meeting at the County Council Chambers (225 Jeter Street, Edgefield) on Thursday, December 15, 6 p.m.

These meetings are open to the public. I encourage all citizens to come out to these meetings to provide any additional input or just listen. If you want to provide any written input, please send it to me, and I will ensure the right subcommittee gets the information.

Once the subcommittees finish their work in February, the Steering Committee will complete the final plan, which is expected to be presented to Council in March.

Coffee with the Chairman Continues

Thanks to those who have joined me for the early morning “Coffee with the Chairman” stops! I enjoy the feedback, and I appreciate the time taken by those coming in.

The next Coffee will be held in Edgefield at McDonalds, 6:15-7:15 a.m., Thursday, Jan. 12. I hope to see you!

These sessions, like the evening meetings called “Chats,” are informal discussions to talk about topics that interest you. I will announce my February evening “Chat” session next month. Vice Chair Genia Blackwell and I enjoyed the December 7 “Chat” session with citizens in Merriwether. Thanks to those who came out!

Merry Christmas and Thanks!

I want to take this opportunity to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year!

I also want to thank the members of the County Council for their hard work this year. There’s a lot more work for us to do, of course, but we have begun to make substantial changes in the way our County is doing business.

I hope you agree.

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How this Update will work

As Chairman of Edgefield County Council, I have introduced this newsletter to help explain County issues and try to answer questions from citizens. We will protect the email addresses of those who are interested in receiving this newsletter.

I'd like to send this newsletter to you at least monthly, depending on issues upcoming or ongoing, or if issues need more explanation.

Finally, if you have a question about an issue, please reply to me. I'll be happy to try to answer your question.