

**CITY OF COLUMBIA  
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES  
FEBRUARY 4, 2010 – 6:00 P.M.  
CITY HALL - 1737 MAIN STREET  
3<sup>rd</sup> FLOOR – COUNCIL CHAMBERS**



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The Columbia City Council conducted a Public Hearing on Wednesday, February 4, 2010 at City Hall, 1737 Main Street, Columbia, South Carolina. The Honorable Mayor Robert D. Coble called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. The following members of Council were present: The Honorable Sam Davis, The Honorable Tameika Isaac Devine, The Honorable Kirkman Finlay III and The Honorable Belinda F. Gergel. The Honorable E. W. Cromartie, II arrived at 6:09 p.m. The Honorable Daniel J. Rickenmann was absent. Also present were Mr. Steven A. Gantt, City Manager and Ms. Erika D. Salley, City Clerk.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

Mayor Coble explained that we will have two (2) separate Public Hearings tonight. We would ask you to speak on the subject of each one. The first is the InnoVista Redevelopment Plan and the second is the Columbia Renaissance Redevelopment Plan. It is permissible for you to speak on both, if needed. The attorneys have advised us that we need to limit the comments to each separately.

**ORDINANCES – FIRST READING**

A. [Ordinance No.: 2010-031](#) - (Innovista Redevelopment Plan) - An Ordinance Approving the Innovista Redevelopment Plan of the City of Columbia, South Carolina; Designating Such Area as a Redevelopment Project Area; Making Findings of Blight Within the Redevelopment Project Area and Other Findings Contemplated by the Tax Increment Financing Law; Designating Redevelopment Projects; and Other Matters Relating Thereto

- **Council opened the Public Hearing for Item A. at 6:08 p.m.**

The following individuals appeared before the Council in support of Item A.:

Mr. Neil McLean, EngenuitySC  
Mr. Bill Boyd, Waterfront Steering Committee  
Mr. John Lumpkin, Midlands Business Leadership Group  
Mr. Tommy Carter, Russell and Jeffcoat Realtors

- **Council closed the Public Hearing for Item A. at 6:20 p.m.**

B. [Ordinance No.: 2010-032](#) - (Columbia Renaissance Redevelopment Plan) - An Ordinance Approving the Columbia Renaissance Redevelopment Plan of the City of Columbia, South Carolina; Designating Such Area as a Redevelopment Project Area; Making Findings of Blight Within the Redevelopment Project Area and Other Findings Contemplated by the Tax Increment Financing Law; Designating Redevelopment Projects; and Other Matters Relating Thereto

- **Council opened the Public Hearing for Item B. at 6:20 p.m.**

The following individuals appeared before the Council in support of **Item B.**:

Mr. John Jones, Columbia College  
Mr. Grant Jackson, Senior Vice President for the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce  
Mr. Gene Green, NAI Avant  
Mr. Ted Speth, Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce  
Mr. Joel Seel, Mashburn Construction  
Ms. Gail Baker, President of the Hyatt Park Keenan Terrace Neighborhood Association  
Dr. Charles Young, President of Allen University  
Dr. Stacey Jones, Benedict College  
Mr. Robert Johnson, Jr., North Columbia Resident

▪ **Council closed the Public Hearing for Item B. at 6:36 p.m.**

Mayor Coble said that we are approving a plan today that may or may not be adopted or implemented by the issuance of a bond or bonds in the future by the next Mayor and the next City Council, although most of you will be on that next City Council. As we understand it, only when a bond is issued does the tax revenue go into the TIF. Until then, the funds will flow as they normally do. I think that all of the arguments about “now is not the time” and “we can’t afford it” are valid and very important, but I think they need to be addressed down the road when a future Council may want to make a decision on the bond; it can be evaluated at that time. Tonight is just as good a time as any to vote no if a person is never going to vote for a TIF. I would approve a plan today, because the next Council doesn’t have to issue the bonds. If we vote the plan down today, it will be very difficult to restart the process in two (2) years. Tonight we are seeing something that we hardly ever see; the business community, the neighborhoods and everyone are together. I hope that two to three years down the road the conditions will be such that issuing the bonds make sense.

Councilor Gergel said that she has spent all of her professional career in North Columbia and when she was at Columbia College as a student; North Columbia was a very vibrant area with small stores and retail. It was very exciting to be in North Columbia many decades back. I do believe in North Columbia; I believe in the InnoVista; I believe in the future of our City; and these are going to happen. I look forward to working with many of you and many members of this Council to do that, but at this time I cannot support the TIFs. I say that because it is simply not the appropriate time. We’ve heard from our School District, our County and our Mayoral candidates. This is a plan to incur debt. This is not just a planning document and I am prepared to offer a motion to incorporate both of these TIFs as planning documents for the future. The TIF is not a planning document; it is a document to incur debt. At this point in our City’s history; when we are looking at a very fragile financial condition for our City; when we’re just beginning to get our financial footing back in place; when we are struggling about whether to impose a property tax to replace police cars; when we’ve looked at furloughs; and we still don’t have Engines 8 and 9 fully up; I simply cannot do this. I will however work with members of this Council to identify smaller projects that we can work on. I remain committed to a smaller TIF and to a program that would like at building upon success. I would welcome the opportunity to work with all of those members of Council who have done such a good job in bringing the conditions of North Columbia and the InnoVista to our full attention. I do not believe that a vote no tonight is a vote against the future of either of these areas. We will have plenty of time to look at this in the future as our new Mayor and new Council takes it seat in July.

Councilor Davis said that before he came to Council he spent a lot of time in the community trying to pay his dues; cleaning up the neighborhoods; and pulling dogs out of ditches for the sake of helping to make things better. I am in favor of the TIF, because every successful part of this City has had their chance, time, commitments and supporters. The areas I am representing including Chestnut Hill you have to balance your support for them. I have always said that it doesn't make sense for a major corridor that leads to the steps of the State Capital to not have the support and the commitment of the people who are espousing a desire to see us go from good to great. When I think about that, I think about the whole and not the part. I like the people who are primarily included in the TIF is sick and tired of hearing the slogan "not now". If they had said that during the Vista planning, then we would not have the Vista. The TIF is a vehicle to implement a plan and it's called the North Columbia Master Plan and the East Central Plan. When I participated in the charettes with the people I represent to put together these plans there was a commitment that the plans would not sit on the shelf and collect dust. The only way you do that is to go to the next step, which is to implement the plans with the necessary resources and vehicles that any other municipality puts in place to make that happen. We've done that; we've done our homework; we've looked at the pros and cons, but it's not a quick fix or an overnight wand that makes things happen; it's long-term. It makes a statement that the City, its leadership and those interested in the quality of life throughout this City are committed to putting the resources and place. Tighten your belts, step forward and do what it takes to make it happen. That is what attracts businesses and that is what attracts new residents. It says that this is a City that's moving forward; this is a City that cares about its people; this is a City that demonstrates a pure partnership between the business community and the neighborhoods; and this is a City that doesn't pit neighborhoods against the business sector. I think that Bob has a lot at stake, too. You don't have to wait to see whoever succeeds you to participate in this. You've got some sweat equity in this and everything we've tried to do. This gives us an opportunity to demonstrate that we're going to do the necessary things to become and to be perceived as a business friendly community and that's why I'm in full support of it.

Councilor Cromartie said that he is the only current Councilmember that voted for the entire redevelopment of the Vista and it has made a difference. I am fully aware of how we got from where we were to where we are today. You've heard the benefit of the plan and obviously it is a means of making sure that all parts of the City of Columbia have an opportunity to grow and to be a part of the prosperity of this great City. The economics of this is the interesting part; this is merely a plan; this is merely a foundation; this is the seed that the trees can sprout from. There is no debt incurred until this Council votes. It is not an argument that it will affect the budget in any way; it simply will not; the tax base is flat. If you look at the statistics of what's occurring on Two Notch Road and Harden Street, all of the economic development that has occurred has been development that the City and the Housing Authority has spurred. And because of that spurred development there has been private development. The taxes on North Main have been flat for the past ten (10) years. If you do nothing then the tax will remain flat. We aren't taking anything away from the tax base. The whole purpose of tax increment financing is to freeze that which already exists and if there is an increment, then you can capture that increment. On the other hand, if this Council in all its wisdom in years to come makes a decision not to levy any taxes, then of course, it makes no difference. It gives this City Council the opportunity to grow our City and if you don't vote to do it then you're not giving yourselves the opportunity to make that decision. Voting for it is setting the seed and the real question will come when the projects come on the table. I am talking to huge developer now about a huge project that they brought to the table, because of this plan. There will be tremendous tax dollars for Richland School District One and additional tax dollars for Richland County, because the tax dollars

for the City of Columbia are very small. This is simply a plan to give us the opportunity to move forward.

Councilor Devine commended Mr. Steven A. Gantt, City Manager and the staff for their work on this. It is very easy to look at this and say that it's a plan, but this is 2 ½ years of hard work; studies; going back to the drawing board; and running numbers. I am very proud of the product that we have here. There's no secret that I am hugely in support of this. I do want to say that I appreciate everyone coming out. As one of the people who have been out there on this for the last two years, I've received hits, I've received the e-mails and I've heard the concerns. I want people to know that we take the concerns very seriously. People are concerned about the economy, the City's finances and whether or not the numbers in this plan are real. What I can say is that the numbers in this plan are real; not just for the projects, but for the future of Columbia. We are losing our children to gangs and violence and to no hope in this City, because there aren't any jobs when they graduate high school or college; there aren't places they can live feel safe. This is not only a plan, it is a vision for Columbia's future and it is a way for this Council, this City and our partners to give our children hope. The letters I've read said that our partners have concerns that have to be addressed; that they have not foreclosed the possibility of working with us; the County has offered suggestions; the School District has expressed serious concerns about our budget; and that says that all of our leaders and partners recognize that this plan can happen. This is a plan, not an obligation to issue debt. Both projects have phases that are prioritized and they may or may not require debts to be issued, but it will happen incrementally not all at once. There hasn't been any growth in this area. You would be increasing the tax base so that we can put that back into other projects and gaining additional business licenses and water and sewer fees. This is the time; if we don't do it now then we will continue to find excuses not to do it. The people in this area have been told for far too long that it's not the time. You have seen a commitment from this Council that we will find the time; this is the time; and we will find a way to do it. This is an opportunity for us to be visionary about our City and to have the InnoVista and the Renaissance District add to the growth that other areas of this City have had. This area has been lacking for far too long and I think that is the one reason why this is the time. I feel that we are ready to go. I look forward to more conversations with the School District and with the County, because there are other ways that we can partner together and they have shown an interest in moving forward with some investment in this area. We must continue to keep the lines of communication open to see this happen for all of us.

Councilor Finlay said that as he has listened tonight, he's heard so many different ideas and thoughts. Let's pull the onion back a little bit. Taking what Sam said, we've had far too many plans and far too little implementation. Taking what Tameika said, we've made promises and we haven't kept them. I think to levy the argument that we're going to approve this plan and not move forward is an argument to continue to do the same thing over and over again. In my mind, we are acknowledging that we are going to move forward. The problem is that the only way to move forward is with debt financing on many of the projects. We can avoid the reality of where we are, but that's where we're going. Councilman Cromartie made a wonderful point, these projects are going to benefit the School District and the County, but they are only going to benefit them if they don't participate in the TIF; the minute they join the TIF, the revenue disappears. All of sudden, the problem becomes that as we as a City invests and it moves forward, our partners have a smaller financial incentive everyday. When we announce that we are moving forward, we lighten the burden of participation and we've increased the potential reward. They are struggling just like us and they need every nickel to help fund general funds. This is going to send a very interesting message to the City as a whole. If we acknowledge that this plan has to be acted on to avoid the history of plans that we haven't acted on employees will want to know how we have the ability to

move forward with plans while they draw furloughs; we've had our holiday pay cut. Even though I am voting against this, I am committed to participating in any discussion that goes forward. I will tell you that I think that what we all hope for and what we all dream for is not going to be developed or delivered by a \$190 million debt financing plan. He said that InnoVista is predicted to produce \$298 million of tax revenue; approximately 75% of that was going to come from the County and the School District. We are setting an awfully lofty goal with that. At this point, I hope that everyone understands my reasons for voting no. I struggle with the math as I had from the beginning.

Upon a motion made by Ms. Devine and seconded by Mr. Davis, Council voted four (4) to two (2) to give first reading approval to Ordinance No.: 2010-031 - (Innovista Redevelopment Plan) - An Ordinance Approving the Innovista Redevelopment Plan of the City of Columbia, South Carolina; Designating Such Area as a Redevelopment Project Area; Making Findings of Blight Within the Redevelopment Project Area and Other Findings Contemplated by the Tax Increment Financing Law; Designating Redevelopment Projects; and Other Matters Relating Thereto. Voting aye were Mr. Cromartie, Mr. Davis, Ms. Devine and Mayor Coble. Voting nay were Mr. Finlay and Dr. Gergel.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Cromartie and seconded by Mr. Davis, Council voted four (4) to two (2) to give first reading approval to Ordinance No.: 2010-032 - (Columbia Renaissance Redevelopment Plan) - An Ordinance Approving the Columbia Renaissance Redevelopment Plan of the City of Columbia, South Carolina; Designating Such Area as a Redevelopment Project Area; Making Findings of Blight Within the Redevelopment Project Area and Other Findings Contemplated by the Tax Increment Financing Law; Designating Redevelopment Projects; and Other Matters Relating Thereto. Voting aye were Mr. Cromartie, Mr. Davis, Ms. Devine and Mayor Coble. Voting nay were Mr. Finlay and Dr. Gergel.

- **Council adjourned the meeting at 7:11 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Erika D. Salley  
City Clerk