

**City Council Minutes
Strategic Plan Workshop
February 27, 2025**

PRESENT:

Michael C. Butler, Mayor
Annette Dees Grevious
Jerry Hannah
Dr. Kalu Kalu
L. Zimmerman Keitt, Mayor Pro Tem
Richard Stroman

ABSENT:

Sandra Knotts

City Administrator Evering addressed Council. He stated, "In August of last year, I was contacted by Mr. Gilleon Frierson with the South Carolina Department of Commerce that the City of Orangeburg was selected to be a part of an initiative to provide strategic planning and in addition provide \$250,000 grant toward any project that supported the initiative. Mr. Charles Sexton with Strategic Location Advisors met with various stakeholders throughout the community including the school district superintendent, the colleges, and universities as well as Council. One of the things they will emphasize is the importance of collaboration with the County, Economic Development Commission, etc. Orangeburg is not an island on to itself and to take things to the next level; it requires a considerable amount of collaboration."

Mr. Gilleon Frierson, South Carolina Department of Commerce stated, "It is a pleasure to be back in Orangeburg. We started this process to help our rural communities with how to be sustainable and competitive. When this is presented to you, you have a choice whether you let it sit, or you work on it to make a better situation for Orangeburg. With your strategic location, three institutions of higher learning, and all the things that are happening in this area, you are ready and primed for growth. After this conversation today, it is all about the leadership."

Mr. Charles Sexton stated, "I grew up in rural, poor western Kentucky and I currently live near where I grew up which is the reason I do what I do and the reason I have been in Economic Development nearly twenty years now and the reason I want to help communities do better for their citizens as well. There is a lot of information in this plan. I want to hit the highlights and give you the key pieces from the data including what we discovered, what we heard from stakeholders, and what we heard from the community folks that completed the surveys. We will hit the strategies as this is the most important part of helping you understand why these strategies are important for the City of Orangeburg. We do this type of work for communities, but we also work for private sector companies and locate them across the United States. We put a \$1.2 million battery manufacturer in Greenville a year ago that considered Orangeburg. One of the reasons they did not visit is they were not sure they could attract engineering talent to Orangeburg like we could Greenville which goes back to Community Development and the things we heard from our stakeholders. With the great industrial property, the location, the infrastructure, how does the City of Orangeburg assist development in getting the higher paying jobs in the community that are needed? It is important as elected officials you understand the difference between Economic development, Community development and Economic activity. Economic development brings new development into your community. You want new money coming in from outside into the community. It is typically through new industry that is invested in construction that is putting people to work at higher wages. Community development is enhancing quality of life. Some of the things you are doing, such as pocket parks, the Edisto Gardens and sidewalk beautification are great. It is things like that but taking it farther and being more impactful in the community. Community development is typically driven by the public sector. You are trying to get the private folks, even entrepreneurs, to assist that community development by doing things but you are driving. The economic development is driven by the private sector because they are making big investments. To drive economic development, you must have good community development, especially now because most of these manufacturers need higher paid people, more technically trained people, more engineers, etc. Economic activity happens when that new money comes in and spreads around such as restaurants downtown. We heard that from individuals, especially young people. They want restaurants here and things to do as they are working here, but instead they are traveling to Columbia on the weekends. The Strength and Weakness Analysis in the

survey involved beautification and negativeness in the community. It felt like all the organizations were disconnected such as OCDC, the Chamber and the City. Everyone needs to be on the same page, and it feels like they are not, like they are in their silos, and we heard that repeatedly. All the things in the community are great but they are not all working together. We looked at the strategic plans of all your different entities and found that a lot of the organizations have strategies that are close to the same thing, but they are not talking to each other about it.

Community Survey

What one thing do you believe would most improve Quality of Life in Orangeburg?

1. Safety/Crime 31% We did some research on crime, and they are high in Orangeburg.
2. Entertainment/Things to Do 20%
3. Opportunities followed closely 18%

We also received comments such as Unity and pride in the community were needed.

Mayor Butler asked, "On the crime stats, were you looking at the City or the County?"

Mr. Sexton stated, "Both, we look at the City itself and the County as a whole. Most companies that are looking, will pull 45 minutes to one hour radius for labor."

Economic Landscape

Economic Dependency Ratio (EDR) is the ratio of economic dependent people compared to those in the labor force. How many people have a job versus the people who do not. It shocked us as we do a lot of work in rural areas, and we did not expect it here. Your rate is 213.6 which is more than double the 101.9 national average. It is important for you to understand what you have in this community is a need for more jobs. You have hidden unemployment here which means you have more people to work here than what is reported to industry.

Labor Force

We like to look at Hidden Unemployment because it is important for Economic Development to be able to promote industry. Our estimate is there are 4,522 Hidden Unemployed Population within the community. We have seen some states putting funding into getting folks that are adults back into the workforce. Part of that is identifying local institutions who can provide Fasttrack Skill Certification Training. This may be something you need to look at.

Income Disparity

You have an annual average wage of \$45,000 and the median household income of \$29,340 which is indicative of the fact that you have a high EDR. For everyone working, you have 2.1 people who do not have a job.

Economic Impact of Recent New Industry Location Announcements

We want you to understand how vital it is to revenue for the community when new industry comes in. Even if that industry is in the County, you want them to employ people who live in the City, who have houses in the City, and are spending money at local restaurants and local businesses in the City.

Mayor Butler asked, "Did you know we are a Work Ready City?"

Mr. Sexton stated, "The Work Ready Program is good as it shows you have a career pathway for the community. It does not show that you have an opportunity to help uplift people that are not counted in that work ready. This is why OCDC, Claffin, SCSU, O-C Tech, and Orangeburg County Schools need to be working together. We feel you need someone that works for the City that says I am going to make sure everyone in this town is talking to each other, working together, sharing resources and doing things necessary to move the whole community forward because there is no one in town that is doing that.

Priority Project

Hire the Orangeburg Community Champion

This position will ensure alignment across all community plans and initiatives. They need good leadership skills, need to be organized, and need to implement the majority of what is in the strategic plan for the City, and you also need to use them on your special projects. They need to drive redevelopment in Downtown Orangeburg.

The design of Railroad Corner will be beautiful, but your downtown corridor, Russell Street, needs some TLC. You need businesses and restaurants downtown as people want this in the community. You have a pretty downtown including sidewalks, trees, and the new City Hall, but you have these empty store fronts. If I am driving with a company that is thinking about investing in Orangeburg and they see the empty store fronts, they ask if this community is driving growth because they are visiting other towns of similar size with a robust downtown. When an industry looks at Orangeburg, even if all the industrial parks are in the County, they look at the City of Orangeburg from a quality-of-life aspect; is this a community that cares about itself, has pride in itself, works together, tries to get things done and is a place we can be successful long-term. We are talking about having an internal marketing campaign from the top down, we are going to talk positively. We will address things that seem negative, but we will put out what is positive about this community, things we are working on and how we are working together and the things that drive prosperity for the people in the community. Because that will help get people more excited if they start seeing that positive news. This is important for Orangeburg to feed the positivity through social media.

Key responsibilities of the Orangeburg Community Champion

1. Strategic Plan Implementation
2. Plan Coordination
3. Community Engagement
4. Liaison Duties – Primary point of contact between the City and local governments, regional agencies, and other municipalities. Also, the point of contact is to make sure the City and County are communicating well.
5. Project Management
6. Stakeholder Communication
7. Data and Reporting
8. Capacity Building – Identifying and securing funding opportunities, including grants, to support community initiatives

Strategic Priorities

1. Community Development and Quality of Life Improvement

City needs to determine what buildings along Russell Street and downtown can support development.

2. Business Development

- a. Provide local and state incentives for private and small businesses to locate downtown. The City may even need to help support businesses after hours. The city needs to look at matching grants, roof stabilization and façade improvement programs. The City could provide incentives for existing retail businesses to move downtown.
- b. Create a website for developers and entrepreneurs with a specific focus on downtown that shows incentives, downtown buildings and permitting options.
- c. Increase quality single-family and multi-family dwellings in the City. There are more renter-occupied homes than owner-occupied homes in the City. Encourage more downtown upstairs living opportunities. It drives more people downtown, which is the focus of this to create a livable, walkable downtown.
- d. Drive downtown business innovation and create an entrepreneurship program
- e. Get universities more involved in helping to drive and develop small business downtown. Use students from universities to help business startup.
- f. Placing a commercial kitchen downtown to help potential new restaurant owners test their products

3. Community Engagement

- a. Engage the community through social media about local events.
- b. Develop a young professional's group. You need your young professionals to help make a change in this community. You must get them involved.

4. Infrastructure Development and Land Use Priorities

- a. Develop 30-year utility and transportation infrastructure plan in the master plan to ensure utility and transportation infrastructure are in place to meet future growth needs
- b. Look for potential properties for annexation that can bring in new housing or industrial developments
- c. Seek out previously underutilized properties in the City for housing opportunities by cataloguing vacant and run-down structures and having a plan to address those.
- d. Improve one-stop shopping for permitting

- 5. Talent Pipeline and Workforce Development** – OCDC and the educational institutions to work on this
- Provide financial aid to help adults back into the workforce or upscale from fast food.
 - Mentorship programs to connect high schools and universities with industries

Councilmember Kalu asked, “We have a concentration of restaurants and hotels in the hospital area and a concentration of stores/retail and restaurants around the North Road area. We need restaurants and quality retail stores downtown to pull traffic downtown. In housing, will we run into gentrification as prices in Orangeburg are high compared to Columbia?”

Mr. Sexton stated, “I think as a City you need to try to protect but you must have progress as well, so you must create that balance. You need to build up your downtown area and allow the private sector and the public to change what they have around it. Again, you are trying to create community pride. Newport, Kentucky is a great example if you want to visit a community that has done something like this. They changed their downtown first and then took over eight blocks”

Mayor Pro Tem Keitt stated, “A lot of the things you presented are being done but like you said the community champion needs to pull together everything so that people will know what we have to offer. I think if Orangeburg could think more positive, you will see that things are here.”

Councilmember Grevious asked, “You mentioned different sectors that you spoke to in gathering information. Do you have a set number of people to speak to?”

Mr. Sexton stated, “No, we wanted to get about 400 and received somewhere between 100-200 in survey responses. Again, the engagement in the community is not there, which is another reason the social media and internal marketing needs to be there because you want feedback going forward. The 100-200 responses included college students, City employees, and City and County residents.”

Councilmember Grevious asked, “In preparing your strategic plan, did you exam the City’s budget for ability to implement these strategies?”

Mr. Sexton stated, “No, examining the budget was not in our scope. Regardless of what the budget is, the champion is someone to help you find the resources. The purpose of this is to drive more revenue into the community long-term. You have a lot of good things going on in Orangeburg. If you focus on these key things, especially Russell Street from Railroad Corner to the Gardens to get that corridor, to become your shining jewel. You need someone that is focused on community and economic development.”

Councilmember Hannah stated, “For what you are saying the mindset comes from the leaders in the town. Also, we have ordinances, but we do not implement them such as code enforcement on properties.”

Councilmember Kalu stated, “The most important thing in this presentation is that we need a comprehensive master plan for the City. We cannot piece meal this plan together. Also, the City and County leaders need to work together.”

Mayor Butler stated, “We appreciate this strategic plan presentation. Our City and County have been divided in the past, but this Council is trying to bridge that gap to communicate with all entities.

City Administrator Evering stated, “I want to thank Gillion Frierson and Charles Sexton and his team. I will share everything with Council electronically so you can digest it and hopefully come together to give it consideration in terms of things you would like to implement.”

The workshop was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda McDaniel
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City Clerk

