

April 15, 2024

First of all, if you ever have a question about something going on with county government, please call the number above or email me. Email is probably more effective because I can print your exact question and get an answer for you. Do not trust Facebook nor other outside outlets for the correct information. There have been so many incorrect things on social media so, please, come to me or anyone at the County Council office for your answers.

Now, as PIO for Saluda County, I would like to touch on a few topics from last week's County Council meeting that have had some incorrect information posted all over social media...

First, the morgue. Saluda has never had a true "morgue". What we did have was a "holding facility" for deceased persons. The same building held case evidence and things other than the deceased. This meant that if you had a loved one that passed in a vehicle accident, you would have to view the body in this holding facility with other case evidence in the room that could possibly be tampered with and it wasn't safe for viewing. The holding facility is on property that has been dedicated to the new detention center so it has to be relocated. The new morgue has a private viewing area among other more personal additions and will last the county for years to come.

There were also comments stating that the detention center and EMS facility were voted NO to on the referendum back in the fall. That is incorrect. The Detention Center was voted to be built with the penny tax years ago, 2017 I believe. The vote back in the fall was for any overage needed for that project, Sherriff's office expansions, and a new EMS facility. That is what the residents voted NO for. The new EMS building will now be built partly using the \$1 million in ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) money that was given to Saluda County EMS. It was voted on in 2021 to use approximately \$1,075,000 of ARPA funds for EMS Stations. This money can ONLY be used on EMS and had to be obligated to a project before the deadline of December 2024. The EMS headquarters requires much more in the way of outfitting since it will be manned 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with sleeping quarters, a kitchen, showers, etc. That is why it costs much more than the Old Town Fire Department or morgue. When finished, it will be a turn key deal, fully furnished and ready for use.

Now, Ordinance No. 03-24, "AN ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH A UNIFORM SERVICE CHARGE FOR MOTORIZED VEHICLE USERS OF THE COUNTY ROADS OF SALUDA COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA."

This proposed \$20 FEE (not a tax) will be collected only for the Roads & Bridges department. It cannot and will not go to anything other than that department. Some of the uses will be....

- to retain an engineering firm for the Roads & Bridges Department to conduct a study on county roads, to establish speed limits and evaluate flooding zones. They would oversee special projects like bridge replacement and correcting flood areas
- to increase our usage of calcium chloride to keep down dust and to harden road surfaces
- To upgrade the work management system to include our street sign section, driveways, and cross pipes

- for center line painting for the few paved roads of the county
- to hire a contractor to rip up and remove slate rock on our high traffic county dirt roads

So no, it cannot be used for salaries or towards the detention center or anything else as some have mentioned. Also, on that note, the Council Chairman makes \$8000 a year and the Councilmen make \$6000 a year. That is public knowledge for anyone to look up so please, do your research.

If you would like to look at the scheduled county paved road improvements, it's on the county website saludacounty.sc.gov under Roads and Bridges then CTC Committee, then Saluda County Road Database PDF

Lastly, the county budget. It was stated that this year's budget is way more than last years. Sure, there will be an increase because we all know that everything in the country has increased in price. The county departments have to "estimate" what they may spend in the next year on everything they use and will need. There is no way to know EXACTLY what things will cost for the next year so that is why you ask for an estimate of what you think costs will be. The department heads turn in these estimates to the County Administrator and Clerk to Council, who review them and make recommendations to County Council for approval. There is also a line item in the budget for *contingency* that council can vote to use for unexpected expenses, grant matches, or underestimated costs for budgeted items. The county financial records are audited every year and that audit assures that funds collected are apportioned to the correct accounts and expenses are verified. That audit is also discussed publicly at a county council meeting once it is completed.

The definition of "budget" is below...

budget [ˈbʌdʒət]

noun

budget (*noun*) · **budgets** (*plural noun*) · **Budget** (*noun*) · **Budgets** (*plural noun*)

1. an estimate of income and expenditure for a set period of time:

"keep within the household budget" · "a budget deficit"

- an annual or other regular estimate of national revenue and expenditure put forward by the government, often including details of changes in taxation.
- the amount of money needed or available for a purpose