

Board OKs Hope on the Hill lease

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Content

After seven months, the lease agreement for Hope on the Hill's usage of the Barr Street facility was approved at the May 16 school board meeting.

The vote was 5-2 vote, with board members Courtney Green and Melvin Stroble voting against.

Hope on the Hill's lease agreement for the facility at 612 E. Meeting St., Lancaster, has been on the board's agenda for several months, after Stroble first brought it up last year, with concerns regarding liability.

The lease agreement for Hope on the Hill to use the Barr Street facility expired in 2006, and has been month-to-month for the 18 years since.

Conflict of interest concerns

Board members Brad Small, Eddie Boykin and Tyrom Faulkner all said they did not have a conflict of interest concerning their votes on the lease. Each said they had met with the S.C. Ethics Commission's general counsel and been cleared to vote.

Boykin said an alleged link between the land purchase by Greater Frazier AME Zion Church for the ER Resource Center on Gay Street to Hope on the Hill is false. Boykin, who is pastor of the church, says the church bought the land 20 years ago.

Small works for Founders Federal Credit Union, and his boss, Bruce Brumfield, sits on the board of directors for Hope on the Hill. The ethics commission also determined this was not a conflict of interest, and Small submitted a letter to that effect.

Faulkner is the head of A Father's Way, which lists Hope on the Hill as a community partner.

The vote

When the motion to approve the Barr Street lease for Hope on the Hill was presented by Small, Boykin made a motion for the board chair — Small — to sign the lease on the board's behalf.

Board member Margaret Gamble seconded the motion. Once the motion was seconded, it went to the floor for discussion, prompted by Stroble.

The lease states that a charter school, which the state mandates must be given first refusal to buy or lease any surplus school buildings, has 10 days to decide if they want to use the space, and if they choose not to, it is available to a nonprofit organization or any other interested member.

At least one charter school — Charter Institute at Erskine Cogito Academies — has indicated that it is interested in joining the school district, according to a 2023 Charter School Application Submitted to Sponsors list on the SC.Gov website.

Board member concerns and comments

Stroble first made a motion to suspend the vote to approve the lease at the May 16 meeting, so the lease could be made public before the vote. He said this was due to the amount of community interest that the lease had received.

“It is important that this board be transparent and give the community an opportunity to review this lease agreement and provide input,” Stroble said.

Green seconded the motion to make the lease public, but the vote failed, 2-5.

Gamble said that if the lease became public information before the vote, the board “will get in a competitive war,” and will be “pitting one group against another. I don't think that's the purpose of this.”

“I'm in favor of let's get it done and do it tonight,” she said.

“I feel like we kicked this can down the road for months and months and months, and the community deserves to get to have a vote tonight, regardless of how the vote goes,” Faulkner said. “I think this is what they expect for tonight, and that's what we need to do diligence as a board.”

Stroble again brought up multiple concerns he had with approving the lease, regarding budgeting, finances, facility upkeep and questions regarding his intentions.

“The one thing I have not done throughout the seven months is I have not said anything disparaging against Hope on the Hill,” he said. “Nor have I tried to drag any of the board of directors or those affiliated with Hope on the Hill through the mud.”