



MINUTES

OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL

Special Meeting

January 23, 2024

MEMBERS, OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL

Mr. John Elliott, District I
Mr. Matthew Durham, Chairman, District II
Mr. Don Mize, Vice Chairman, District III
Mr. Julian Davis III, District IV
Mr. Glenn Hart, Chairman Pro Tem, District V

Oconee County Council met at 6:00 PM in Council Chambers, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC with all Council Members, County Administrator Amanda F. Brock, County Attorney David Root, & Jennifer C. Adams, Clerk to Council present.

Press: Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting, date, time, place of meeting and agenda were posted on the bulletin board at the County Administrative Offices, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC, and the County Council website [www.oconeesc.com/council]. In addition, it was made available [*upon request*] to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned citizens.

Members of the press present: Andrea Kelley and Norm Cannada / The Journal, Dick Mangrum / 101.7 WGOG

Call to Order

Mr. Durham called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Moment of Silence

Mr. Durham asked for a moment of silence prior to the Invocation.

Invocation

Mr. David Root, County Attorney, gave the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Hart led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Elliott made a motion, seconded by Mr. Davis, approved 5 - 0, to approve the January 16, 2024 regular meeting minutes as presented.

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Attorney's Comments

None at this meeting.

Administrator's Comments

Ms. Brock informed all in attendance of the multiple ways to exit the building in the case of an emergency and provided restroom locations.

Discussion Regarding Action Items

Discussion regarding the \$25,000,000.00 General Obligation Bond secured by Oconee County for the purposes of designing, acquiring, constructing, installing, equipping, or rehabilitating various capital projects, including wastewater improvements and related equipment.

Ms. Brock opened discussions with background information as it relates to the County's priority of sewer expansion along the I-85 corridor and utilized a map entitled, "Sewer Service Area Providers Oconee County" [copy filed in backup], noting this "expansion has come to fruition with the passage of bond funding for the infrastructure expansion specifically for waste water on the 85 corridor."

Ms. Brock went on to point out the area that would be most beneficial for waste water expansion in the County by utilizing a map entitled, "I-85 Sewer Project Location Map" [copy filed in backup], noting the green highlighted area on the map is not an exact location and is just a conceptual idea of where sewer expansion would be the most fruitful for commercial and industrial growth along the 85 corridor.

Ms. Brock continued by providing details regarding Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Sewer South project.

Mr. Elliott provided details of a meeting that he attended with Mr. Durham in March 2023, where it was conveyed that South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster desired sewer along all interstates in South Carolina, then went on to note sewer expansion cost estimates, only along the I-85 corridor, that were provided during the meeting from engineers working with the Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority.

Mr. Elliott continued with details of discussions that were held as to how and where funding would be procured for sewer expansion, offered comments related to the passing of Resolution 2023-21 by Council, addressed "scope creep" rumors related to sewer expansion and question as to whether sewer along the 85 corridor would be gravity fed or by forced main.

Mr. Davis explained the reasoning behind his priority of sewer expansion to Exit 4 and Golden Corner Commerce Park, noting he is not in favor of working with Anderson County with Exit 4 sewer expansion or sewer sprawl.

Ms. Brock addressed rumors of sewer sprawl within the County and clarified that the only engineered plans that have been procured are those at Exit 4, by Blue Ridge Electric and the County received rights to provide input to this plan.

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Mr. Davis noted that while he is in favor of sewer expansion to Exit's 4, 2, and 1, he is not in favor of sewer sprawl especially in the Fair Play area where he resides and went on to note that surrounding counties are also expanding sewer to their exit(s) along I-85.

Mr. Durham noted that any actions related to sewer expansion and expenditures would be coming back before Council for approval.

Mr. Elliott asked Council to be transparent with sewer expansion and expenditures going forward.

Public Comment Session

If you are not able to attend in person and you have a comment, you may submit it by contacting our Clerk to Council, Jennifer C. Adams at jennifercadams@oconeesc.com or 864-718-1023, so that she may receive your comment and read it into the record.

(Copies of all emailed comments can be found in the backup material for this meeting.)

1. Ms. Martha Steele (emailed comment read by Council Chair) provided comments to Council related to development standards in the County.
2. Mr. Matt Alexander addressed Council in favor of sewer expansion that could potentially attract employment opportunities for the citizens of Oconee County.

(The live stream was interrupted and emailed comments from Mr. Tim Donald (stated below) were unable to be recorded when read by Council Chair. The live stream returned while Mr. David Nix was addressing Council.)

3. Mr. Tim Donald (emailed comment read by Council Chair) provided comments to Council in opposition to sewer expansion in the Fair Play area.
4. Mr. David Nix addressed Council in support of sewer expansion to help attract industrial growth.
5. Ms. Linda Love (emailed comment read by Council Chair) presented a series of questions to Council regarding the \$25 million-dollar bond secured for sewer expansion.
6. Mr. Chris Roun provided Council with a handout [copy filed in backup] and expressed his opinion that the \$25 million-dollar bond is an "extreme high risk to the tax payers".
7. Mr. Gerry Yantis (emailed comment read by Council Chair) provided comments to Council stating his opinion that Oconee County needs "stronger land management and development standards, ordinances and/or regulations."
8. Mr. Jim Mann expressed to Council his disapproval of how the \$25 million-dollar bond was acquired and presented questions related to how the bond was going to be expended and re-paid.
9. Mr. Grady Moorhead (emailed comment read by Council Chair) provided comments to Council related to Sewer South.
10. Mr. Kevin Ramey addressed Council in opposition to sewer expansion in the Fair Play area.
11. Mr. Gary Owens (emailed comment read by Council Chair) provided comments urging Council to implement stronger development standards.
12. Ms. Jody Gaulin addressed Council with comments related to neglect of existing infrastructure repairs, development standards and growth within the County.
13. Ms. Jean Hightower (emailed comment read by Council Chair) provided comments in support of sewer expansion in the Fair Play area.

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14. Mr. Luke Moore addressed Council with comments related to the \$25 million-dollar bond, sewer expansion, growth within the County and development standards.
15. Mr. Jim Corey (emailed comment read by Council Chair) provided questions to Council related to the expenditure of the \$25 million-dollar bond, development standards and growth within the County.
16. Mr. Andy Whiten addressed Council with concerns related to Sewer South, industrial development within the County and discussions held by Council during executive session.
17. Ms. Sonya Land (emailed comment read by Council Chair) provided comments urging Council to focus on bringing more job opportunities into the County.
18. Mr. Larry Day addressed Council with his concerns related to the proposed waterline repairs on Delphi Drive in Port Santorini.
19. Mr. Dwight Baker addressed Council in support of sewer and industrial expansion along the I-85 corridor and presented questions related to the expenditure of the \$25 million-dollar bond.
20. Mr. Ben Thrasher addressed Council with comments in support of sewer expansion, development and agriculture in Oconee County.
21. Mr. Bob Hoover read a statement [copy filed in backup] in place of Mr. Mike Huskey, who was unable to attend, that noted his (Mr. Huskey) support of Sewer South and industrial growth along the I-85 corridor.
22. Mr. David McMahan addressed Council and citizens in attendance with comments related to agriculture, the Right to Farm Act and sewer expansion in the County.
23. Ms. Holly Whiten addressed Council in favor of both industrial growth and agricultural preservation.
24. Ms. Sharon DeRidder addressed Council support of Sewer South and encouraged Council to seek additional grants that may be available to help with the cost of sewer expansion.
25. Mr. Justin Ables addressed Council with concerns over rumors that are related to a map that was provided to him by Mr. Hart.
26. Ms. Reah Smith addressed Council with comments related to housing prices and development standards in the County.
27. Mr. Mickey Haney expressed to Council his support of Sewer South and stated his opinion that industrial development will actually help local farmers who subsidize their farming income with additional employment.
28. Ms. Ellen Hotz addressed Council with comments related to thoughtful growth, housing prices, conditions of paved roads and traffic congestion within the County.

Council Members Comments

Mr. Elliott extended his thanks to all citizens in attendance, noting he would like to see this kind of turn out at every Council meeting. Mr. Elliott then addressed an emailed question [copy filed in backup] from Ms. Linda Love, stating he only owns a half-acre of land in District I and went on to note he has no financial interest in Sewer South.

Mr. Hart recalled details of a Farm Bureau meeting he and Mr. Durham attended and noted that while at that meeting, he was encouraged by citizens in attendance to vote “no” for Sewer South.

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Mr. Hart then offered details regarding the map Mr. Ables spoke about during public comment, noting he had this map produced to try and get input from area farmers concerning sewer expansion.

Mr. Davis provided some history related to sewer expansion in the County and addressed rumors regarding the map Mr. Ables referenced. Mr. Davis went on to address the topics of the \$25 million-dollar bond, industrial development, attracting workforce and sewer expansion.

At the request of Mr. Durham, Ms. Brock provided details related to estimated project costs connected with the \$25 million-dollar bond and addressed the Debt Services Fund, along with the bond payment schedule, while utilizing a document entitled, "GO Debt Profile: After 2023 Bonds" [copy filed in backup].

Mrs. Christy Hubbard, Oconee County Auditor, provided information related to bond dollars, bond millage over the next eight years and bond payments.

Ms. Brock stated that a comprehensive 10-year financial status of Oconee County was used during the bond presentation, noting the last included year was 2022.

Mr. Mize extended his appreciation to all who attended the meeting and noted that Council is in favor of farmers, progress and development of the I-85 corridor.

Mr. Hart extended his thanks to all who attended the meeting and stated he made the promise of sewer expansion to the Fair Play area when he ran for election eight years ago.

Mr. Mize added comments related to road conditions in the County and encouraged citizens to reach out to state representatives concerning state road repairs.

Ms. Brock noted to citizens that there are limited items that are allowed to be discussed during executive sessions and that budget items were not permitted and under no circumstances were budget matters discussed behind closed doors.

Mr. Durham extended his thanks to all who were in attendance and noted that the County was planning for the future generations.

Adjourn:

Mr. Hart made a motion, approved unanimously, to adjourn at 8:29 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Jennifer C. Adams
Clerk to Council

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