



OCONEE JOINT REGIONAL SEWER AUTHORITY

Joint Meeting with Oconee County Council

May 5, 2023

The Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority Joint Meeting with Oconee County Council was held at the Oconee County Council Chambers located at 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC.

Commissioners that were present:

- Seat 7 (Westminster): Brian Ramey, Board Chair
- Seat 1 (Seneca): Bob Faires, III
- Seat 3 (Seneca): Scott McLane
- Seat 4 (Seneca At-Large): Marty McKee
- Seat 8 (Westminster): Kevin Bronson
- Seat 9 (Walhalla-Westminster At-Large): David Dial

Commissioners that were not present:

- Seat 6 (Walhalla): Scott Parris, Board Vice-Chair
- Seat 2 (Seneca): Scott Moulder
- Seat 5 (Walhalla): Brandon Burton

OJRSA appointments and staff present were:

- Lynn Stephens, Office Manager & Board Secretary/Treasurer
- Chris Eleazer, Executive Director

Others present were:

- Chip Bentley, Appalachian Council of Governments (ACOG)
- Amanda Brock, Oconee County
- David Root, Oconee County Attorney
- Jennifer Adams, Oconee County Clerk to Council
- John Elliott, Oconee Co. Council - Dist. 1
- Matthew Durham, Oconee Co. Council Chair - Dist. 2
- Don Mize, Oconee Co. Council Vice-Chair – Dist. 3
- Julian Davis, Oconee Co. Council – Dist. 4 (*arrived at 11:16 a.m.*)
- Glenn Hart, Oconee Co. Council – Dist. 5
- Teresa Spicer, Oconee County Planning Commission Dist. 1
- David Nix, Oconee County Planning Commission Dist. 2
- Britton Adams, Oconee County Planning Commission Dist. 3
- Frankie Pearson, Oconee County Planning Commission Chair, Dist. 4
- Gary Gaulin, Oconee County Planning Commission Dist. 5
- Mike Johnson, Oconee County Planning Commission Vice-Chair, At-Large
- Mickey Haney, Oconee County Planning Commission At-Large
- James Coley, Oconee Co. Planning Director
- Jamie Gilbert, President, Oconee Economic Alliance
- Norm Cannada, [Seneca Daily Journal](#)
- Dick Mangrum, WGOG Radio
- Paul Wilkie, SCDHEC
- Robert Royer, AQD
- H. Ray Martin, Oconee Co. citizen
- Tom Markovich, Markovich Homes
- Adrienne Hennes, Remax Realty
- Tony Adams, Oconee County citizen

A. Call to Order – Mr. Durham called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

B. Moment of Silence – Mr. Durham asked everyone to have a moment of silence.

C. Invocation – By Mr. Root.

D. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America – Lead by Mr. Haney.

E. Discussion Items:

Mr. Durham welcomed everyone to the meeting and then introduced Mr. Chip Bentley of the Appalachian Council of Governments to lead the discussion.

Mr. Bentley stated that he wanted to provide some context and said that when looking at sewer provisions and future county growth, the biggest challenge for an infrastructure provider is to know where the growth should happen, in what timeframe to do it, how much the cost will be, and how to allocate resources to get there. This discussion is to determine, as Oconee County grows, how the OJRSA and Oconee County work together to get it done efficiently.

- **Clarify and Understand the Roles for Each of the Following, Especially as They Relate to Growth and Development: County Council, Planning Commission, and OJRSA** – Mr. Hart stated he wanted to amend the agenda to speak about the restructure of the Sewer Authority according to the second paragraph of the article in the Seneca Daily Journal. He questioned whether the County Council would be dealing with the OJRSA in six (6) months from now, or would there be a new, unfamiliar structure to be dealing with. The decisions made today may not even be relevant six (6) months from now.

Mr. Bentley said he didn't believe there was an imminent restructuring of the OJRSA board at this time. He added that he wasn't sure decisions would be made today as this meeting was more about how to move forward as a group no matter what the structure looks like. No matter what structure the OJRSA may become, their role will be the same.

Mr. Eleazer stated that there will not be any restructuring in the next six (6) months. He added that the OJRSA hasn't received authorization from the State yet about their review of the draft Request for Proposals. This RFP will be used by the agency to select a firm that is going to do the Regional Feasibility Study that Mr. Hart referred to. Mr. Bentley added that the RIA asked the OJRSA to undertake this; it is being looked at, but there is no imminent restructuring any time soon.

Discussion then addressed the agenda topic about what each agency felt its role was as it relates to growth and development.

Mr. Elliott stated he feels that Oconee County Council's job is to plan for economic development such as Exits 1, 2, and 4 on I-85, and for finding funding for those sewer lines. Mr. Mize stated that before the roles can be set, the Oconee County Council needs to know what the OJRSA is asking for. What is the end product?

Mr. Pearson stated that the Planning Commission's role is to protect the agricultural community in this county and to manage the growth that happens in the county. Mr. Johnson stated that sewer creates density elements that are not typical of septic; from the Planning Commission's standpoint, where the sewer lines are is where growth will be. Although the OJRSA needs to plan the sewer lines, the Planning Commission must deal with that as well as stop signs and traffic lights in those areas.

Mr. Eleazer addressed the question at Chairman Ramey's request. He said the OJRSA's role is serving to meet the needs of what Oconee County Council, the Planning Commission, and the City Councils and their economic development and planning committees want to do. The OJRSA doesn't drive growth; that is the role for others outside the OJRSA to make that determination. The board does not see that as their role or responsibility.

Mr. Bentley said the OJRSA wants to know where Oconee County wants growth to occur in order to plan to extend sewer and determine cost and time factors. Mr. Mize stated that the Planning Commission decides that first and then brings it to County Council to approve. Then the OJRSA would learn about the proposed growth. There needs to be a new structure where the OJRSA learns ahead

of time what is being proposed so they have time to plan. He said there is no problem with planning; things can always be put on a shelf if it doesn't work out.

Mr. Eleazer stated that he heard the Planning Commission state that they are trying to protect the agricultural areas of the county. He stated the OJRSA is a service provider and not a zoning entity. If someone buys a large property in an agricultural area and wants to pay to have a sewer line go to that property, the OJRSA has no authority to deny that project. If they pay to run the line, the OJRSA's role is to serve it. Mr. Bentley replied that the root of the problem with a lot of jurisdictions is there is a gap that must be discussed to reduce confusion: the sewer department says they will expand to where the growth is, and the counties say they will grow where the sewer is located.

Mr. Ramey stated there are misconceptions regarding who does what. This is why the OJRSA wanted this meeting and wants the Planning Commission on board. The OJRSA doesn't care where growth occurs and doesn't push growth. The OJRSA only wants to provide the service. There is rhetoric out there that the OJRSA is holding up growth, and that is not the case. The OJRSA cannot be efficient providing the service not knowing where Oconee County wants that growth.

Mr. Ramey explained that Oconee County wanted Sewer South and pushed for it, and now the OJRSA is doing all they can do to make that happen. He also spoke about the "Project Green Paw" development (an Oconee Economic Alliance or Oconee County project code name) that Mr. Eleazer has spent 200-300 hours working on, and then the OJRSA found out at the last hour that Oconee County Council is not supporting this project. In a perfect world, the OJRSA would expand sewer everywhere it was requested with unlimited funds; however, funds must be used towards the SCDHEC Consent Order which the agency is required to abide by and keeping existing things running smoothly, especially with increasing costs. Having the Planning Commission on board will help the Executive Director to determine what projects Oconee County wants to support. The OJRSA board doesn't want Mr. Eleazer wasting time on projects that will not move forward.

Mr. Hart stated that Oconee County Council did not vote to stop the Green Paw project; they just voted not to give the \$3 million kickback. Oconee County Council is not against the development continuing. Mr. Ramey replied that County Council did not provide financial support for that project, and that is what the OJRSA needs to know.

Mr. Ramey stated it was important to have this meeting, because the word is out that the OJRSA is pushing for growth in certain areas and holding back on others, and that isn't the case. The OJRSA provides a service for the county and needs direction from the County. Mr. Mize stated Oconee County voted not to approve the \$3 million kickback for the Green Paw project, but the project will probably go forward and have to be looked at again in the future, so Mr. Eleazer's time was not wasted.

Mr. Bentley said the next step should be that all three (3) parties have more discussions about future growth locations.

- **Current and Projected Future Capacity** – Mr. Eleazer stated there are two types of capacity the OJRSA deals with: capacity at the treatment plant and capacity within the pipelines and pump stations (referred to as the collection or conveyance system). In terms of the treatment plant, it has plenty of capacity. The plant is rated at 7.8 million gallons per day (MGD). On a dry day, the treatment is approximately 2.5-2.6 MGD. On a wet day, it could be between 6-8 MGD for periods of time. However, in certain parts of the county, there are areas within its collection system that the OJRSA cannot get the flow to the plant due to undersized piping or pump stations being beyond their useful life and needing upgrades or replacing. Mr. Eleazer spoke some about the Seneca Pump Station that is 40 years old (beyond its useful life) that has a 10" diameter force main pipe. The OJRSA is currently looking at fixing this station in a couple phases. (This is the project that would have supported the Green Paw development.) An engineer proposed that the force main be increased to 16" diameter to allow several hundred thousand gallons per day more flow, as well as replacing the pump station.

The Executive Director also spoke about the OJRSA and the City of Seneca having constraints and having to watch for overflows, especially between Clemson and Seneca. He stated that since the beginning of 2022, the OJRSA was asked if there was sewer service for a total of 4,600-acres within the

county. Some of this was in an area not served by sewer and some may never happen, but some of it could not be approved due to the constraints.

Mr. Eleazer also spoke about the word being out that the OJRSA doesn't have industrial capacity. This is not the case. The OJRSA has plenty of industrial capacity (in the approximate 38-39% range) to accept regulated parameters. He also spoke about how many of the industries are over-permitted for the flow capacity that they need and that, if the OJRSA could get those overages returned, there would be even more capacity for parameters, such as metals, to allocate to others.

- **Areawide Sewer Master Plan That Addresses the Developable Areas of the County That Were Not Included in the Fair Play/Townville Sewer Basin Plan** – Mr. Bentley said this discussion is to determine if anyone is interested in a master plan that would address areas of the county that do not currently have sewer and were not included in the sewer basin plan a year ago.

Mr. Pearson said that it would be helpful to the Planning Commission for the OJRSA to provide them, and Oconee County Council, with information to know where the OJRSA receives requests for sewer. That would give the Planning Commission knowledge as to where the citizens of the county want to see growth. Mr. Eleazer replied that he made a map which was emailed to Oconee County showing the areas for these requests. He will resend it to Ms. Amanda Brock to have her disseminate to Oconee County Council and the Planning Commission. Mr. Bentley said that this could be a new structure for communication where, when the OJRSA gets requests, they can pass the information on to the County.

Mr. Durham said the sewer lines can drive growth, but the markets also drive growth. He said he doesn't intend to incentivize high-density, residential housing like Green Paw; however, the market is still there, so it's still going to come. The market is driving the growth between Seneca and Clemson, and the market can show where the growth is going to.

Mr. Bentley said the study that assessed possible sewer service along the I-85 corridor in Oconee and part of Anderson counties ended at Highway 24 and asked if Oconee County wanted to expand the study into the rest of Oconee County. Mr. Eleazer replied that the study was done and presented to Oconee County Council in January by Weston and Sampson. The intent was not to tell anyone what to do but how the growth may occur over the coming years. The OJRSA has to plan ahead; it is critical to identify what growth may happen and what is needed to serve those areas. He spoke about the necessity of a study to help OJRSA make the decision on what size pipe should replace old pipe to account for the future growth.

The Director stated he put the cost of this study in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget but stated it could be pulled back out if this is not what the OJRSA board wants. He also added that he wouldn't be doing his job if he didn't ask Oconee County for financial support on this study, and he added that he received a verbal commitment from someone who was willing to pay one-quarter to one-third of its cost.

Mr. Bentley agreed with Mr. Durham that the market can drive growth but recapped that the OJRSA has two jobs: 1) how to provide sewer in the unsewered areas of Oconee County, and 2) how to continue to provide sewer within the existing footprint (how to meet the needs that exist and make sure the needs for the future use of the line are met). It is inefficient use of limited resources to have to replace a line just a couple years down the road after replacing it because of poor planning.

Mr. Davis stated he looked at the map that Mr. Eleazer sent out regarding the areas sewer was requested (the map that was mentioned earlier showing the requests the OJRSA received for sewer). He said that a quarterly report of what the OJRSA is seeing as far as those requests would be helpful to the Planning Commission and Oconee County Council.

Mr. Davis also asked what the replacement plan for the pump stations is regarding their useful lives, and what are they servicing: Is it 60% servicing Member Cities and 40% outside the cities? Does Oconee County Council have to come up with some funding on that?

As far as capacity and bottleneck issues that were identified by the OJRSA, Mr. Davis said he learned that part of this is a Member City issue and part an OJRSA issue. He said identifying those areas together would help to determine where Oconee County comes into play. He also added that the areas where bigger pipes are anticipated to accommodate growth should be brought to Oconee County

Council to possibly consider funding some projects using taxation. He said that everyone agrees that the Highway 123 area between Seneca and Clemson is an area of prime business development.

- **Capital Needs of the OJRSA, Inside and Outside of the Coneross Wastewater Treatment Facility –** *(made part of next discussion)*

- **Update on OJRSA and Member City DHEC Consent Order Requirements, Responsibilities, and Implications Thereof** – Mr. Bentley asked Mr. Eleazer to give a quick overview of capital needs and the Consent Order. Mr. Eleazer replied they go hand-in-hand. He said the OJRSA has been slowly chipping away since 2018 to get the treatment plant back to where it needs to be without incurring any debt. OJRSA Operations Director, Kyle Lindsay, has been budgeting, identifying equipment that needs to be replaced, and then prioritizing the replacement of equipment. The OJRSA is in pretty good shape for the plant, although it is not known at what time an expansion will be required. The Director added that the Consent Order does not cover anything related to the plant, and the most recent SCDHEC inspection was satisfactory.

The requirements of the Consent Order are related to the collection system lines. The OJRSA is addressing wet weather issues and force main lines that have broken numerous times. Without even touching the wet weather issues, the replacement of force mains is expensive in and of itself. The OJRSA transports the waste from the Member Cities to the treatment plant primarily using large diameter (12" to 36") pipe, and the larger pipe is more expensive to maintain, rehabilitate, and replace.

The OJRSA received close to \$9.6 million from the SCIIP grant from the RIA (plus the match the OJRSA must provide), and that money will be spent on replacing the Flat Rock Pump Station, a piece of equipment that handles the solids disposal at the plant, and to rehabilitate areas out in the system that need to be replaced. It is very likely that the areas out in the system will cost more than \$5 million - \$6 million to repair, so the grant money will not cover it all and will not address future growth.

The Director said it may take an 8- to 10-year period to comply with the Consent Order, which was part of the Capacity, Management, Operations, and Maintenance (CMOM) audit. Over that timeframe, the OJRSA will be scientifically investigating the lines using CCTV, smoke testing, and cleaning to see what needs to be fixed. Mr. Eleazer added that once the Consent Order is completed, the OJRSA will have to start all over again, as it is a continuous 10-year cycle of work to keep the system in good repair.

Mr. Mize asked if he understood correctly that some of this grant money was going to take care of the Consent Order problems. Mr. Eleazer replied yes and stated that before being awarded the grant, some of the system deficiency investigation was included in the current fiscal year 2023 budget. The OJRSA cleaned and CCTVed lines and presented the findings to an engineer. The OJRSA just received the report back from the engineer this week on what needed to be fixed or replaced. Being the work will not be completed by the end of the fiscal year, the funds that were budgeted will be rolled over to the fiscal year 2024 budget.

Mr. Durham stated that Mr. Eleazer explained how the OJRSA was going to finance the Consent Order at different stages during the Annual Members' Meeting in January. He suggested Mr. Eleazer send out a copy of that PowerPoint presentation to everyone. Mr. Eleazer said it is on the OJRSA website in the minutes, but he will go ahead and send it out as well.

- **Need for Rate Schedule for Sewer South** *(this discussion was moved down in the meeting)* – Mr. Bentley said the challenge for Sewer South is putting sewer in for existing development and development that isn't there yet. The question is how to pay for the cost when there are no users yet, and how is it to be structured. He said this would be a "homework" question for everyone to think on and bring some ideas up at a future meeting.

Mr. Eleazer said the OJRSA reconfigured the way rates will be calculated for the existing users effective July 1, 2023. It went from a pro rata method to a traditional method where users will be charged on actual water meter readings using a base rate plus a per 1,000-gallon charge. He told

everyone that he would be willing to explain the pro rata system to anyone that wants to know about it outside of the meeting.

The Director stated that for Sewer South, the OJRSA does not know what it will cost to operate this system yet, and there are questions if there should be money set aside for future capital or potential debt service to expand lines. He added this all needs to be discussed and will require someone other than himself to figure out the costs.

Mr. Durham asked if Sewer South was going to be accounted for separately than the rest of the system. Mr. Eleazer replied that neither system can subsidize the other; Sewer South cannot subsidize what services the Member Cities, and the Member Cities cannot subsidize Sewer South. There will only be a small overlap at the treatment plant.

Mr. Davis said Oconee County Council will need to set some money aside for sewer, as the money will come from the County. He recommends a fund for the long-term plans and said the County cannot rely on rate payers, as there are not enough people tied into it. There needs to be planning for maintaining the system and preparing for future emergencies on the system.

- **Regional Sewer Feasibility Planning Study** – Mr. Bentley thanked everyone for their thoughts. He added that the key takeaway from this meeting is the importance of the structure moving forward and the Sewer Feasibility Planning Study. The study would be a good opportunity for everyone to participate and get on the same page moving forward.

Mr. Bentley added that it would also be beneficial for the OJRSA to provide information on capital needs and sewer request areas quarterly to the Planning Commission and Oconee County Council, and the Planning Commission to keep the OJRSA in the loop of future areas of growth.

Mr. Bentley ended by stating that future meetings should be scheduled to continue this discussion. If all parties want him to be involved as a neutral third party, let him know. He is willing to coordinate the meetings.

Mr. Mize requested that everyone think about creating a joint committee with members from each of the three (3) organizations (OJRSA, County Council, and Planning Commission), as well as Economic Alliance, to understand what expansion will look like in the future and what it will take to reach that expansion. This wouldn't have to be a permanent committee. Mr. Bentley replied that was a great idea and would be beneficial, and he stated he would talk to the heads of each party and see what they thought about it.

F. Upcoming Meetings:

1. **Operations & Planning Committee** – Tuesday, May 16, 2023 at 8:30 a.m. *(rescheduled by committee at the April 19, 2023 meeting)*
2. **Finance & Administration Committee** – Thursday, June 1, 2023 at 9:00 a.m. *(rescheduled by committee at the May 1, 2023 board meeting)*
3. **Board of Commissioners** – Monday, June 5, 2023 at 4:00 p.m.

G. **Adjourn:** Mr. Durham adjourned the meeting at 12:01 p.m.

Notification of the meeting was distributed on May 2, 2023 to *Upstate Today*, *Anderson Independent-Mail*, *Westminster News*, *Keowee Courier*, WGOG Radio, WSNW Radio, City of Seneca Council, City of Walhalla Council, City of Westminster Council, Oconee County Council, SC DHEC, www.ojrso.org, and the OJRSA Administration Building.



**Board of Commissioners
Joint Meeting with Oconee County Council**

Oconee County Administration Building
County Council Chambers
415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, South Carolina
May 5, 2023 at 11:00 a.m.

Public comments and questions will not be received at this meeting. Citizens and qualified stakeholders are encouraged to provide comments and feedback at the appropriate OJRSA Board and Committee meetings.

Agenda

- A. **Call to Order** – Chip Bentley, Appalachian Council of Governments Deputy Executive Director
- B. **Moment of Silence**
- C. **Invocation** – County Council Chaplin
- D. **Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America**
- E. **Discussion Items**
 - Clarify and understand the roles for each of the following, especially as they relate to growth and development: County Council, Planning Commission, and OJRSA
 - Current and projected future capacity
 - Areawide sewer master plan that addresses the developable areas of the county that were not included in the Fair Play/Townville sewer basin plan
 - Capital needs of the OJRSA, inside and outside of the Coneross Wastewater Treatment Facility
 - Need for rate schedule for Sewer South
 - Update on OJRSA and Member City DHEC Consent Order requirements, responsibilities, and implications thereof
 - Regional sewer feasibility planning study
- F. **Upcoming Meetings** *All meetings to be held in the Lamar Bailes Board Room unless noted otherwise.*
 - 1. Operations & Planning Committee – May 16, 2023 at 8:30 a.m. *Rescheduled for this date by the committee at its April 19, 2023 meeting*
 - 2. Finance & Administration Committee – June 1, 2023 at 9:00 a.m. *Rescheduled for this date at the May 1, 2023 board meeting*
 - 3. Board of Commissioners – June 5, 2023 at 4:00 p.m.
- G. **Adjourn**



**OJRSA Joint Meeting with Oconee Co. Council
Meeting Sign-in Sheet**

Date: 5/5/23 **Time:** 11:00 a.m. **Location:** Oconee Co. Council Chambers, 415 S. Pine St., Walhalla, SC

| NAME (Print) | POSITION/TITLE | ORGANIZATION |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Adams, Britton <i>BA</i> | District III | Oconee County Planning Commission |
| Bronson, Kevin <i>KB</i> | OJRSA Board | City of Westminster |
| Burton, Brandon | OJRSA Board | City of Walhalla |
| Davis III, Julian <i>JD</i> | District IV | Oconee County Council |
| Dial, David <i>DD</i> | OJRSA Board | Cities of Walhalla & Westminster |
| Durham, Matthew <i>MD</i> | District II | Oconee County Council |
| Eleazer, Chris <i>CE</i> | Executive Director | OJRSA |
| Elliott, John <i>JE</i> | District I | Oconee County Council |
| Faires, Bob <i>BF</i> | OJRSA Board | City of Seneca |
| Gaulin, Gary <i>GG</i> | District V | Oconee County Planning Commission |
| Haney, Mickey <i>MH</i> | At Large | Oconee County Planning Commission |
| Hart, James Glenn <i>JGH</i> | District V | Oconee County Council |
| Johnson, Mike <i>JM</i> | Vice-Chairman, At-Large | Oconee County Planning Commission |
| McKee, Marty <i>MM</i> | OJRSA Board | City of Seneca |
| McLane, Scott <i>SM</i> | OJRSA Board | City of Seneca |
| Mize, Don <i>DM</i> | District III | Oconee County Council |
| Nix, David <i>DN</i> | District II | Oconee County Planning Commission |
| Parris, Scott | OJRSA Board | City of Walhalla |
| Pearson, Frankie <i>FP</i> | Chairman, District IV | Oconee County Planning Commission |
| Ramey, Brian <i>BR</i> | OJRSA Board | City of Westminster |
| Root, David <i>DR</i> | Attorney for Oconee Co. | David A. Root Attorney |
| Spicer, Teresa <i>TS</i> | District I | Oconee County Planning Commission |
| Stephens, Lynn <i>LS</i> | Office Mgr/Board Secy | OJRSA |
| Williams, Pat | At-Large | Oconee County Planning Commission |
| Brock, Amanda <i>AB</i> | Administrator | Oconee County |
| Adams, Jennifer <i>JA</i> | Chk to Council | Oconee County |

