



MINUTES

OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL

Regular Meeting

January 20, 2026

MEMBERS, OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL

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

Ocnee County Council met at 6:00 PM in Council Chambers, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC with all Council Members [Mr. Elliott via phone], County Administrator Stewart Jones, Mr. Phil Shirley, County Attorney David, & 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: 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 by County Council Chaplain

Mr. Root, County Council Chaplain, gave the Invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Beverly Jenkins led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Attorney's Comments

Mr. Root noted Project Broadway, Ordinance 2025-21, is requiring additional site evaluation works, therefore second reading needs to be removed from the agenda.

Mr. Durham made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hart, to amend the agenda by removing second reading of Project Broadway Ordinance 2025-21.

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Mr. Durham added to the above motion by requesting the removal of Consent Agenda items #2 and #3 per Administration request.

Motion approved 5 – 0, to amend the agenda by removing second reading of Project Broadway Ordinance 2025-21 and Consent Agenda items #2 and #3.

Administrator's Comments

Mr. Jones, County Administrator, provided the following statement:

“Mr. Chairman, over the past two weeks I have been meeting with department heads, starting to assess our policies and procedures, conducting a deep dive into our financials and processes of our budget, and day to day operations. Looking at our county’s health insurance, we are seeing that the county actually started to run a deficit about 10 years ago in funding the employee health plan. This deficit has been covered with other funding such as the enterprise fund and then later on CAP Accounts, as the deficit grew. We are now looking at improving these budget practices and to eliminate the deficit. The good news is that we are in the process of renegotiating our health insurance for Oconee County employees, and are considering all options on the table - these options should equate to a savings of at least \$1.2 million, most likely more depending on actions council takes in the 26-27 budget. The other major contributor to the deficit was a miscalculation and miscommunication between the Finance Department and the Auditor’s Office - in the calculation of the millage rate for property tax collections, dating back to at least 2019. Until recently, higher than budgeted performance in other revenue streams offset the shortfall in property tax collections caused by the rate calculation error. As those offsetting revenues have normalized, the underlying gap in tax collections has become more apparent. Currently, we are calculating potentially a \$5-\$6 million deficit, \$5.7 million in the GF to be exact. Some of the people that were involved, no longer work for the county and so we are going through and finding all the information that we can on how this happened and most importantly how to fix it - so that we can ensure that it never happens again. As we get closer to our strategic planning for the coming 26-27 fiscal year - I will be coming to council with requests, and changes in budget practices, policies and procedures, and working to implement practices that will help our county stay on solid financial footing for the long-term. Council’s foresight in recent years to separate funds has provided greater transparency into our financial position and I’m glad the Council took this step.”

Mr. Jones went on to provide Council with details as to how this miscalculation occurred in the FY 2024-2025 budget year.

Mr. Durham provided the following clarifying statement:

“I want to be very clear for the public. What Mr. Jones has described did not arise recently. These issues developed over several years and across multiple councils.

This was not an easy conversation, but it is a necessary one, and it did not begin tonight. Last year, concerns were raised with Council regarding under-collection in property tax revenues. At that time, the nature and cause of the issue were not yet fully understood.

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As the issue was examined further, it became clear that this was not a posting or accounting issue. It was a miscalculation in the millage rate itself. More concerning, this was not a one-time error, but a pattern going back several years, to at least 2019.

Once it became clear that this was a systemic issue, the prior administration was asked to determine how it occurred and what controls failed. That work was not completed.

During this same period, the County paid for annual external audits each year. Those audits did not flag the ongoing under-collection or the millage miscalculation, even as the County received recognition for financial reporting. That contrast tells us that existing safeguards were not sufficient.

Before this can be fully corrected, the County must have strong financial leadership in place, and filling the finance director position is a priority. We must also determine the appropriate level of audit and review, because this was not a routine variance.

Taxpayers deserve to know not just what happened, but how it was allowed to persist. Going forward, this Council will insist on stronger checks and balances, clearer verification of revenue assumptions, and processes that ensure this cannot happen again.”

Consent Agenda

1. January 06, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes

2. Procurement Item:

2018 Bell B30E Articulated Water Truck

Department: Rock Quarry

Amount: \$227,000.00

~~Procurement was approved by Council in Fiscal Year 2025 2026 budget process.~~

~~Budget: \$227,000.00 Project Cost: \$227,000.00 Balance: \$0.00~~

(Funding from Rock Quarry Capital Equipment budget)

It is the staff's recommendation that Council approve the purchase of the used 2018 Bell B30E articulating water truck from National Equipment Dealers in Columbia, SC, in the amount of \$227,000.00.

3. Procurement Item:

2025 Volvo EC500 Excavator

Department: Rock Quarry

Amount: \$503,670.00

~~Procurement was approved by Council in Fiscal Year 2025 2026 budget process.~~

~~Budget: \$503,670.00 Project Cost: \$503,670.00 Balance: \$0.00~~

(Funding from Rock Quarry Capital Equipment budget)

It is the staff's recommendation that Council approve the purchase of a 2025 Volvo EC500 Excavator from Ascendum Machinery, Inc. of Piedmont, SC, in the amount of \$503,670.00, per Sourcewell Contract # 011723 VCE.

Mr. James made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hart, approved 5 - 0, to approve item #1 on the consent agenda as presented.

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Public Comment Session

If you are unable to attend in person and you have a comment you would like to be considered by Council, please email or call the Council Member for your district (<https://oconeesc.com/council-home/council-officials>), so that they may consider and perhaps include your comments during Council Member comments, as and if appropriate.

1. Ms. Susan Blount addressed Council with her concerns related to special source revenue incentives and their effect on the School District of Oconee County.
2. Mr. David McMahan addressed Council with an expression of thanks from the Oconee County Agricultural Advisory Board [copy of statement in backup].

Council Members Comments

Mr. James requested further information related to the former Administrator's County issued phone and its whereabouts.

Mr. Stewart informed Council that the phone is in the possession of the Oconee County Sheriff's office and was wiped prior to its return to the County, noting the phone could be acquired and an attempt could be made to retrieve data.

Mr. Stewart went on to state that data was retrieved off of a laptop and hoped that it would help to provide some answers to a number of issues.

Mr. Mize inquired if a "spending freeze" would need to be implemented in the future and if there is any fiscal accountability from the auditing firm(s) that performed audits in the last several years.

Mr. Jones responded that non-critical items were being put on hold while an assessment is being conducted and further noted there could be a potential spending freeze in the FY 2026-2027 budget.

Mr. Jones went on to provide comments related to previous auditing firms and the possible reason they did not catch the miscalculation, noting a new auditing firm was contracted last year and should be finishing up their audit soon.

Mr. Hart commented that, in the past, he made the suggestion that it would be beneficial to hire a new auditing firm.

Public Hearing for the Following Ordinances *If you would like to be heard during either of the public hearings, please contact Clerk to Council Jennifer C. Adams at jennifercadams@oconeesc.com or 864-718-1023 so that your participation may be coordinated.*

ORDINANCE 2025-25 AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND ARTICLE IV ("USE OF PARKS AND RECREATION AREAS") OF CHAPTER 22 ("PARKS AND RECREATION") OF THE OCONEE COUNTY CODE OF ORDINANCES, WITH RESPECT TO THE REGULATION OF GOLF CART OPERATION AT COUNTY PARKS; AND OTHER MATTERS RELATED THERETO.

Mr. Durham opened the floor for Public Comment.

Noting that no citizens signed up to address Council; Mr. Durham opened the floor for any citizen wishing to address Council regarding this ordinance. No citizen addressed Council and no citizen submitted or presented any written comments for the record.

Mr. Durham closed the Public Hearing regarding **Ordinance 2025-25**.

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ORDINANCE 2025-26 AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND SECTION 28-9 (“USED AND WASTE TIRES”) OF CHAPTER 28 (“SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT”) OF THE OCONEE COUNTY CODE OF ORDINANCES TO ALIGN THE SAME WITH THE 2025 AMENDMENTS TO S.C. CODE SECTIONS 44-96-170(E) AND (F) RELATING TO WASTE TIRE RECEIPT AND FEES; AND OTHER RELATED MATTERS.

Mr. Durham opened the floor for Public Comment.

Noting that no citizens signed up to address Council; Mr. Durham opened the floor for any citizen wishing to address Council regarding this ordinance. No citizen addressed Council and no citizen submitted or presented any written comments for the record.

Mr. Durham closed the Public Hearing regarding **Ordinance 2025-26**.

ORDINANCE 2025-27 AN ORDINANCE TO REVISE AND EXPAND THE LOCAL CONTRACTOR / VENDOR PREFERENCE PROVISIONS CONTAINED IN THE OCONEE COUNTY PROCUREMENT CODE.

Mr. Durham opened the floor for Public Comment.

Noting that no citizens signed up to address Council; Mr. Durham opened the floor for any citizen wishing to address Council regarding this ordinance. No citizen addressed Council and no citizen submitted or presented any written comments for the record.

Mr. Durham closed the Public Hearing regarding **Ordinance 2025-27**.

Third Reading of the Following Ordinances

ORDINANCE 2025-25 (see caption above)

Mr. Hart made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mize, approved 5 – 0, to approve **Ordinance 2025-25** on third and final reading.

ORDINANCE 2025-26 (see caption above)

Mr. Hart made a motion, seconded by Mr. James, approved 5 – 0, to approve **Ordinance 2025-26** on third and final reading.

ORDINANCE 2025-26 (see caption above)

Mr. Mize made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hart, approved 5 – 0, to approve **Ordinance 2025-27** on third and final reading.

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Second Reading of the Following Ordinances

~~ORDINANCE 2025-21 AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING, PURSUANT TO TITLE 12, CHAPTER 44 OF THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA 1976, AS AMENDED, THE EXECUTION AND DELIVERY OF A FEE IN LIEU OF AD VALOREM TAXES AND SPECIAL SOURCE REVENUE CREDIT AGREEMENT BY AND BETWEEN OCONEE COUNTY, SOUTH CAROLINA, AND [PROJECT BROADWAY] ACTING FOR ITSELF, ONE OR MORE CURRENT OR FUTURE AFFILIATES AND OTHER PROJECT COMPANIES (COLLECTIVELY, "COMPANY"); PROVIDING FOR A FEE IN LIEU OF AD VALOREM TAXES INCENTIVE; PROVIDING FOR A SPECIAL SOURCE REVENUE CREDIT; DEVELOPING A JOINT COUNTY INDUSTRIAL AND BUSINESS PARK BETWEEN OCONEE COUNTY AND PICKENS COUNTY SO AS TO DESIGNATE THE PROPERTY OF THE PROJECT AS PART OF A MULTI-COUNTY INDUSTRIAL PARK; AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION AND DELIVERY OF A PURCHASE AND SALE AGREEMENT BETWEEN COUNTY AND COMPANY FOR THE TRANSFER OF CERTAIN REAL PROPERTY FROM COUNTY TO COMPANY, SUBJECT TO THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS SET FORTH IN THE PURCHASE AND SALE AGREEMENT; AND OTHER RELATED MATTERS.~~

Second reading of **Ordinance 2025-21** was removed from agenda at the beginning of the meeting on a motion made by Mr. Durham, seconded by Mr. Hart, approved 5 – 0.

First Reading of the Following Ordinances

None for this meeting.

First & Final Reading for the Following Resolutions

RESOLUTION 2026-01 A RESOLUTION APPOINTING AND COMMISSIONING LUCAS WHITE AS A CODE ENFORCEMENT OFFICER (ANIMAL CONTROL) FOR THE PROPER SECURITY, GENERAL WELFARE, AND CONVENIENCE OF OCONEE COUNTY; AND OTHER MATTERS RELATED THERETO.

Mr. Hart made a motion, seconded by Mr. James, approved 5 – 0, to approve **Resolution 2026-01** on first and final reading.

Action on Matters Removed from Consent Agenda at Council Member Request

None for this meeting.

Discussion Regarding Action Items

None for this meeting.

Council Committee Reports

None for this meeting.

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Board & Commission Appointments

Building Codes Appeal Board..... 1 At-Large Seat

No questionnaires on file requesting consideration of appointment.

Fire Service Advisory Commission *District I*

No questionnaires on file requesting consideration of appointment.

Board of Zoning Appeals *District V*

No questionnaires on file requesting consideration of appointment.

One questionnaire was received prior to the meeting requesting appointment to the District V seat on the Board of Zoning Appeals.

Mr. Hart made a nomination, approved 5 – 0, appointing Mr. Chad Overholt to serve as the District 5 representative on the Board of Zoning Appeals.

Executive Session

Mr. Hart made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mize, approved 5 – 0, to enter into Executive Session for the following purposes, as allowed for § 30-4-70(a) of the South Carolina Code of Laws:

1. *Receive legal advice and discuss potential contractual matter regarding employee benefits consultants / vendors and issues directly related thereto.*
2. *Receive legal advice and discuss security measures at and about County facilities.*
3. *Receive legal advice and discuss application of statutory real property development incentives with respect to historic properties.*
4. *Receive legal advice and discuss fiscal / accounting review processes.*
5. *Discuss contractual issues related to legal service provision.*

Council entered into Executive Session at 6:24 p.m.

Council returned from Executive Session at 7:43 p.m. on a motion made by Mr. Hart, seconded by Mr. James, approved 5 – 0.

As requested by Mr. Root, Mr. James made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hart, approved 5 – 0, to direct County Administrator to proceed with acquisition of health insurance coverage with PEBA, including authority to transfer and expend necessary funds to begin the process.

Mr. Durham indicated that if the insurance change does not prove beneficial to employees, Administration should regroup and reassess the matter.

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As requested by Mr. Root, Mr. Hart made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mize, approved 5 – 0, to direct County Administrator to execute a waiver for potential possible conflict of interest regarding legal services with current County Attorney.

Adjourn:

Mr. James made a motion, approved unanimously, to adjourn at 7:44 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Jennifer C. Adams
Clerk to Council

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