



## Ad Hoc Sewer Feasibility Implementation Committee

OJRSA Operations & Administration Building

Lamar Bailes Board Room

January 9, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.

*This advisory committee was established by the OJRSA Board of Commissioners at its November 4, 2024 meeting to consider recommendations and report to the OJRSA Board and Oconee County as identified in the [Regional Feasibility Planning Study](#) as adopted by the OJRSA on September 9, 2024. The committee can neither create policy nor make decisions on behalf of the OJRSA or other wastewater service providers within the area. See the study at [www.ojrsa.org/info](http://www.ojrsa.org/info) for more information.*

*OJRSA commission and committee meetings may be attended in person at the address listed above. The OJRSA will also broadcast meetings live on its YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/@OconeeJRSA](http://www.youtube.com/@OconeeJRSA) (if there is a technical issue preventing the livestreaming of the meeting, then a recording will be published on the channel as soon as possible). For those not able to attend in person, then the OJRSA Board or Committee Chair will accept public comments by mail (623 Return Church Rd, Seneca, SC 29678) or at [info@ojrsa.org](mailto:info@ojrsa.org). Comments must comply with the public session instructions as stated on the meeting agenda and will be received up until one hour prior to the scheduled meeting. If there is not a public session scheduled for a meeting, then comments shall not be accepted.*

### Agenda

- A. Call to Order** – Chip Bentley, Facilitator
- B. Presentation and Discussion Items** *[May include vote and/or action on matters brought up for discussion]*
  - 1. Consideration for proceeding without Committee Member/Chair Graham Rich, who resigned from the committee due to health reasons – Chip Bentley, Facilitator
  - 2. Clarify Ex Officio member and Committee Chair roles and responsibilities – Chip Bentley, Facilitator
  - 3. Elect a new Chairperson for the committee – Chip Bentley, Facilitator
  - NEWLY ELECTED CHAIR WILL PRESIDE OVER REMAINDER OF MEETING**
  - 4. Review Roles and process for Executive Session procedures; agenda development, email communications, and meeting minutes – Committee Chair
  - 5. Review and discussion of background information (Exhibit A; also included in Regional Feasibility Planning Study 2024 Appendix B) – Committee Chair
- C. Public Comment** – Receive comments relating to topics that may or may not be on this agenda. Session is limited to a maximum of 30 minutes with no more than 5 minutes per speaker.
- D. Approval of Ad Hoc Committee Minutes**
  - December 2, 2024 – Committee Chair
- E. Executive Session** *NOTE: Committee may act on matters discussed in executive session upon returning to open session*
  - Receive legal advice and information regarding future reorganization or consolidation with another multi-county utility organization. *[Executive Session permissible under SC Law 30-4-70(a)(2), which states: Discussion of negotiations incident to proposed contractual arrangements and proposed sale or purchase of property, the receipt of legal advice where the legal advice relates to a pending, threatened, or potential claim or other matters covered by the attorney-client privilege, settlement of legal claims, or the position of the public agency in other adversary situations involving the assertion against the agency of a claim.]*
- F. Discussion Items** – Led by Committee Chair
  - 1. General discussion among committee members regarding reorganization or consolidation with another multi-county utility organization.
  - 2. Public comments following discussion about reorganization or consolidation options.
- G. Committee Action Items** – Led by Committee Chair

1. Action on items discussed in Executive Session, if any.
2. Agenda items for next meeting.
3. Confirm date for next meeting, which is scheduled for Thursday, February 13, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.

**H. Upcoming Meetings** *All meetings to be held in the Lamar Bailes Board Room unless noted otherwise.*

- Operations & Planning Committee – January 15, 2025 at 8:30 a.m.
- Finance & Administration Committee – January 28, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.
- Board of Commissioners – February 3, 2025 at 4:00 p.m.
- Sewer Feasibility Implementation Ad Hoc Committee – February 13, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.

**I. Adjourn**



## REGIONAL SEWER FEASIBILITY STUDY

### Initial Stakeholder Meetings:

Oconee County/City of Seneca/Town of Westminster/Town of Walhalla/Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority

### Main Discussion Notes

November 8, 2023

- 1. How is the current organizational model working? What are strengths/challenges?**
  - The County is now more involved in the “conversation” than in the past.
  - There is more communication and a better relationship between the County and the Authority than in previous years.
  - Board members work well together. Most feel that they can express opinions and be heard, even if not everyone agrees.
  - Board conversation are now more about capital investments and organizational improvements rather than rates/allocations
  - OJRSA consent order is a positive. It forced a reset to begin strategic planning. There is a common goal now.
  - Tough decisions were made to increase rates but now are seeing a strengthening in financial strength of the Authority.
  - Change in the way the Authority bills the municipalities has been very beneficial for all. Reduced burden on staff. It is now based on customer water usage as opposed to fluctuating flow contributions. Although it stemmed from the lawsuit, there has been a positive outcome.
  - Although board members have agreement on many issues, it may be a ‘fragile peace.’ Still issues around control based on where growth is occurring.
  - There are inconsistencies/misalignment with Authority organizational documents/agreements.



## REGIONAL SEWER FEASIBILITY STUDY

- Current organizational model makes county involvement more difficult.
  - The sewer is the growth and power. The member cities have benefited from this, but not the County.
  - Authority Board members are being asked to do county-wide planning through where sewer is being installed. That is not their job.
  - Because Authority Board members are either elected officials or employees of the member municipalities, it is like they serve two masters and that is difficult.
  - Authority Board members from the smaller member municipalities feel pressure from their residents/customers.
2. **What are some of the real and/ or perceived issues with the current organizational model or any modifications to it?**
- The current structure of the Board was very intentional. It was all to control growth.
  - The other municipalities feel that Oconee County and Seneca will always vote together and would dominate if they have a seat on the Board.
  - It would be better accepted if each of the municipalities had an equal vote.
  - The County's view is that the Authority Board does not want their opinion, but they want their money.
  - The Board understands that the County needs to help them decide where sewer will be extended into the unincorporated areas. The current structure "doesn't work."
  - County is making decision on sewer without involving the Authority (e.g., \$25MM GO Bond for sewer). This also gives the perception that the County is pushing for Greenville-like growth and not considering the agriculture industry (top industry in county).
  - The Authority cannot issue debt for capital projects without unanimous approval from the elected officials of all member cities.
  - The member municipalities do not want the Authority to spend money that does not directly benefit their residents.



## REGIONAL SEWER FEASIBILITY STUDY

- Enforcement of sewer regulations is not consistent. All municipalities adopt the Authority's sewer use regulations but the way it is enforced is different.
  - The level of investment in individual collection systems is different but reduction of I/I is an issue for the Authority.
  - Rates (affordability) is always a concern, especially for smaller member municipalities.
3. **What are some of changes that could be made to the current organizational model that may be an improvement?**
- The County needs a seat on the Board. This would improve communication around sewer and growth because much of the growth is occurring outside the incorporated municipalities.
  - Either reduce the number of Board members, change the weighting of them (not based on size/flow contribution) or start over. Suggested composition:
    - 1 from each member municipality
    - 1 from Oconee County
    - 1 appointed by state legislative delegation
    - 2 at large members
  - Only 1 seat for the County would be a challenge for the County commissioners. They may want at least 2 seats.
  - It would be better if elected officials were not Board members. But if that were the case, it might be difficult to find the right person to represent if not an elected official or staff of a member municipality. Council wants either a staff member or an elected official.
  - Some member municipalities may not want to get out of the "sewer business" and there should be a consideration for how the Authority may deal with that.
  - There can be operating agreements rather than a system consolidation. This could still provide operating efficiencies.



## REGIONAL SEWER FEASIBILITY STUDY

4. **What things should NOT be considered with regard to any changes to the current organizational model?**
  - There is no need to include Anderson County. They have no interest in the Oconee community. They can be a wholesale customer.
  - This should remain sewer only. Do not need a combined water & sewer authority.
  - A true system consolidation of all entities would require a combined water and sewer authority. It would be almost impossible for all entities to agree to this, but it may have to be vetted.
  - Feel like anything that involved water would derail any movement toward making needed organizational modifications.
  
5. **How much cooperation between the entities is currently happening? Including coordination/ assistance not necessarily memorialized in legal agreements.**
  - Outside of the Authority Board Room, all of the entities work well together (e.g., solid waste collection, fire protection, etc.).
  - They help each other out in other areas, but not on the sewer side.
  - The member municipalities help out the Authority with things like sewer taps.