



CITY OF WALHALLA

Main Street to the Mountains

AGENDA

City Council Committees Meeting

September 1, 2026

5:30 PM

Council Chambers | 206 N Church St. Walhalla, SC

Tim Hall
Mayor

Call to Order and Welcome

Mayor Hall

David Underwood
Mayor Pro Tem

Public Utilities Committee

David Underwood (Chair), Jessie Bunning

I. Call to Order and Welcome

David Underwood, Chair

II. Discussion/Action Items

A. Phone system and communications

B. Website and notifications

C. Work orders for utilities

III. Adjournment

Jessie Bunning
Councilwoman

Chris Grant
Councilman

Lynn McClain
Councilwoman

Sarai Melendez
Councilwoman

Parks, Recreation and Tourism Committee

Jessie Bunning (Chair), Sarai Melendez, Chris Grant

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Jessie Bunning, Chair

II. Discussion/Action Items

A. Parks, Tourism, & Events Director search

B. Fall Recreation Schedule

C. Tournaments

D. Community Center Modification and Grand Opening

E. Upcoming events

F. Signage at Sertoma

III. Adjournment

Michael Kozlarek
City Attorney

David Poulson
City Administrator

Public Safety Committee

Chris Grant (Chair), Sarai Melendez, David Underwood

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Chris Grant, Chair

II. Discussion/Action Items

A. Careless Driving ordinance

B. Update on new Police facility

C. Axon Body Cam presentation

III. Adjournment

Report of the Walhalla Water Advisory Ad Hoc Committee

Submitted to the City of Walhalla

Improving Communication and Public Understanding of Water Services

November 24, 2025

Introduction

The Walhalla Water Advisory Ad Hoc Committee conducted a detailed study of communication practices within the City of Walhalla's Water Department. This study included:

- Interviews with the Water Director
- Discussions with City administrative staff and Water Department employees
- Conversations with customers inside and outside the City
- Review of public concerns, communication methods, and service-related challenges

The purpose of this report is to provide recommendations that improve communication, reduce confusion, support Water Department staff, and enhance customer service across the entire system.

Recommendations

1. Improve Phone Contact Options and Enhance Customer Access to the Water Department

The most consistent concern raised during interviews and discussions was the **difficulty customers experience when trying to reach the Water Department by phone**. Many reported long hold times, voicemail-only options, or difficulty reaching a live representative.

It must be emphasized that the **two employees currently tasked with answering the phones are doing an excellent job**. They are knowledgeable, courteous, and committed to helping customers. However, **the call volume—combined with constant walk-in traffic—has overwhelmed their capacity**, resulting in unavoidable delays and stress.

The committee believes that implementing a **professional call service** would provide substantial relief to these employees and improve customer experience. A call service would:

- Provide 24/7 coverage
- Never require vacation, sick time, or benefits
- Sort calls efficiently so customers reach the correct option
- Allow routine information to be handled automatically
- Reduce the number of repeated calls related to outages and line breaks
- Email outage and emergency notifications to all necessary staff

- Free Water Department employees to focus on billing, walk-ins, and field coordination rather than acting as intermediaries between customers and repair crews

Because the inability to reach the Water Department was the **number one complaint** heard during the committee's study, the creation of a better way to contact the City is the **top recommendation** of this report.

2. Create and Distribute a “How-To” Guide for Phone Prompts and Reporting Issues

To support improvements to the phone system, the committee recommends that the City prepare a simple, clearly written guide explaining:

- How to navigate the phone prompts
- How to report outages and leaks
- How to reach billing, customer service, or other departments
- What information customers should have on hand when calling

This guide should be:

- Posted on the City's website
- Sent through the City's text alert system
- Printed and handed out to customers paying bills in person
- Kept at the Water Department service counter

Clear, accessible instructions will help reduce confusion and improve communication consistency.

3. Increase Public Communication Through Social Media and the City Website

The committee recommends improving the frequency and content of communication through social media and the City website. Monthly or bi-monthly updates should include information such as:

- Water line replacement projects
- Pump station upgrades
- Status and use of grant funds
- Year-to-date expenses and remaining balances on grant-related projects
- Planned improvements or construction that may affect service
- General updates on Water Department operations

When citizens understand what is happening, trust increases—and misinformation decreases.

4. Expand Information Signage in City Offices and Along Local Streets

The committee recommends expanding physical signage—both indoors and outdoors—to better distribute important information to customers who may not use digital platforms. This may include:

- Bulletin boards in City Hall and Water Department offices
- Printed notices in high-traffic areas
- Reader boards or message signs where permitted
- Digital displays inside buildings

These tools provide simple, effective ways to publish outage alerts, updates, announcements, and changes in policies.

5. Improve Public Transparency on Grant Funding and Required Matching Dollars

Residents frequently expressed confusion about how grants work. The committee recommends that the City clearly explain:

- The total amount of each grant
- The required match from the City
- What portion is fully funded
- How funds are being spent
- Project timelines
- Remaining grant balances

Transparent financial communication promotes confidence and reduces speculation or misunderstanding.

6. Provide Limited Public Access to a GIS Water System Map

A simplified GIS viewer—showing only non-sensitive water line routes—would provide customers with a better understanding of their service connections. Sensitive or detailed operational information can remain internal.

Providing even limited access promotes transparency and reduces service-area confusion among residents, developers, and real estate professionals.

7. Improve Public Understanding of Why City Policies and Fees Are Implemented

The committee recommends that the City proactively explain the reasoning behind important decisions, fee structures, and policy changes.

There is currently **significant public confusion** about costs such as:

- **Water tap fees**
- **Credit card processing fees**

Customers are often unaware that some of these fees—such as credit card surcharges—were previously suspended during COVID-era emergency measures and have since been reinstated following federal and banking guidelines.

Communicating *why* these costs exist helps eliminate speculation and misunderstanding, while showing residents that decisions are made based on regulations, cost recovery, and financial responsibility.

This type of explanation should be included in:

- Official announcements
- City website updates
- Social media posts
- Signage in offices
- Press releases when new policies are implemented

Clear, proactive communication will significantly reduce negative feedback and confusion in the community.

Conclusion

The Walhalla Water Advisory Ad Hoc Committee respectfully submits this report to improve communication, reduce confusion, and support both City staff and water customers.

The committee strongly emphasizes that the Water Department employees are dedicated and doing excellent work under challenging conditions. The recommendations outlined here—especially improved phone contact options and clearer public communication—will directly support them and improve overall customer experience.

We appreciate the opportunity to serve and stand ready to assist the City in implementing these recommendations.

Walhalla Utilities Reorganization

Background

The Walhalla Utility Department serves over 7,000 customers by providing water treatment, water distribution, and sewer collection. Approximately 75% of these customers reside outside the city limits of Walhalla. Walhalla owns and operates its own water treatment facility, which commenced operations in the fall of 2020. This facility was funded by a \$20 million revenue bond issued in 2018.

The Utility staff manages all aspects of the system, including treatment, maintenance, light construction, right-of-way maintenance, meter reading, billing, and collection of wastewaters. The department is currently led by a director who reports to the City Administrator.

Proposal

Administration Changes

It is proposed that the Utility Director be reassigned to report directly to the City Council. The Council would then be responsible for providing direction, hiring, firing, and receiving reports from the director. This change would likely necessitate minor ordinance amendments. The primary objective of this modification is not to diminish the role of the City Administrator but rather to alleviate their workload. Given the substantial size of the utility system and the added complexity of financial management related to the 2018 revenue bond, it is also proposed to offer the Utilities Director an employment contract. This measure would provide security for the director and offer incentives to aid in recruiting and retaining a high-quality manager.

Budget

Currently, the utility budget is consolidated with the city's overall budget. Given that the utilities budget operates as an enterprise fund, it is proposed that it be separated into its own distinct budget and managed independently from the city's overall budget. Cash and fund accounts would no longer be commingled, which will enhance financial transparency and allow for the independent accounting of funds. This change would not prohibit the movement of funds between different accounts. Furthermore, this separation is expected to provide comfort to bond rating agencies and bondholders.

Public Engagement

In conjunction with the aforementioned changes, it is recommended to establish a Walhalla Utilities Advisory Board. This board would be tasked with advising the Utilities Director and the City Council, and with representing the customers in their respective areas.

The board would comprise the Council Utility Committee Chair and a representative from each of the following areas: inside city limits, Oconee County Council District 1, Oconee County Council District 2, and Oconee County Council District 5. Prospective

representatives would be required to apply for a seat, similar to the process for the Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA). Additionally, representatives must be Walhalla Utility customers and reside within the district they represent. The Advisory Board would operate without legislative or executive powers. This initiative aims to provide an avenue for customers residing outside the city limits to voice their concerns and have direct representation to the city.

Summary

The reorganization proposal for Walhalla Utilities aims to improve administrative efficiency, financial transparency, and public engagement. Key recommendations include: having the Utility Director report directly to the City Council to reduce the City Administrator's workload and enhance oversight; separating the utility budget into an independent enterprise fund for better financial clarity and bondholder assurance; and establishing a Walhalla Utilities Advisory Board to provide direct customer representation, especially for those outside city limits, without legislative or executive powers.



INSTALLED

5-4-26

Date: 8/27/2026

To: Council

From: Judge Roberta Barton

I would request to amend the Municipal Code addressing Carless Driving offense under Subsection 295-14 Penalties and Subsection 295-15 Purpose and Scope.

Background:

Walhalla Police Department officers operate as prosecuting officers in the municipal court. Accordingly, they have discretion to enter into plea agreements with defendants for a wide variety of reasons.

Currently this ordinance only allows for fines between \$50 to \$100 (with fees, assessments, and court costs that is a range of \$153.75 to \$257.50).

The Court's request is that the penalties for this offense match the statutory scope of penalties as found in is Subsection 1-1, Fines for ordinance violations as listed here:

The Municipal Judge of the City of Walhalla is authorized to impose a fine not to exceed \$500 or imprisonment for a period not to exceed 30 days for the violation of any ordinance or crime committed within the City of Walhalla.

This will allow for smaller traffic offenses (i.e. speeding) to be penalized closer to the original traffic fine amount, while also allowing the officers to use this ordinance as an alternative charge in a plea agreement for other traffic-based offenses.

Also, I ask that the first-time offenders' provision be removed from the Purpose and Scope section.

Attached is the Careless Driving ordinance.

Article IV

Careless Driving

[Adopted 5-19-1998 by Ord. No. 1998-6]

§ 295-12 Due care required.

§ 295-13 Violations.

§ 295-14 Penalties.

§ 295-15 Purpose and scope.

§ 295-12 Due care required.

It shall be unlawful for any person to operate any vehicle without due care and caution and full regard for the safety of persons and/or property.

§ 295-13 Violations.

Any person operating any vehicle without due care and caution and full regard for the safety of persons and/or property, whether or not their driving results in personal injury and/or property damage, shall be guilty of careless driving.

§ 295-14 Penalties.

Any person found guilty of this offense will be fined ~~no less than \$50 nor more than \$100,~~ **up to \$500** plus all applicable state-mandated fees and assessments and/or **up to** 30 days' imprisonment.

§ 295-15 Purpose and scope.

This article will not be used as a means of increasing revenue, but is to be used as an alternative method to avoid an increase in insurance rates ~~for first-time offenders.~~