

Up and running



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Walhalla utilities director Scott Parris stands near the pumps at the city's new water plant.

\$21M Walhalla water plant begins serving customers

BY NORM CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

WEST UNION — Nearly two years after construction began, the new \$21 million Walhalla water plant is providing customers water from Lake Keowee.

City utilities director Scott Parris said the plant has received a “partial permit” from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) to begin serving customers through the new plant on Melton Road near West Union. The city’s old plant is still operational, but Parris said he hopes to have the new plant serving customers full time within the next few weeks and likely begin the process of “decommissioning” the older plant early next year.

Officials began testing the new plant about a month ago, but didn’t begin running water from the plant through the system until getting DHEC approval on Tuesday.



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Once a day, Walhalla officials set off an air burst to blow debris off screens in Lake Keowee so the pumps are only dealing with pumping out water. The air burst also makes a big bubble in the lake.

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PLANT: 'We're serving customers'

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In addition to getting a final permit, Walhalla officials are also waiting for a DHEC permit for the laboratory at the new location.

The Melton Road plant is on 17 acres, and the city also has 4 acres by the lake where the pump station is housed.

"We don't have our final permit yet, but we can pump water," Parris told The Journal Thursday morning during a tour of the new plant and the raw water pump station at Lake

Keowee. "Both plants are still working right now. We're serving customers."

The new plant is permitted for 4 million gallons a day, but Parris said it could eventually handle a capacity of 6 million gallons daily to give the water system more room for growth. The city serves about 7,000 customers, about three-fourths of whom live outside the city, according to Parris.

"This time of the year, we're in the range of 1.8 million (gallons per day) and 2.3 million in the summer — which was maxing

out our current plant. We've got the industrial park on the southern end of the system that's growing. We've had a lot of residential growth over the past few years, and that's not slowing down anytime soon. I think we're in a good position now."

Parris said reliability and long-term service, along with water quality and capacity, are among the benefits of the new plant.

"Over the last few months, we have had a lot of issues at the old plant," he said. "We've got a lot of obsolete equipment. ... It was getting to a point where it

was getting tough to keep that going reliably.

"Capacity is important during the dry summers when we're really low," Parris added. "We were probably limited to about 2 million (gallons) a day at the old plant. The water supply is better here. We've had several summers where we had to go on (water) restrictions because of the (lack of) availability of water."

The plant has more than triple the water storage capacity — up from 300,000 gallons in the old plant to 1 million gallons of storage at the new location.

"That's a huge benefit, because we definitely needed some storage," Parris said.

As the new plant comes com-

pletely online, the city will need to deal with aging water pipes, many of which are decades old. Parris said the speed of the pumps can be adjusted to "ramp up slowly what goes into the system so we don't blow apart lines." He added city officials are beginning work on plans to address the system's long-term infrastructure needs that include older pipes, which Parris said last year would likely need a \$10 million investment over a five-to-10-year time period.

City administrator Brent Taylor said a dedication ceremony will likely be scheduled for the new plant after the holidays.