

Masks, millage increase, sign standards on agenda tonight

BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — A final reading on a county facilities mask ordinance and the establishing of lake corridor signage standards are planned for tonight's Oconee County Council meeting,

along with discussion of increasing the millage of a tax district.

The meeting, set to begin at 6 p.m., will see

the expected approval of the mask ordinance requiring face coverings in all facilities owned and operated by the county until June

30, or until Gov. Henry McMaster revokes the ongoing state of emergency for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Anyone violating the ordinance is subject to a fine of at least \$25, but no more than \$100. Ordinance 2021-

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Official: County codes dictate amendments are performance standards instead of zoning

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WALHALLA — Although debate over whether the proposed traffic corridor design standards should be treated as zoning continues, the Oconee County Code of Ordinances provides insight on the current protocols in place.

The semantical debate focuses on proposed ordinances 2021-05 and 2021-06, which contain amendments to Chapter 32 of the Oconee County Code of Ordinances in establishing lake corridor signage standards and traffic corridor design standards, respectively, Chapter 32

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WANT TO GO?

What: Oconee County Council meeting
Where: 415 S. Pine St., Walhalla
When: 6 p.m. tonight

ZONING: 'It's playing semantics'

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in the codebook is on Unified Performance Standards.

County Councilmen Matthew Durham and Glenn Hart have cast themselves as the two voices on council against the ordinances.

Durham has been vocal in saying the ordinances should fall under Chapter 38, which focuses on zoning.

Chapter 38-8.2 requires public hearings, a notice of hearing, posting and notification of property owners for any amendments to the official zoning map of the county. Durham has pointed to the county failing to notify property owners, which includes a wide swath who would be impacted throughout the county.

County planning director Adam Chapman said in an email the chapter would only be relevant "during a rezoning or amendments that impact specific piece of property(s) in relation to zoning."

"2021-05 and 2021-06 are not zoning related and if accepted by Council will be placed in Chapter 32, which broadly speaking, is how property owners can develop their property in specific circumstances," he wrote. "We do want and encourage public input, in person or by email or letter."

The proposed changes fall under Chapter 32, which requires the planning commission to hold a public hearing on any proposed amendments. A notice of at least 30 days must be published in a newspaper of general circulation and later adopted by a vote of county council, according to the county's code of ordinances.

Councilman Paul Cain said council relies on the county attorney's team to determine the appropriate notification process.

"Any of these proposed actions that the council reviews, our county attorney determines what type of notice is to be provided. It's not county council," he said.

'CLEARLY A ZONING ISSUE'

Still, Durham and Hart have questioned whether those potentially affected have been made properly aware of pending changes.

But what designates the ordinances as not zoning has been cast as a game of semantics by those against it, saying it does, in fact, affect what property owners can do with their land.

Durham told The Journal the ordinances were "clearly a zoning issue."

"It's playing semantics, and it's backdoor politics," he said. "We don't have any place for that in Oconee County.

We need to be above board and do it transparent."

Durham questioned why submittal requirements had to be turned over before a zoning permit was issued in ordinance 2021-06.

On Monday afternoon, Councilman John Elliott told The Journal

the legality of the ordinances would be evident at tonight's meeting and didn't elaborate any further.

Councilman Julian Davis said the standards look to avoid the planning missteps seen along Tiger Boulevard and U.S. Highway 123 throughout Clemson and Easley.

Davis said he has spoken with residents concerned about eyesores and safety concerns throughout the county.

"I see performance standards as a way to encourage building more than just what is required through building codes," he said. "Buildings have a nicer feel to them and blend better with the county than just a standard metal building off to the side, ... I'm

also into incentivizing development of these buildings to meet these standards. This is definitely not something that's an attack on small businesses — in any shape, way or form."

Davis added it wasn't the right time to add any pressure to developments looking to expand or venture into Oconee and said he was open to incentivizing growth standards, similar to what was done at Hartwell Village.

Cain said he was also sensitive to not making life harder on small businesses.

"My feeling on the matter is, at this point in time, I don't believe that it's in the best interest of the majority of Oconee County residents to require performance standards on the appearance of buildings," he said.

Lake corridor signage standards (ordinance 2021-05) affect county portions of:

- S.C. Highway 130
- S.C. Highway 183 from S.C. Highway 188 to the Pickens County line
- S.C. Highway 188

Includes language that would limit the height and number of signs along the lake corridor and even restrict "moving/rotating signage." There are exemptions for temporary signs for construction, politics, special events, real estate listing and yard sales.

Traffic corridor design standards (ordinance 2021-06) affect county portions of:

- S.C. Highway 11
- S.C. Highway 28
- S.C. Highway 59
- S.C. Highway 130
- S.C. Highway 183
- U.S. Highway 76
- U.S. Highway 123

Any new development or existing development expanding by more than 50 percent of its existing area will be required to abide by the new ordinance, which calls for standards for a building makeup and entrances, along with prohibited building materials such as painted concrete block or asphalt shingles incorporated to a building's facade adjacent to public or private right of ways.

Exemptions: Agricultural and forestry uses under the S.C. Right to Farm Act and the S.C. Right to Practice Forestry Act.