

# \$3.3M Seneca Creek funding plan up for vote

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THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Oconee County Council will consider approving a plan to fund a multi-million-dollar recreation project on Lake Hartwell in its

last scheduled meeting of the year tonight.

Developing a Seneca Creek boat ramp, including a contingency amount of money, would cost approximately \$3.3 million.

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FILE

The current Seneca Creek access boat ramp on Lake Hartwell is worn down and dated ahead of planned renovations.

according to tonight's agenda.

County administrator Amanda Brock told The Journal the item was "a very big project" and Oconee's strategic plan backed such a move, which is to expand recreation opportunities on Lake Hartwell. The meeting is set to begin at 6 p.m. at 415 S. Pine St. in Walhalla.

The project would create a three-lane boat ramp facility with fresh pavement, a parking lot, a fishing dock, a kayak dock, sidewalks and drainage infrastructure. The completion of the project is scheduled for

December 2022. Last year The Journal reported the project would cost more than \$2 million but would be a two-phase project.

Now, county parks, recreation and tourism director Phil Shirley says the project's scope has expanded into finishing out in one phase with an added restroom facility. He said building and engineering costs have skyrocketed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Access to Lake Hartwell is extremely limited on that side of the county," he said. "This would add to our asset inventory. The ramp that's there now ... the infrastructure has not been maintained well. This is an opportunity

to provide our citizens a first-class facility for access to Lake Hartwell."

If approved, the project would be funded through the parks, recreation and tourism capital fund budget (\$1.5 million), PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) contamination; lawsuit happened in early 2010s) settlement funds (\$300,000), accommodations tax funding (\$70,240) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding (\$1.5 million).

Brock said the ARPA's final rules allow for money to be spent on the expansion of outdoor recreation use. The money would become available in May.

## PREMIUM PAY COMING FOR COUNTY WORKERS?

Brock is also request-

ing council consider awarding premium pay for essential workers through money from the ARPA. The county has already been awarded half of its \$15.4 million award through the federal stimulus package, with a second flow of money hitting county accounts by May 2022. Money can be spent on water, sewer and infrastructure work. Approximately \$8.7 million of the total award has already been committed to various infrastructure projects in Salem, Seneca, Walhalla and Westminster. The money can also be used to provide retrospective premium pay to essential workers who worked through the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the U.S. Treasury Department.

"After reading through it again, it seemed that (premium pay) was part of the intent for the distribution and allocation of funds," Brock said.

She will likely explain to council how many workers the pay would apply to and specific categories of workers. If approved, funding would come next year when the final allotment of ARPA money is received.

Walhalla City Councilman Keith Pace has also requested a discussion tonight at a city council meeting for certain employees to receive premium pay through the funding.

## REDISTRICTING TALK SET TO CONTINUE

Council will also discuss the 2020 redistricting plan and next steps. At a meeting last month, Councilman John Elliott proposed redistricting 750 residents from his district to District 2. Councilman Matthew Durham also asked those putting the maps together to include major roads on them to lessen confusion among county residents.

## BRIDGE REPLACEMENT

Separately, a \$747,882 bridge replacement project will also need council approval tonight. The existing bridge on Cherokee Lake Road needs to be replaced "due to structural and functional elements," the meeting agenda said. The Cheochee Valley Fire

Substation is located near the bridge, but it is "not a safe way for fire trucks to pass" to get to Cheochee Valley Road in Tamassee. The winning bid would be awarded to Seneca-based Thrift Development Corporation for \$679,893.41, with a 10 percent contingency amount.

## EXECUTIVE SESSION

Council is also set to go behind closed doors in executive session to talk about projects Harmony and Ruby Slipper. Officials will also talk, again, about potential litigation from Elevated Youth Services.