

'Years in the making'

Groundbreaking event for Salem project today

BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR
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SALEM — After repeated grant rejections and funding obstacles, a project dreamed about for decades is finally becoming a reality.

A ceremonial groundbreaking event is scheduled for today at 2 p.m. at the Salem Community Center at 521 Church St. in Salem to commemorate work beginning on a massive waterline project.

Last summer, Oconee County Council unanimously approved awarding Salem up to \$2 million for a waterline extension with money from the federal American Rescue Plan Act package.

The project has been discussed for more than 20 years, according to one town official.

Town director of operations Ryan Hardin has been with Salem for most of that time.

"We're excited to see that it's moving forward and, honestly, there was a time we didn't think it would ever happen," he told The Journal ahead of the event. "It's fantastic to see it come to fruition and us moving forward with what we need to continue growing."

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Salem Mayor Lynn Towe said he was excited for the day.

"We've been anticipating it for a long time," he said.

The town had about 2,400 water customers in 2021, but that number figures to grow, with Hardin saying there will be a much larger landscape for potential water customers.

Council chairman John Elliott, whose district includes Salem, said on Thursday he was "thrilled council" got on board for the project.

"I've been working with Ryan Hardin, the mayor and (Oconee County administrator) Amanda Brock ever since I went on council to extend the waterline," Elliott said. "We've applied for grants and, unfortunately, we didn't get the grants. It's needed. It's going to be great for Highway 11 and the homes up there. I'm thrilled to be a part of it."

Brock said she was "so happy for the town of Salem."

"This has been years in the making for them," she added.

PROJECT FUNDING

Funding for the comprehensive project is multifaceted. Last February, county council gave teeth to the extension project after releasing \$210,000 to help build and install a booster pump station in the Shallow Ford Road area last month. The station would increase the source water capacity to the northern portion of Salem's system by more than 250 percent, according to Hardin. Construction of the Fall Creek Source Water Station is projected to cost \$640,992. Hardin told The Journal on Thursday officials were hoping work would finish in July.

Salem designated \$215,922 in cash

The second and third

phases, which will be funded with the federal relief money, will involve a pipeline extension of 2.3 miles. The second phase would install more than 1,000 linear feet of water main across S.C. Highway 11.

for the project. The town was selected to receive \$216,000 in funding from the State Revolving Fund Program, which is under the jurisdiction of the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, the S.C. Rural Infrastructure Authority and the Office of Local Government. The project qualified for principal loan forgiveness, and the town will not be required to repay the loan due to the program essentially being an extension of federal grant dollars.

The second and third phases, which will be funded with the federal relief money, will involve a pipeline extension of 2.3 miles. The second phase would install more than 1,000 linear feet of water main across S.C. Highway 11. The installation of a waterline along Highway 11 would come in Phase 3, adding 12,100 feet of water main. Money will also pay for an additional ground storage tank, according to Hardin.

Engineering is underway for the project, he said, and with any luck the project could be done this time next year.

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Salem holds groundbreaking

Pictured, from left, Salem town director of operations Ryan Hardin, Oconee County administrator Amanda Brock, Oconee County Council chairman John Elliott, Salem Mayor Lynn Towe, Councilman Jimmy Barker, Councilwoman Judy Hines and Councilmen Kevin Talley and Russell Patterson pose for a picture at a ceremonial groundbreaking event Friday in Salem. Rain and a thunderstorm didn't dampen the celebration, which also drew an appearance from Oconee County Councilman Julian Davis. Town clerk Marti Jennings said you can't have water without rain, a timely comment with work set to begin on a massive waterline extension project along S.C. Highway 11. Towe said the project had been in the works for more than two decades. "It's come through a lot, but everything takes time as it does," he said. Elliott said it was "the best thing to happen to the town of Salem in decades" and would result in safe, reliable access to water and prompt more growth in the area.