

\$30M in local infrastructure grants awarded

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SENECA — More than \$30 million will be poured into infrastructure work throughout Oconee County after the Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA) announced awards on Monday.

The RIA was given \$900 million from South Carolina's share of American

Rescue Plan Act funding to establish the S.C. Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP), which is a one-time initiative to improve water, wastewater and stormwater systems throughout the state.

The grant requires a percentage match depending on the project, and applicants could request up

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to \$10 million. The agency announced it received 309 applications for a total of \$2 billion.

Four municipalities and a major utility in the county applied for the grants. The city of Seneca and town of West Union submitted applications for water system improvements.

The Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority and the cities of Walhalla and Westminster are each under consent orders from S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC).

Completing the projects with the applied-for funds would help bring them into compliance.

Work has to be finished by Dec. 31, 2026, to meet the federal expenditure deadline.

OJRSA

The Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority received \$9.6 million to renovate 25,000 linear feet of its collection system, along with the Flat Rock Pump Station and portions of the Coneross Creek Wastewater Treatment Facility. The sewer authority had to provide a

15 percent match, contributing \$1.7 million to the project.

The portions of the collection system to be repaired are under the DHEC consent order, OJRSA executive director Chris Eleazer said, but replacing the dewatering system at the treatment plant is separate.

"That's not in the consent order, but that's something that's got to be done, because if the one we have fails — and it could at any time — then we're in a world of hurt, because we're going to have to rent a unit that's going to have to be brought in on a truck. And the cost of that thing is in the thousands of dollars per day, if I remember correctly," he

said. "We're hoping to get something put in in time before the one we have fails."

Just shy of 8,000 residential and 1,094 business customers will be served by the project, according to the application, and work is projected to start in July and end in December 2025.

SENECA

Seneca was awarded almost \$7 million install an elevated water tank with a capacity between 500,000 and 1 million gallons along Doug Hollow Road, along with 4,000 feet of water line. The existing tank would then be demolished.

Almost 35,300 residents and 17,400 businesses would benefit from the project, according to the application.

City utilities director Bob Faires said the work to be done with the grant money would address both current needs as well as preparing for future growth.

"This project will support consistent pressures in the water distribution system in the upper northeast quadrant of our service area, which serves Keowee Key, Salem, Duke Energy and a host of residential and commercial developments," he said.

"It's the only area of our system that does not have elevated storage.

"I'm very thankful for our representatives in Columbia — Sen. (Thomas) Alexander and Rep. (Bill) Sandifer, along with the RIA staff who have helped in this huge effort to serve not only the citizens of Oconee County, but the entire state of South Carolina."

Seneca's grant request required a 25 percent match, so the city will add more than \$2.3 million of its own funds for the project through in-kind work and actual cash on the project.

Groundbreaking is scheduled for July 2024, the application said, with a projected wrap-up date of July 2026.

WALHALLA

Walhalla's \$10 million grant will go straight to replacing ancient waterlines downtown, benefiting 300 businesses and 3,000 residents, according to the application.

The city will also replace 21,100 linear feet of leaking or old sewer lines and manholes, along with the Rocky Knoll booster pump station and its

Walhalla contributed almost \$1.8 million in matching funds for the project, which will start in June 2024 and is scheduled to wrap up by December 2025.

WESTMINSTER

Westminster is focusing solely on its sewer system, receiving just less than \$4 million to replace more than 8,000 linear feet of sewer lines and manholes.

The project includes about \$900,000 in matching funds and would serve 29 customers, according to the application. Pipe replacement is scheduled to be finished in less than a year, with a projected start date of December 2024 and work wrapping up in November 2025.

City administrator Kevin Bronson said the grant was a "big win" for residents.

"There is now almost \$4 million being invested in sewer line rehabilitation that the residents did not

have to pay additional fees to realize and will benefit from future cost savings due to well-functioning sewer lines," he said.

Receiving such a sizable grant is "affirming" to the city's state of affairs, Bronson added, especially "in light of the competition."

"We also celebrate with our Oconee County peers in their awards," he said. "We are especially thankful to Sen. Thomas Alexander and Rep. Bill Whitmire for their hard work at the State House to create this program and provide the funding."

WEST UNION

West Union was awarded \$433,707 to replace water lines along Neville Street and S.C. Highway 11.

Mayor Linda Oliver, who got the call in the middle of a called town council meeting Monday, gave a shout of joy.

"I'm so glad that waterline's going to get fixed," she added.

Councilwoman Dixie Meeks, whose property is affected by the bad pipes, said the first time she came to a council meet-

ing was because of the waterline.

"I just praise the Lord for that. Because first of all, it'll save me money. You know, I'm buying a four-month filter once a month," she said. "But praise God."

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