TOWN OF AWENDAW

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Katharine Watkins | *Town Administrator*

Takeya White | *Town Clerk*

Town of Awendaw South Carolina SETTLED 1696

Chris Crolley | *Mayor*

Town Council

Paul Brown | Wendy Helms

Grace Gasper | Rodney Porcher

Kent Prause | John Timmons

Town Council Special Called Meeting DRAFT Minutes
July 15th, 2026
5:00 P.M.

1. Call to Order

The Awendaw Special Called Meeting was called to order by Mayor Chris Crolley on Wednesday, July 15th, 2026, at 5:00 PM

2. Roll Call

Present: Mayor Chris Crolley, Councilman Rodney Porcher, Councilman Paul Brown, Councilwoman Wendy Helms, Councilwoman Grace Gasper, Councilman Kent Prause and Town Staff Town Administrator Katharine Watkins, Town Clerk Takeya White (virtual), and Town Attorney, James I. Ward, III.

It was noted that Councilman John Timmons arrived at 5:48 pm.

3. Invocation

The invocation was delivered by Mayor Chris Crolley.

4. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all.

5. Civility Pledge

Councilman Paul Brown read the Town of Awendaw Civility Pledge.

6. Approval of the July 15th Town Council Special Called Meeting Agenda

Motion: To approve the July 15th Town Council Special Called Agenda was posed by Councilwoman Grace Gasper and seconded by Councilman Rodney Porcher.
Discussion: None
Vote: The motion passed unanimously.

7. Executive Session in accordance with S.C. Code Section 30-4-70(a)(1) concerning personnel matters related to the utilities manager.

Motion: To enter Executive Session was made by Councilwoman Wendy Helms and seconded by Councilman Kent Prause.

Discussion: None

Vote: The motion passed unanimously.

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Council went into Executive Session at 5:03 pm.

Upon return to public session, Town Administrator Katharine Watkins noted for the record that no motions, actions, or votes were taken during Executive Session. She further noted that Council had feedback and considerations regarding certain decisions made during the session.

Council came out of Executive Session at 5:37pm.

Motion: To come out of Executive Session was made Councilwoman Wendy Helms and seconded by Councilman Rodney Porcher.

Discussion: None

Vote: The motion passed unanimously.

8. **Discussion with Town Water Professionals- [Time Stamp: 38:11/3:04:30]**

Mayor Crolley opened the water discussion by framing it as the single highest-priority operational issue facing the Town of Awendaw. He introduced the panel of water professionals assembled for the meeting: Ron Bycroft, consultant for the Town's water system; Mickey Seabrook, engineer and designer of the water system; and Christopher Cross, General Manager of H.M. Northam, the firm that has operated the system for approximately 16 years. A representative from the South Carolina Rural Water Association, Brandon Abernathy, was also in attendance.

Current System Conditions
Mayor Crolley described the water system's most pressing problems: pervasive hydrogen sulfide odor affecting town residents, declining water pressure, and concern about fire suppression capability during a severe drought. He noted that irrigation restriction letters had been circulated to residents, but compliance appeared minimal. He also indicated that between 280 and 400 new residential connections were anticipated imminently, with further growth beyond that still unquantified.

Engineering History and System Overview — Mickey Seabrook
Engineer Mickey Seabrook provided historical context, explaining that the water system was conceived approximately 50 years ago and developed with funding from the USDA Farmers Home Administration. The system was designed as a long, linear distribution network—not a looped system—which has significant consequences for water quality and pressure management. The existing infrastructure was sized and designed for conditions that bear little resemblance to current and projected demand.

Mr. Seabrook outlined three primary treatment options for addressing the hydrogen sulfide problem:

- Chemical oxidation — The application of an oxidizing agent such as hydrogen peroxide or chlorine to neutralize hydrogen sulfide compounds. He noted the significant chemical demand: approximately 8 to 10 parts of oxidant are required to eliminate 1 part of hydrogen sulfide.
- Aeration — The stripping of hydrogen sulfide gas into the atmosphere by exposing water to air. He cautioned that the water's current pH of 8 to 8.5 is not favorable for effective aeration, and that pH adjustment with an acid would be necessary to bring the gas into a state where it can be effectively stripped.

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- Ozone treatment — The generation of ozone on-site to oxidize sulfide compounds as a pretreatment step prior to chlorination. Mr. Seabrook noted this approach has safety considerations, as ozone is a hazardous gas if it escapes into the atmosphere, and that regulatory requirements would apply.

When asked by Council to identify the preferred option, Mr. Seabrook stated his preference for chemical oxidation as a first step, though he acknowledged that cost would be a determining factor in any final decision.

Discussion also turned to the non-looped nature of the distribution system. Mr. Seabrook confirmed that the linear "spur" design creates dead ends throughout the system, making it difficult to maintain adequate chlorine residual and requiring frequent and costly flushing. He indicated that opportunities exist to loop portions of the system by negotiating easements across developing properties, including tracts adjacent to Highway 17, which would significantly improve circulation and water quality throughout the network.

Operational Perspective — Christopher Cross, H.M. Northam
General Manager Christopher Cross provided an operational assessment of current conditions. He reported that the system is currently moving approximately 250,000 gallons per day, compared to roughly 100,000 gallons per day in prior years, with peaks approaching 300,000 to nearly 400,000 gallons per day during high-demand periods. This four-fold increase in flow has overwhelmed a system designed 16 years ago.

Mr. Cross explained the root of the chlorine management problem: with only a single point of chlorine injection serving a distribution system spanning approximately 16 miles, it is impossible to maintain a safe and effective chlorine residual throughout the network without approaching or exceeding regulatory limits for disinfection byproducts (DBPs)—carcinogenic compounds formed when chlorine reacts with organic matter. He stated that the Town has never failed a DBP test, but that maintaining compliance while also addressing odor complaints represents a direct operational conflict: more chlorine reduces odor but risks DBP violations; less chlorine protects against DBPs but leaves the sulfide smell unaddressed.

Mr. Cross emphasized that the 200,000-gallon ground storage tank at Plant 2 is currently not in active use and is not DHEC-permitted for operational distribution. It has been informally maintained for fire department access only. Getting that tank permitted, cleaned, disinfected, and fully operational was identified as an immediate priority that would provide meaningful relief in both water storage and fire suppression capacity. He also noted that Plant 2's controls are not configured for automated chlorine management at scale, making operation labor-intensive.

Mr. Cross raised the issue of unauthorized water withdrawal, specifically citing observed instances of construction contractors filling tanker trucks at Town fire hydrants. He stated that the recently appointed fire inspector had personally witnessed this activity and that photographic documentation had been obtained. He urged Council to pursue enforcement action and called for increased staffing to provide adequate field presence.

He further recommended that the Town require separate irrigation meters for all future connections, so that domestic water use and landscape irrigation are metered independently, enabling tiered rate enforcement and demand management. He noted that current rate structures do not distinguish between meter sizes or use types, creating a significant equity and sustainability problem.

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Demand, Capacity, and Growth — Panel Discussion
Councilwoman Wendy Helms raised the central concern of long-term capacity planning. She noted that her neighborhood alone had grown from 13 to approximately 41 homes, with further development underway. She questioned whether the system could realistically sustain 600 to 800 additional homes, and whether planning was accounting for the actual fixture-unit demand of large, multi-bathroom homes rather than the standard 242-gallon-per-day-per-household figure used in prior calculations.

Mr. Cross and Mr. Seabrook both acknowledged that the 242 gallon-per-day estimate is a historical engineering benchmark that does not reflect the actual consumption patterns of newer, larger homes with multiple bathrooms and irrigation systems. Mr. Cross noted that the system is currently committed to serving 537 units beyond the existing 400 residential and 36 commercial accounts, based on agreements already in place with developers.

Council Member Kent Prause asked whether the existing water supply volume—independent of quality—was sufficient to serve anticipated growth. Mr. Seabrook confirmed that the two operational wells have the physical pumping capacity to produce adequate volume, but that water quality, distribution infrastructure, storage, and treatment capability are all constraining factors that must be addressed as growth continues.

Town Administrator Katharine Watkins clarified that discussions with staff and professionals had already identified a policy direction of prohibiting irrigation meters tied to the Town's water system for all new development connections, limiting new connections to domestic use only. This was noted as a meaningful demand management tool, though Council Member Prause questioned the legal authority to enforce such a requirement, and no formal action was taken on this point during the meeting.

The panel also discussed the system's vulnerability in emergency scenarios. Mr. Cross stated that with only one well pumping at full capacity and the Plant 2 tank unavailable, the fire suppression reserve could be depleted within approximately one to one and a half hours during a structure fire. He noted that a simulation had previously been conducted and that results were concerning. The Town has no backup generator, meaning a power outage would render the entire water system inoperable. This was identified as an unacceptable risk given the growth in the service area.

Water Rates — Panel Discussion
Council Member Prause noted that the current residential water rate of $4.00 per thousand gallons for the first 5,000 gallons and $5.00 per thousand gallons thereafter has not been increased in approximately 17 years. He observed that a household using the national average of approximately 300 gallons per day would generate a monthly water bill of only $40.00, which is far below rates in comparable systems. Mr. Cross agreed that the rates are deeply underpriced and stated that the Town is subsidizing usage rather than recovering costs.

Mr. Cross recommended implementing a steeply tiered rate structure that creates strong financial disincentives for high-volume use, particularly for irrigation. He also recommended differentiating rates by meter size, noting that some commercial and multi-family connections have 1.5-inch or 2-inch meters but pay the same rates as standard residential accounts.

South Carolina Rural Water Association — Brandon Abernathy
The South Carolina Rural Water Association (SCRWA) representative, Brandon Abernathy, outlined the organization's role as a provider of free technical assistance to rural water systems in the state. He noted that SCRWA has 21 staff members with specializations spanning treatment, distribution,

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finance, wastewater, and regulatory compliance. He offered to assist the Town in identifying comparable systems that have addressed similar challenges, and to help develop ordinances, drought response plans, and rate structures based on proven models. He also noted that the Town's failure to raise rates for 17 years makes it currently ineligible for most available grant programs, as grant agencies evaluate financial sustainability before awarding funds. He strongly encouraged the Town to conduct a formal rate study and adopt a rate ordinance that includes at minimum an annual inflation-based adjustment, as a prerequisite to pursuing grant funding.

Brandon also emphasized the importance of separating irrigation from domestic service at the meter as both a regulatory compliance matter (cross-connection control) and a demand management tool and noted that a formal drought response plan should be adopted by ordinance, reviewed annually, and clearly define Stage A, B, C, and D response actions.

He confirmed that SCRWA does not itself provide grants, but that significant funding is available through the State Revolving Fund (SRF) and USDA Rural Development (RD), and that he was prepared to assist the Town in navigating those application processes. He noted that grant awards in the range of $150,000 to $1,500,000 are regularly made to similarly situated systems, but that recipients must demonstrate financial sustainability to qualify.

9. Consideration of Recommendations post Discussion

Following the panel discussion, Mayor Crolley summarized the consensus priorities identified through the evening's discussion. No formal votes were taken on individual recommendations, but the following action directions were affirmed through Council deliberation:

- Emergency Generators — Identified as the immediate top priority. The Town does not currently have permanent backup power for either plant. Grant opportunities through emergency management programs are to be pursued. It was noted that grant applications have already been initiated.
- Plant 2 Ground Storage Tank — Activation of the existing 200,000-gallon ground storage tank at Plant 2 was identified as a near-term priority already budgeted in the current fiscal year. Mr. Siebert confirmed he is prepared to submit the necessary DHEC permit applications. Council was advised that this process, while potentially expedited, could take considerable time. The tank requires cleaning, disinfection, booster pump installation, and operational controls before it can be brought online for distribution use. The addition of an aeration component on top of the tank to address hydrogen sulfide was recommended by Mr. Bycroft as a cost-effective enhancement to incorporate during the same construction phase.
- Water Rate Study and Rate Increase — Council acknowledged the urgent need for a formal rate study and a subsequent tiered rate increase. It was noted that rates have not been adjusted in 17 years, that the current structure does not reflect the true cost of service, and that maintaining the status quo is financially unsustainable and disqualifies the Town from grant programs. The rate study was described as a prerequisite to all capital improvement grant applications.
- Separation of Irrigation and Domestic Meters — Council affirmed the policy direction of requiring separate meters for irrigation versus domestic use in all future connections and discussed the possibility of implementing this requirement through ordinance. This was identified as essential to demand management, rate equity, and system sustainability.

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- Staffing — Mr. Cross and Mayor Crolley both acknowledged that the current staffing level is insufficient to manage the growing system, respond to emergencies, maintain flushing schedules, and conduct field monitoring. Increased staffing was identified as a necessary investment.
- Long-Term Treatment System — Council acknowledged that a formal water treatment system—potentially utilizing ozone generation, aeration, or other approved oxidation technology—represents the ultimate solution to the hydrogen sulfide problem, but that permitting alone could take one to three years, and that this is a long-term capital project requiring significant funding, design, and regulatory approval. In the interim, Council acknowledged that point-of-use filtration at individual homes remains the most practical near-term remedy for residents experiencing odor issues.
- Grant Applications and SCRWA Partnership — Council expressed strong support for formalizing its relationship with the South Carolina Rural Water Association and directed staff to begin pursuing all available grant opportunities, including generator grants through emergency management, and infrastructure grants through SRF and USDA Rural Development.
- Enforcement of Unauthorized Water Use — Mayor Crolley and Mr. Bycroft noted documented instances of construction contractors withdrawing water from Town fire hydrants without authorization. Council directed that enforcement action be pursued using documented evidence, including a report from the Town's fire inspector.

10. Closing Remarks

11. Mayor Crolley thanked the water professionals and the Rural Water Association representative for their time and expertise. He acknowledged that while the problems facing the water system are serious and will not be resolved immediately, the meeting had clarified both the nature of the challenges and the path forward. He encouraged Council and staff to continue working collaboratively and indicated that the relationships formed with SCRWA and the engineering team would be instrumental in moving solutions forward.

12. Adjournment

Motion: To adjourn was made by Councilwoman Wendy Helms and seconded by Councilwoman Grace Gasper.
Discussion: None
Vote: The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:04 pm

DRAFT Minutes Respectfully Submitted on Tuesday, August 4th, 2026, by Takeya White Final

Approval Date: ***August 6th, 2026*** **Electronic Signature:** ***Takeya D. White***

Note: These meeting minutes are not verbatim. To watch the full meeting video, please visit the town's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/@TownOfAwendaw

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Notice of Meeting: In accordance with the SC Code of Laws, 1976, Section 30-4-80(d), as amended, the following have been notified of the time, date, place, and agenda of this meeting. The agenda was posted on the bulletin board at Town Hall prior to the meeting.

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