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County mulls animal control changes

BY DEDE BILES
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Aiken County Council is expected to consider today the second reading of an ordinance that would change how it deals with animal control issues.

In addition, when the panel meets at 7 p.m. at the Aiken County Government Center, it also is scheduled

to vote on resolutions that deal with the major renovation underway at the Aiken County Public Library in Aiken and the construction of a new inclusive playground at Langley Pond Park in the Warrentonville area.

County Council has tabled and retabled the second reading of the animal control ordinance several times while county staff members revised a draft.

The changes made took into account suggestions and complaints made during a public hearing in June or submitted electronically to the county.

That process included a meeting with interested individuals and groups Aug. 12 at the Government Center and via Zoom.

"I think we have addressed a majority of the concerns that were

raised," Bunker said. "There were a handful of people that testified and said, 'We like it,' and there were some who said, 'We don't like it.' But we had a lot of people who were somewhat in the middle who said, 'We understand where the county is going, but we have a lot of specific issues with it.' And it's a lot of that middle group of comments that we've been addressing on this."

According to a memorandum from Assistant County Administrator Joel Duke to County Council, the latest version of the ordinance includes the following:

- Revised definitions for adequate food and water, domestic animal, humane care, livestock, pet and shelter.

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Pandemic reduces access to food in region

BY KRISTINA RACKLEY
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Economic fallout driven by the coronavirus pandemic has caused food insecurity to spike in Aiken County and the greater CSRA – a problem that could cause numerous health issues in the future, experts warn.

The CSRA American Heart Association and Concerned Ministers Fellowship are teaming up to fund mobile food distributions throughout Aiken County, where food insecurity has risen to 11%. Across 25 counties in the CSRA, food insecurity has risen 41% since the pandemic began.

It's a trend the association has labeled "disturbing" due to its health implications.

Almost twice as many people have diabetes in food-insecure groups compared to those who are food secure, according to a 2019 study. Food insecurity has also been reported in people with higher rates of hypertension, obesity and obstructive airway disease compared to those who are food secure – all of which are risk factors contributing to mortality from COVID-19.

"These also are really important issues to address particularly because of the pandemic," said Kayla Kranenberg, executive director for the CSRA American Heart Association. "We know that some of the risk factors for severe illness from COVID-19 are the same medical conditions associated with food insecurity. Through our collaboration with the Concerned Ministers Fellowship and BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina, we hope to meet the needs of those most vulnerable in Aiken."

Kranenberg made clear that food insecurity doesn't just mean not knowing where your next meal is coming from – it's being unable to get healthy meals when food is available.

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City eyes fire fee fix



STAFF PHOTO BY COLIN DEMAREST

Aiken Mayor Rick Osbon speaks to a man before City Council's meeting Monday. The meeting, with just a single agenda item, was brief.

Formula would revert to pre-July rate



STAFF PHOTO BY COLIN DEMAREST

Aiken City Council member Ed Girardeau speaks at Monday night's meeting.

BY COLIN DEMAREST
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A quick fix for some inadvertently high fire-protection bills in Aiken County is one step closer to fruition.

The Aiken City Council on Monday night preliminarily approved an ordinance that would walk back the fire-fee formula to what it was a few months ago.

The vote was unanimous. "This ordinance will put the rates back, for non-city customer fire fees, as they were prior to July 1, 2020," City Manager Stuart Bedenbaugh said, introducing the measure and offering a brief summary. "Staff recommended to council a rate amendment, and I think after feedback and comments, internally and with council, we're recom-

mending that we" roll those rates back.

Two separate approvals are needed for the change to go into effect. City Council next meets Oct. 26. Another meeting is expected in early November.

Monday's special-called meeting comes after Mayor Rick Osbon and other City Council members apologized for – and pledged to address – fee changes instituted over the summer.

City Council member Andrea Gregory on Monday said some people in the city's fire district, which extends beyond city limits and into the county, saw "astronomical" jumps in their bills because of the summertime update. Anecdotes of 400% spikes have floated around

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Maze of terror: The making of Deadwood Manor

BY SHIANN SIVELL
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In the light of day, when the fog machine and the myriad of lights decorating Aiken resident Jonathan Barton's back yard are off, Deadwood Manor – Aiken's very own haunted attraction – looks like a slightly off-putting junkyard.

However, when the sun sets and Deadwood Manor's ghouls come out to play, the tarps and wires turn into a maze of terror for those who dare enter.

From jagged sheets to chicken wire and a collection of inexpensive decorations, Barton makes do with just about anything he has on hand to get the manor up and running to its scariest potential.

Located at 27 Deerwood Drive, Deadwood Manor has been under construction since early August and will take until opening day, this Friday, to fully complete.

"When everybody else is cutting their grass, I'm putting up tombstones," Barton joked. "(The neighbors) think I'm nuts, but they seem



STAFF PHOTO BY SHIANN SIVELL

Deadwood Manor's haunted graveyard is pictured.

to like it, even if they think it's a little trashy sometimes."

Most props are recycled from previous Deadwood Manors, while others are donated from neighbors or even former visitors who come across them during cleanups, Barton said. To put it all together, including buying new supplies, the Bartons estimate a budget of \$1,000 or more – and that's not

including an electric bill.

Local organizations and businesses, such as Habitat for Humanity and Tractor Supply, have donated supplies to the Barton family for their cause for several years, offsetting some of the cost.

Each "room" of Deadwood Manor has a unique theme that changes from year to year. Greeting visitors this year

Want to go?

WHAT: Deadwood Manor haunted house
WHERE: 27 Deerwood Drive
WHEN: Oct. 23-24, 30-31

will be an ornery hillbilly in a swamp shack who will chase visitors further into the clutches of horror icons like Norman Bates and his mother and Freddy Kruger.

While Barton does the majority of the "grunt work" of Deadwood Manor, the planning is a family affair that starts after Christmas each year, Barton said.

Barton's wife, Jessica, follows a lot of do-it-yourself websites to brainstorm new ideas for props and decorations and has come up with simple yet effective solutions, such as using hot glue strands as spiderwebbing.

"We see something and think, 'We can do that, and maybe do it a little better,'" Jessica said.

Barton's daughter, "BB," 18, handles

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