



SECOND FRONT

E-mail: pressrelease@theitem.com

Crestwood field updates, rezoning attendance lines before school board Monday

Public participation on agenda

BY BRUCE MILLS
bruce@theitem.com

Updates on the Crestwood High School football field/athletic complex and the district's rezoning of schools' attendance lines for implementation in the 2026-27 school year will be before Sumter School District's Board of Trustees on Monday.

An Office of Academics presentation on district-wide academic strategies and attendance plans for the upcoming school year, monthly financial reports and public participation also



WRIGHT

highlight the agenda, which was posted online on Friday. The meeting is the board's regularly scheduled meeting for the month of July.

Regarding renovations to Crestwood's football field that have been in the works for more than a year, Superintendent William Wright Jr. informed *The Sumter Item* on Wednesday that the plan is for the stadium to be ready for the team's opening home game on Aug. 22 against rival Manning High.

Wright will also provide the update on the district's rezoning of attendance lines, officially called realignment. On May 19, the trustees voted 5-4 to implement realignment one year from now with the start of the 2026-27 school year. The measure will keep all 24 of the district's schools open, despite declining enrollment for nearly a decade, and balance enrollments across the schools.

At that May meeting, the full board turned down a substitute motion to prioritize first a "bigger picture" master plan involving several factors to include the age of school buildings, consolidations and a capital development program for new schools.

Also, Monday's executive session behind closed doors for the trustees includes the receipt of legal advice from the board's attorney and contractual matters, per the agenda.

On May 2, two days after a special-called meeting on April 30 to discuss legal and personnel matters with its attorney, the full board issued a statement that despite "rumors" in the community it was not trying to terminate Wright. But the statement did say the superintendent did want to resign June 30 in exchange for three years' pay. However, the trustees would not accept his proposal.

Then, at the board's June 23 meeting, trustees conducted an unusual mid-year evaluation of the superintendent during executive session, which lasted two hours.

When the board returned to open session, Chairman Shawn Ragin did not provide a statement on the evaluation.

Monday's meeting will begin at 6 p.m. at the district office, 1345 Wilson Hall Road.

Regarding public participation, any member of the public wanting to make a comment to the board on any topic must arrive before the 6 p.m. start time — as early as 5:30 p.m. — and complete a form to speak.

For those not physically attending, the district continues to broadcast meetings live on YouTube.

Anyone wanting to attend the meeting virtually can do so via YouTube Sumter School District Board Meeting and the district's Facebook page, @SumterSCSchools.

Under-construction BJ's Wholesale granted variance for 40-foot sign

BY DEIRDRE CURRIN
deirdre@theitem.com

A larger than usual sign for the still-in-construction BJ's, fire station improvements and a pavilion at USC Sumter were all before Sumter's Board of Zoning Appeals on Wednesday, July 9.

Sumter's permanent sign standards dictate the maximum height of free-standing signs in the General Commercial zoning district is 30 feet. The variance requested for BJ's Wholesale, which will be at 1475 Alice Drive, was a 10-foot increase for an overall sign height of 40 feet.

The applicant, Jay Davis, said the signage would be critical for visibility from the Alice Drive and Broad Street intersection.

During the public comment period for the request, one resident who lives close to the new construction spoke against the variance. She said she was addressing concerns from her and her neighbors about what the board will keep bending to, citing the applicants knew what the sign standards were when they began their sign development.

One person spoke in favor of the request: the installer of the sign who said the extra 10 feet will not be noticeable to residents.

The request was approved by all but one board member.

Initially, the request was for a 50-foot-tall, free-standing sign, but it was removed from the board's June agenda, scaled down and presented at the July meeting.

The fire station at 2041 Stadium Road was ap-

proved to construct an addition on the east side of the building and to construct a 600-square-foot storage building on the property's west side behind the station.

The east side addition would house a new fire truck bay. The project will also include the construction of a new parking area to the rear of the building, a new fire truck access to Stadium Road, storm-water improvements and a living quarters addition.

The variance is required for setback standards. The station is on land zoned R-15 where there is a 50-foot setback required for non-residential uses. The station requested a 35-foot setback variance for the storage building and a 44-foot setback variance for the building addition.

Fire Chief Karl Ford said the station was built in 1993 and the fire department has outgrown it. The variance was unanimously passed by the board.

An application by the Mid-Carolina Commission for Higher Education for an outdoor, roofed pavilion on USC Sumter's campus was also approved by the board.

The pavilion will be about 16 feet and has a proposed use of supporting educational activities. It will be on two separate parcels, which are both part of USC Sumter's campus, but were purchased by two agencies at different times, resulting in the need for a variance. A variance was also granted for a distance requirement that ordains whenever more than one principal building is to be on a lot, the buildings must be separated by a horizontal distance that is at least equal to the height of the highest adjacent building.

Musical duo Johnson, Sepulveda represent Sumter well in Sweden

BY ALAYSHA MAPLE
alaysha@theitem.com

Sumter is well-represented in Sweden, thanks to a hometown dynamic duo.

Sonja Sepulveda and Herbert Johnson have spent the summer traveling and performing internationally, representing Sumter and South Carolina during the MidAmerica Productions International concert season in Stockholm and Uppsala, Sweden. Sepulveda is one of several renowned conductors on the tour, while Johnson is a featured soloist and one of 209 voices in the international choir. The pair perform on the international stage every summer, having been to Greece, London and Paris in previous years.

"We just want to remind our community that when we go out and do great things on an international level, we carry them with us," Johnson expressed.

On July 8, Sepulveda directed the Stockholm Concert Orchestra in Kungsholm Church at Bergsgatan on the island of Kungsholm, performing the spiritual "In Dat Great Gittin' Up Mornin'," arranged by Jester Hairston with Johnson as the soloist. The group moved on to Uppsala on July 11 to perform at Uppsala Cathedral two requiems by Rutter and Faure with the British composer John Rutter conducting the Stockholm Con-



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Sonja Sepulveda, center, with Herbert Johnson, far right, back row, and Francis Marion University students and professor Fran Coleman pose at Kungsholm Church.

cert Orchestra.

Fran Coleman from Francis Marion University in Florence and her students traveled with the two Sumterites to represent the state and country.

The pair will head to Vienna, Austria, next year, June 14-21, 2026, to perform four spirituals by M. Roger Holland II and a concert of spirituals in Salzburg, the home of "The Sound of Music."

Anyone interested in singing with Sepulveda and Johnson can contact DeAnna Lee at deannalyonslee@gmail.com.



Sonja Sepulveda, bottom center, conducts the Stockholm Concert Orchestra during "In Dat Great Gittin' Up Mornin'" featuring Herbert Johnson as soloist.

OSTEEN

PUBLISHING COMPANY
Established 1894

36 W. LIBERTY ST., SUMTER, S.C. 29150
(803) 774-1200

Vince Johnson

PUBLISHER
vince@theitem.com

Kayla Green

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
kayla@theitem.com
(803) 774-1235

Jill Burrus

CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGER
CLASSIFIEDS, SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DELIVERY
jill@theitem.com
(803) 774-1212

Melanie Smith

ASSISTANT EDITOR
melanie@theitem.com
(803) 774-1293

HOW TO REACH US

IS YOUR PAPER MISSING?
ARE YOU GOING ON VACATION?

Call (803) 774-1258 or (803) 774-1231
Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Friday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

TO PLACE A NEWSPAPER AD

To place an ad, call (803) 774-1242, (803) 774-1274 or (803) 983-0786 Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., or email advertising@theitem.com.

To place a classified ad, call (803) 774-1231 or (803) 774-1258 Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

TO PLACE AN OBITUARY

Obituaries must be submitted by a funeral home. Email obits@theitem.com.

REFUND POLICY FOR PRINT SUBSCRIPTIONS (ENROLLED IN THE MONTHLY, QUARTERLY or annual EZ PAY PROGRAM) Cancellations are effective only for future charges. You may notify us of your intent to cancel at any time, but the cancellation will become effective at the end of the billing cycle your notification is received. You will continue to receive the newspaper until the end of the billing cycle, including digital access. You may choose to discontinue receiving the newspaper immediately upon notifying us of your intent to cancel; however, your subscription account will not be canceled until the end of the billing cycle, and you will continue to have digital access during that period. You are welcome to donate your unused newspapers to the local schools if requested.

TO BUY A SUBSCRIPTION

Call (803) 774-1258 or (803) 774-1231 Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., or online at www.theitem.com/subscribe.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Standard Home Delivery plus Digital Subscription:

WEDNESDAY AND SATURDAY DELIVERED VIA USPS

One year - \$229.99; six months - \$119.99; three months - \$59.99; one month - \$19.99

Digital-only Subscription to *TheItem.com*:

One year - \$143; one month - \$12.99

The Sumter Item is published each Wednesday and Saturday by Osteen Publishing Co., 36 W. Liberty St., Sumter, SC 29150, and delivered via USPS. Major holiday delivery may be altered due to USPS schedule.

Periodical postage paid at Sumter, SC 29150.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Osteen Publishing Co., 36 W. Liberty St., Sumter, SC 29150.

Publication No. USPS 525-900