

TOWN OF
IRMO
EVENTS COMMITTEE



EVENTS COMMITTEE MEETING

Irmo Municipal Building
7300 Woodrow Street, Irmo, SC 29063

January 22, 2026 @ 6:00 PM

AGENDA

- I. Call to Order
- II. Approval of the Minutes
 - A. Minutes of the November 13, 2025 meeting
- III. Election of Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary
- IV. Old Business
 - A. After Action Review of the Christmas Parade
- V. New Business
 - A. Discussion concerning the Chili Cookoff
- VI. Discussion
- VII. Presentation by Citizens
- VIII. Adjournment

ADA Notice: The Town of Irmo complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. For meeting accommodations, call (803) 781-7050 during normal business hours and ask for the Events Manager or the Communications Director.

Nov 13, 2025

Irmo Events Committee

In Attendance:

Gabriel Penfield

Cynthia Giles

Chelsea Christiansen

George Frazier

Doug Polen

Details

George Started the meeting at 6:05pm

- **Discussion of Past and Future Events** The committee moved to formalize the meeting structure to include "past events" and "current events" instead of "old business" and "new business," aligning with the council's method. They then proceeded to discuss the recent "trunk or treat" event, which experienced overwhelming attendance, with over a thousand people in line, leading to a shortage of donated candy and potential costs to the town.
- **Trunk or Treat Event Strategy** To address the high turnout and candy shortage, Doug suggested that participants, referred to as vendors, should be required to bring a specified large quantity of candy, such as 2,000 pieces, with the town providing only emergency backup ([00:02:05](#)). They noted that the event has grown every year and suggested partnering with businesses for sponsorships to manage the candy supply and the strain on resources ([00:03:01](#)).
- **Candy Supplementation Policy** There was a debate regarding the town's responsibility to supplement candy, as many participants expected refills ([00:06:50](#)) ([00:10:54](#)). Chelsea explained that they previously secured donated candy from local grocery stores to prevent trunks from leaving early ([00:08:02](#)). A specific incident was mentioned where Laser Chicken, a paid vendor, expected the town to supply their candy, leading to the decision that the application language for the event must be very specific about vendors supplying their own candy ([00:08:56](#)).

- **Trunk or Treat Vendor Expectations and Expansion** The committee decided they need to be explicit in the application process about vendor expectations for candy contributions ([00:12:34](#)). They discussed having between 30 and 40 candy distributors, which could handle a large number of guests if managed correctly, and considered expanding the event into the park with a pedestrian-focused "Trunk-or-Treat Festival" atmosphere, possibly including hanging lanterns and contests ([00:13:38](#)). It was suggested that participants should be trained to hand out only two pieces of candy per guest unless it is full-size candy ([00:16:30](#)).
- **Long-term Planning and Staffing for Events** It was recommended that planning for the trunk or treat event should begin earlier, possibly with sign-ups for vendors starting in August ([00:17:29](#)). Doug revealed plans to hire a full-time events person for the town, possibly starting in January, as large events require planning to begin the day after the previous year's event ([00:18:19](#)). They acknowledged that the event is one of the town's biggest and is continuously growing ([00:19:14](#)).
- **Tree Lighting Event Coordination** The discussion moved to the Christmas tree lighting event. Doug presented notes from Danielle detailing the plan: Santa will arrive at 6 PM via the Irmo Fire District's fire truck after the gazebo ceremony. Liberty Tax will provide cookies, Dunar Funeral Home will provide hot cocoa, and Jim Crosslin suggested ordering pizzas from Little House of Pizza ([00:22:50](#)). Doug offered to manage the AV ([00:23:52](#)).
- **Santa Photo Location and Backdrop** A suggestion was made to have Santa sit in the swing underneath the big tree for photos, as it's a beautiful, lit location with easy crowd management ([00:23:52](#)). Chelsea offered to build a Christmas-themed backdrop to prevent photo-bombing and create a more professional feel for the photos, with the intent to conduct a site visit beforehand ([00:24:57](#)). Liz with the fire department, a professional photographer, will be taking the photos ([00:26:57](#)).
- **Sound System and Food Sourcing for Tree Lighting** Gabe bought a better sound system, and the portable PV system used for the Cherry Blossom event was offered ([00:26:57](#)). Ideas for future improvements included installing waterproof speakers disguised as rocks in the parks for public music ([00:27:50](#)). The group considered ordering the 60-70 pizzas needed for the event from Costco for volume and cost-effectiveness, suggesting a potential sponsorship opportunity ([00:28:41](#)).

- **Christmas Parade Sign-ups and Refunds** The Christmas Parade has seen significant traction in sign-ups, reaching nearly 70 participants. The committee addressed issues with people signing up without paying and non-profits overpaying ([00:32:28](#)). They established that any refunds must be issued through Lisa and tentatively agreed to a general no-refund policy, but may honor an early cancellation refund this year while implementing stricter cancellation deadlines next year ([00:34:35](#)).
- **Proposed Parade Route Changes** There was discussion about a potential major change to the parade route suggested by Jim Crosslin, proposing to shut down all four lanes of St. Andrews Road and stage the parade at Irmo High School ([00:37:18](#)). The idea was to create a longer, more properly staged parade, and there was an appetite to switch to a lit night parade in future years, possibly on Woodro Street ([00:38:27](#)).
- **Current Year Parade Plan and Logistics** Given the upcoming date, the decision was made to stick with the original plan for this year to maintain consistency, which follows the existing method and uses the Crossroads staging area ([00:44:44](#)) ([00:50:52](#)). The advantage of staging on the road was cited as creating a longer parade and potentially accommodating more floats ([00:45:39](#)). The need for a map of the Crossroads staging area was brought up to better plan float positioning ([00:46:34](#)).
- **Parade Space Allocation and Communication** The group acknowledged the need to clarify space requirements for large entries (like those with multiple trucks and trailers) in future applications ([00:47:46](#)). They emphasized the importance of being able to easily contact participants via email for day-of changes ([00:45:39](#)). The committee decided to proceed with the initial plan for the first year, focusing on organization and tightening up specific language for the following year ([00:50:52](#)).
- **Community Enthusiasm and Event Enhancement** The committee believes the Christmas parade will be well-received, especially since they anticipate better weather than the prior Okra Strut event ([00:52:00](#)). The committee approved adding a full page of detailed information about the parade to the Irmo Charm website. They also decided to incorporate a non-perishable food drive for Serve and Connect during the parade, with Serve and Connect collecting items along the route ([00:54:13](#)).

- **Parade Order and Performances** The committee will meet to organize the parade order to ensure a varied and interesting sequence of entries ([00:57:52](#)). The plan for performers, such as dance teams and bands, is for them to perform within the parade segments, stopping briefly while the rest of the parade maintains continuous movement, similar to the Macy's Day parade model ([00:59:03](#)).
- **Future Parade Performance and Logistical Improvements** Cynthia Giles discussed the need for improved coordination for future events like the Christmas parade, suggesting incorporating staggered performance areas or a full stop along the route to prevent gaps in the procession ([01:00:09](#)). They also emphasized the need for better sound and communication systems for performers and announcers, noting a request from WLTX for a better system after their experience at a previous event ([01:01:14](#)). Cynthia Giles mentioned the possibility of live-streaming the parade, especially if a news anchor like the one from WLTX is involved ([01:02:06](#)).
- **"Best Of" Categories and Sponsorship Opportunities** Cynthia Giles suggested implementing "best of" categories for events, possibly creating three categories for judges at the end of the parade, with recognition like Facebook shoutouts or trophies. They volunteered to sponsor the trophies. The discussion shifted to a need for a formalized list of sponsorship opportunities year-round, as multiple businesses expressed interest after an initial request for Santa sponsorship was filled ([01:03:01](#)). Chelsea noted that this full list, which Gabe is reportedly finalizing, would help businesses budget for event support throughout the year ([01:05:19](#)).
- **Chili Cookoff Planning and Expansion** George proposed discussing the dates for the 2026 Chili Cookoff, suggesting the last Saturday of January (the 31st), with a rain date of February 7th ([01:07:12](#)). They aim to increase the number of competitors ([01:08:25](#)). The group also discussed expanding the competition's categories beyond First, Second, and Third place and People's Choice, to include first responders from outside Irmo, restaurants, citizens, and churches ([01:07:12](#)) ([01:09:47](#)). They noted that participation in the cookoff currently has no cost, just the requirement for participants to cook at least five gallons of chili ([01:12:53](#)).
- **Partnerships for the Chili Cookoff** The group discussed the history of partnering with different organizations for the Chili Cookoff, including the Kidney Foundation, Junior Diabetes, and most recently, McGregor Presbyterian Church. McGregor Presbyterian Church has been involved by selling pottery to raise funds for their snack pack program, with the church also receiving a percentage of

ticket sales from the event ([01:14:44](#)). It was suggested to explore opening up partnerships to other churches or non-profits that could offer alternative items for sale or a prize for a category, which could also help with advertising within their congregations ([01:17:17](#)) ([01:19:42](#)).

- **Potential for Chili Cookoff Revenue and Growth** The discussion proposed that the Chili Cookoff could include vendors selling related items like drinks, barbecue rubs, and grilling supplies, expanding beyond just non-profits ([01:21:28](#)). A key question raised was whether they could sell beer to generate revenue for future events, which was confirmed as doable, potentially turning the event into a "full festival" ([01:22:28](#)). To grow the event, it was suggested that organizers start reaching out to non-profits and participants in the summertime ([01:21:28](#)). Dr. Walden also suggested considering the District 5 Foundation's snack program as a beneficiary for the profits, as they support multiple schools within the town limits ([01:45:02](#)).
- **Event Committee Membership Policy Review** A discussion was initiated regarding the process for filling vacant seats on the Events Committee, with a proposal to allow committee members to interview applicants and recommend candidates to the council ([01:23:33](#)). It was argued that hands-on committees like Events and Okra Strut require members who are willing to be actively involved ([01:24:40](#)) ([01:27:17](#)). Doug plans to bring this change to the council workshop ([01:26:26](#)). They also mentioned considering expanding the eligibility for committee members to include people who live outside the town limits, similar to the Okra Strut committee, to attract the best-qualified people ([01:25:31](#)).
- **Secretary Role and Committee Term Limits** A brief discussion was held about the secretary role for the Events Committee, noting the current note-taker's unofficial status and the tradition of electing a Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary in January ([01:32:35](#)). Cynthia Giles confirmed that the committee would vote and nominate among themselves for these positions in January ([01:34:30](#)). They mentioned that there are no term limits for the chair position, though there are limits to how long one can serve as a commissioner ([01:33:28](#)).
- **Update on the October 18th Walk Event** An public update was provided on the walk event held on October 18th, which saw about 4,500 attendees, 235 registrants, 38 vendors, and 17 sponsors. The event featured free clothing and accessories, a focus on targeting the blind and disabled, and strong interaction from the police and fire departments ([01:35:28](#)). A highlight was the Mayor

speaking and taking pictures, which impressed attendees, and it was suggested this should be promoted next year ([01:36:21](#)).

- **Accessibility Concerns and Future Walk Planning** The event update included addressing areas for improvement, specifically safety ramps and the yellow metal cable covers in the park, which posed difficulties for wheelchair users and the blind ([01:37:27](#)). The committee member suggested collaborating with the person working on the "all-inclusive" event to address these accessibility issues ([01:38:22](#)). Another logistical concern raised was the park sprinklers being on the morning of the event, which resulted in wet surfaces and difficulties for vendors and attendees, something to coordinate with the town moving forward ([01:39:24](#)). The event was deemed a success for helping three people relocate ([01:40:56](#)). The next event is scheduled for October 17th, 2026 with the date confirmed ([01:41:53](#)).
- Meeting ended 7.46pm