

WALHALLA — It's been more than four years since Oconee County decided it was time to put together a blueprint for the future.

Led by the Oconee Alliance, a Florida-based consultant was hired to lead a series of town hall meetings that got people talking about what matters most to them and how they'd like the county to look a couple of decades down the road.



The ideas that came out of those town hall sessions resulted in the 2028 Oconee by Choice vision plan.

Many of the issues being talked about today are contained in the 2028 Oconee by Choice blueprint — zoning, conservation easements, Scenic Highway Overlay, recycling, county commuter buses and more.

The blueprint has been embraced by some, but rejected by others.

Chanda Morrison is a young mom in Mountain Rest, who with her husband, would love to see the beauty around them preserved for their young children to enjoy.

Morrison is constantly spinning ideas in her head of things that could be done to make this planet a better place to live for everyone.

She looks around at the waste that goes on at supermarkets and restaurants, and thinks of incentives to promote "green, sustainable and earth-friendly" practices at home, school and work.

"I think there are a lot



'A lot of people concerned'

Conservation issues draw opposing views

Oconee residents who are passionate about preserving the county's natural attractions want to see elected officials and those seeking public office address conservation issues in this election cycle.

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of people concerned about this kind of stuff," Morrison said.

The trips to the convenience center that Morrison takes to sort her trash and recycle can get wearisome after a while when she sees that the county is not doing enough to get more people involved.

Morrison wonders what's going to happen in a few years when the county realizes it no lon-

ger can afford paying to haul its trash to Homer, Ga.

"We need to be voting for people who are thinking about these things," Morrison said.

There are others, just as Morrison, who participate in a working group that meets to promote and help enact the ideas contained in "A Natural Choice" — one of the six components in the

Oconee by Choice blueprint.

Alice Wald is a leader with the group. She outlined the group's priorities:

- Conserving natural resources as a priority by promoting balanced growth and development to protect scenic areas, working farms and historic sites;

CONSERVATION: '... but we already have 85,000

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- Promote and support the fledgling Oconee County Conservation Bank to encourage protection of scenic areas, working farms and historic sites;
- Enforce the litter ordinance with penalties and see more coordination by county agencies in the control of litter, recycling

and waste management;

- Promote a shift away from being an oil-reliant economy by producing, manufacturing and generating business closer to home; and
- Generally encouraging everyone to be better stewards of the environment.

Donna and Larry Linsin made a career working for the U.S. Forest Service,

and they can appreciate the many natural resources found in the county.

They took part in several of the town hall meetings that led to the creation of the 2028 vision plan. They were not sold on the process or the content.

"The question they would never answer is how you're going to pay for this," Donna Linsin said.

"They asked, 'What would you like to see in Oconee in 25 years?' Frankly, their goals are not my goals."

The Linsins said they are particularly concerned with the push to protect more Oconee County land with conservation easements. They said that as more properties are given tax shelters with these easements, and taken off

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acres set aside'

the county's tax rolls, the tax burden would shift to other Oconee property owners.

"When I left the Forest Service, we had about 85,000 acres, more or less, protected by the Forest Service or state and county parks ..." Larry Linsin said. "I don't think anybody in the county would rather drive by a factory as they would a

waterfall or a ridge, but we already have 85,000 acres set aside."

Regardless of differing point of views on these issues, the opposing sides agree they are important, and they expect candidates running for three contested County Council seats in this election to address them.