AID, hotel plans move forward

BY MIKE EADS
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WALHALLA — The Oconee County Council moved ahead Tuesday night with tax breaks for a Georgia-based aerospace manufacturer and a plan to turn the county's abandoned courthouse into an upscale hotel.

The council approved the first reading of Ordinance 2012-37, a Fee-in-Lieu-of-Tax agreement between the county and A.I.D. Company, plus Resolution R2012-18, which fixes the millage for the firm's new Oconee facility at 204.3 mils, the rate at the time A.I.D. committed to moving its operation here, for the next 20 years.

A measure approving Courthouse Ventures LLC's plans for the old courthouse, Ordinance 2012-38, also passed its first reading. In addition, the council voted in favor of an agreement with the developers stating the county's intent to sell the property.

"This says, 'Hey, we want to move forward with this project,'" County Administrator Scott Moulder told council members.

Both measures appear to have the support of the entire council and should clear second and third readings to become law by mid-January.

The council also gave its blessing to hiring Roebuck Buildings of Roebuck, S.C., to build the new, 11,000-square-foot Seneca offices of Anderson Oconee Behavioral Health Services (AOBHS). The council has agreed to sell bond and take ownership of the building, provided it will not cost more than $1.6 million.

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"We are all hoping it comes in for less than that," Moulder told the council.

A final price won't be determined until the council, AOBHS and the contractor all sign off on final construction plans.

IN OTHER BUSINESS:

• The council agreed to donate $3,000 worth of gravel for the completion of a parking-lot expansion within Oconee State Park. Park Manager JoAnna White asked for the donation after the park failed to land a grant to pay for the work. Council member Wayne McCall urged his colleagues to support the request, saying that park personnel are forced work each year with fewer and fewer resources and still maintain a good operation. "We'd be doing the county and state a service by doing this," McCall said.

• Chairman Joel Thrift announced upcoming public meetings. There is a workshop with the members of the county's statehouse delegation set for 9 a.m. Dec. 14 in the council's chambers at the county administration center. Duke Energy officials will appear before the council at 6 p.m. Dec. 20 to discuss their ongoing work to secure new federal licensing to continue operating the Keowee-Toxaway hydroelectric facility.

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