Big problems await next

Administrator hopefuls claim experience handling the types

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WALHALLA — Given Oconee County's looming challenges — sewer expansion, increasing jail space, courthouse improvements, expanding the scope of economic development and managing growth — do any of the hopefuls for the county administrator job have what it takes to tackle these demanding issues head on?

Resumes released this week of the final-four candidates still standing for Oconee's top job show, at least on paper, that they have experience handling some of the big problems facing Oconee.

For instance, Leonard B. Sossoman lists among his accomplishments as a county administrator in Newberry and city manager in Concord, N.C., having planned and directed the development of numerous infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, water and sewer plants and lines.

Sossoman also has experience as a legislator having served as a member of the North Carolina House of Representatives during the 2000 session.

Oconee County Council members trying to make up their minds on whom to recruit, have no doubt noticed that Sossoman recruited Caterpillar to open a plant in one of the county-owned industrial parks in Newberry and that he oversaw the renovation of Newberry's historic courthouse.

Walter K. Munchheimer is no stranger to handling growth and big government. For more than eight years he served as director of Financial Management in Palm Beach County, one of the largest urban centers in Florida and the wealthiest.

After being responsible for an operating budget of $169 million and a capital budget of $500 million, Oconee's $43.3 million operating budget must seem like pocket change to Munchheimer.

In 2006, Munchheimer participated in a study to revamp the strategic focus of Palm Beach County's economic development effort. Sounds familiar?

In a previous job as Deputy County Manager in Fulton County, Ga., Munchheimer highlights directing the structuring of a $300 million bond issue for water and wastewater system expansion and technology upgrades.

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Oconee County boss

of challenges area now faces

Although William M. Watson's more than 15-year career with Union County Government in Monroe, N.C., has been as director of Personnel, he's been recognized for his work initiating the first "Consumer Driven Health Plan" model provided by a local government in the southern United States.

All of the finalists are seasoned and have been around the block a few times. For example, S. Hal Mason is twice retired. In February, he stepped down as City Administrator of Hanahan just north of Charleston after almost five years on the job.

Prior to that, Mason spent more than 11 years as Assistant City Manager in Shelby, N.C. until retiring for the first time in 2005. According to published reports, he moved on after being passed over for the then-vacant city manager position.

Among his achievements, Mason notes having improved the availability of affordable housing in Shelby through Community Development Block Grant funding and creative financing. He also touts having worked with government and community leaders to attract new jobs after the textile industry demise.