Building permits up, 'clear trend' in activity



JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Oconee County has issued building permits for construction of 27 new homes in January and February, giving local officials cause for optimism. Overall, there were 229 building permits issued in the county in the first two months of 2013, compared with 179 for the same period last year and 129 permits issued in January-February 2011.

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WALHALLA — Building permits issued in Oconee County in the first two months of 2013 are higher than for the same period in each of the previous two years, giving local officials reason for optimism about the housing market.

"There is a clear trend of increased permit activity," said Josh Stephens, county zoning administrator. "It is not the boom we all want, but things are gradually getting better in terms of building activity. The increased number of new homes is an encouraging sign, and we anticipate this trend to continue to improve over this year and following years."

Stephens said 229 total building permits were issued in January and February – 27 of which were for new homes. The total number of permits is 50 more than the 179 issued during the first two months of 2012, when 25 permits were issued for new homes.

The 2013 numbers are 100 more than the 129 total permits in January-February 2011, which included 24 new homes.

Stephens said he is also seeing more applications for new subdivisions in the county. He said there are currently subdivisions preparing to submit plans for formal review and others are talking to his office about subdivisions which could be presented later in the year.

"This is very encouraging because subdivision activity has essentially been non-existent for the past couple of years," he said.

Kevin Cope, a Seneca Realtor and chairman of the board of directors for the Western Upstate Association of Realtors, said the increase in new construction is a good sign for the housing market.

"The positive thing is new construction," said Cope. "We're seeing more new home starts and the majority of them are not spec homes. They are people's houses that are being built custom for them."

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