

WALHALLA — The zoning debate in Oconee County took an unexpected turn Monday



Heller

night when a planning commissioner called for a vote to have County Council implement top-down zoning.

District 1 Commissioner Andrea "Andy" Heller's presented the motion and District 5 Commissioner Gwen McPhail seconded it.

The suggestion generated a spirited discussion amid jeers and catcalls from by some in the audience.

Eventually, the Oconee County Planning Commission decided not to recommend top-down zoning to council by a 4-2 vote. However, the debate points again to the emotional roller coaster ride the zoning process is producing for many.

Heller alluded to it when she referenced The Journal's series last week that looked at a controversial rezoning decision by County Council in light of emails obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request.

"It's a painful process..." Heller said. "In my opinion, citizen-initiated zoning is not working in a timely manner."

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Call for top-down zoning quashed

Motion by Oconee District 1 planner is voted down

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

ZONING: 'I think citizen-initiated zoning is flawed,' Heller said

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Heller argued that with top-down zoning "you're not looking parcel to parcel."

Commissioner Howard Moore disagreed with the idea.

"I have a problem with us not doing our jobs," he said.

Heller did not back down.

"We'd still be doing our jobs..." she said. "I think citizen-initiated zoning is flawed."

Commission Chairman Ryan Honea said he would not want to make such a recommendation to council without the idea being vetted first with input from the public.

"We got in trouble by moving too fast with zoning," he said.

Commissioner Bill Gilster failed in a bid to amend the motion that would have allowed council to work with the commission to have something other than citizen-initiated zoning.

Oconee implemented its Zoning

Enabling Ordinance in May 2009. The law allows for rezoning through three methods — planning district, small area or citizen-initiated and county-initiated in which County Council could rezone any or all parcels.

To date, only the small-area method has been used.

Earlier, the commission voted to send the nearly 3,000-parcel Keowee Key/Stamp Creek rezoning petition back to council with staff's recommendations.

One of the recommendations is to apply Community Commercial District to a string of businesses, including Councilman Wayne McCall's diving business.

McCall and his brother, Keller, had asked to be left off the petition or be rezoned industrial.

The vast majority of properties in the petition presented by Gary Owens are being zoned Lake Residential.

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