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# Comprehensive Plan resurfaces

## Discussion comes as Oconee tries to get back on track with its rezoning requests

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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**IF YOU GO**
**What:** Oconee County Council meeting
**When:** 6 tonight
**Where:** Council Chambers, 415 S. Pine St., Walhalla

WALHALLA — Somewhat lost in the shuffle over the past eight months — as Oconee County officials juggled their attention on a myriad of pressing issues — the updated Comprehensive Plan resurfaces on tonight's Oconee County Council agenda.

The timing for a renewed discussion on the plan, which some would describe as a blueprint to the county's future, could not come at a better time.

Among the nine elements or subjects analyzed in the Comprehensive Plan is Land Use, which includes the county's Future Land Use Map.

A discussion on Land Use is critically relevant as Oconee tries to get back on track with a backlog of rezoning requests put on hold as officials try to figure out how to proceed with two overlapping petitions on properties on or near Lake Keowee.

Council Chairman Reg Dexter is concerned that the Method 2 use of property owners' signatures on a petition to request a particular rezoning category is mistakenly looked on as a vote or will of a certain group.

Dexter points out that the courts in South Carolina, as County Attorney Tom Martin has pointed out many times, have consistently ruled

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against the notion that zoning could be brought about by a vote.

According to Martin, South Carolina jurisprudence gives County Council the final say on zoning and that the council relies on the Comprehensive Plan and a county's FLUM in making any decision.

The council is expected to approve on second reading the Comprehensive Plan tonight. Public hearings and a third and final reading of the plan is set for October.

State law requires counties to update their Comprehensive Plan every five years. The second reading of the Comprehensive Plan leads to an initial look at an ordinance to create the Oconee County Conservation Bank.

Such a bank is one of the recommendations contained in the Comprehensive Plan.

Dexter said the Conservation Bank ordinance deliberately omits how to fund it. He said that once the bank is organized, the county would be better positioned to go after grants.

Other funding options for the bank would be left up to taxpayers in the future, he said. The ordinance also would call for the appointment of a seven-member board to oversee the Conservation Bank.

Another ordinance being taken up on first reading is one that would allow the county to purchase more than 400 acres on Highway 11.

This proposal was originally contained with the purchase of two other properties but was separated so that Councilman Joel Thrift could abstain from voting on the Highway 11 property.

Thrift said he is abstaining because his childhood friend owns the Highway 11 property.

carlos@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6685