

# Corbeil denies

District 1 councilman says he sought 'fair outcome'



BY CARLOS GALARZA  
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WALHALLA — The elected official caught in a firestorm of controversy regarding zoning in Oconee County spoke openly for the

first time Thursday, addressing his handling of "overlapping" petitions by constituents in his voting district.

District 1 Councilman Paul Corbeil opened up three days after initially saying

that he would reserve comment until The Journal finished its series based on emails he sent to other council members, county staff and private citizens.

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To read the emails and attachments provided by Oconee County and referred to in this story go to: <http://upstatetoday.com/index.php/rezoning>

# collusion

# COUNCILMAN: 'My intent was to work through our difficulties'

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The emails obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request show time and time again that Corbeil was front and center on discussions dealing with the rezoning of North Cane Creek and North Fairview properties on or near Lake Keowee.



How transparent do you feel the county has been?

sought.

They point to the emails as proof that Corbeil worked much too closely with Jim Codner, who spearheaded the North Cane Creek petition. Codner also wears the hat of president of Advocates for Quality Development, Inc.

Corbeil said this week, just as Codner did earlier, that there was no collusion.

He said the preponderance of emails is part of his management style for sharing information and ideas with others to work out a compromise. The goal, Corbeil said, was to find a win-win situation and not undermine anyone.

"My intent was to work through our difficulties and get a fair outcome," Corbeil said.

The emails, Corbeil added, show that Andrea "Andy" Heller, the District 1 Planning Commission member, set up a meeting with Jennings, Gary McMahan and Codner early in the petition

process.

Eventually, Corbeil said, Jennings took the position that she should get Traditional Rural zoning because it was what she wanted.



Corbeil

Corbeil said a comment made by a Planning Commission member to the effect that anything you request in zoning "you get," probably gave Jennings the wrong impression of how the process is supposed to work.

"There were offers to meet," Corbeil said. "After it got heated up (Jennings) indicated no interest to meet with us ..."

The emails released by the county offer no indication that such offers were ever extended to Jennings beyond the first meeting arranged by Heller.

"I honestly believe that certain people opposed to zoning basically decided that the Jennings and McMahan petition would be the battleground for zoning ...," he added. "It became a political football."

Jennings recalled Friday the one meeting she had with Corbeil, Heller and Gary McMahan.

"Before we'd hardly sat down good, they started recommending something else," she said. "I knew where they were going with that, and I wasn't interested."

Corbeil also brushed aside criticism that the services of County Attorney Tom Martin were used to give Codner and AQD legal advice. He said it had nothing to do with giving legal advice to an individual, but rather to get an expert interpretation on the zoning process.

"It wasn't Paul Corbeil's interpretation, it was com-

ing from our attorney,"

Corbeil said. "I don't recall asking any questions other than on grandfathering."

In fact, grandfathering was the topic of a Sept. 14, 2010, email from Corbeil to County Administrator Scott Moulder. In that correspondence, Corbeil wrote, "Jim Codner ... raises a good question here ... I'm trying to route all legal questions thru you to help manage that expense."

About a month later, Codner emailed directly to Corbeil and Martin.

"Please indulge me in making sure I understand this issue and that we are all on the same page," he wrote, again referring to grandfathering. He goes on to ask Martin if he probably understands the attorney's position on the issue.

Codner, however, is just as adamant that there was no impropriety involving the county attorney.

"There was no attempt to get free legal advice, and no benefit to AQD other than to understand the rules," Codner said. "AQD doesn't need free legal advice. We have a very competent attorney on retainer and consult with him regularly."

Corbeil said that to be criticized for going the extra mile to find a solution to an impasse "is discouraging."

"If I've erred procedurally, perhaps," he said. "But ethically, don't go there. When I make an unpopular decision, I try to provide the public with why I voted the way I did."

Jennings and David McMahan are not about to drop their grievance and have indicated that they would press County Council to seek an ethics investigation surrounding the one-sided exchange of emails.