Council approves concept of YMCA

BY NORMAN CANNADA
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WALHALLA — Members of the Oconee County Council gave an initial green light Tuesday night to a concept that would bring a YMCA facility to the county.

The council approved proceeding with a plan in which Oconee Medical Center (OMC) would give 22 acres of property to the county and the county would make the land available to the Foothills Area Family YMCA.

County Administrator Scott Moulder was instructed to work out the details of an agreement with the hospital, including resolving the issue of a road to the proposed facility and the costs involved. Moulder is scheduled to meet Monday with the OMC Board of Directors to discuss the property transfer.


Moulder

OMC chief operating officer Hunter Kome said last week the 22-acre property is located in the back of the hospital property nearest Sheep Farm Road.

The hospital has an interlocal agreement with the county which has been in place since 2005, Kome said. In that agreement, the county can request the land for construction of an "aquatics/wellness center."

The agreement states the land must be requested by Dec. 31, 2020, and says the land would be deeded to the county within 60 days of written notification.

No written notification was authorized Tuesday.

Moulder said YMCA representatives approached the county about the possibility and he has been meeting with hospital and Y officials to discuss details. He said he is trying to do "due diligence" and continuing to consider all the legal issues involved. Moulder said discussions are continuing to determine if the county can give the land to the YMCA. If not, he said it is possible that the county could retain ownership of the land and draw up a 50-year lease.

Dr. Greg Enders, chairman of the board for the YMCA, said last week the proposed $8 million, 40,000-square-foot facility would include a cardiac rehabilitation pool and a warm-water pool for swimming.

During a public comment meeting before the council meeting, four of the five speakers spoke on the proposal for

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the property transfer. Jean Serino, a Y board member, talked about the importance of learning how to swim and said the new YMCA could play a role in teaching children in local schools to swim. Larry Smith of Schneider Electric said he is working with his company and others to get donations and in-kind contributions to help the new Y. Enders told the council the new facility would allow the YMCA to offer more programs to adults.

Walhalla resident Susie Cornelius told the council members the county, not the hospital, owns the property and a property transfer is not necessary.

Moulder said he would investigate Cornelius' claims, but said the interlocal agreement indicates the property in question belongs to the hospital.

Councilman Archie Barron, a former chairman of the hospital board, said a council member with an interest in recreation requested property set aside when the interlocal agreement was created.'

"Very appropriately, the YMCA has an interest in it and the hospital has an interest in supporting the Y, and I certainly strongly support that," said Barron.

Council Chairman Joel Thrift expressed concerns about the location of the road that would be built to the property and said he would want to know those costs before giving final approval.

"The road issue is a big part of it, an expensive part of it," said Thrift.

Moulder said negotiations would include costs and responsibility for the road, as well as effects on traffic flow and other issues.

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