Council hears tourism, e-waste updates

BY MIKE EADS
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WALHALLA — Tourism has been good for Oconee County, but electronic waste not so much apparently.

The Oconee County Council conducted an uncharacteristically uneventful meeting Tuesday, dominated primarily by updates on tourism growth and just how the Solid Waste Department is coping with old televisions and electronic waste.

Phil Shirley, who runs the county's Parks, Recreation and Tourism office, said Oconee currently ranks 20th out of the state's 46 counties in tourism, with 420 jobs and more than $5 million generated recently. Hotel spending has surpassed camping in recent years, but camping has held its own.

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"It's no secret: tourism creates jobs, it's sustainable and taxes are generated," Shirley said.

Shirley also touted Ken Sloan's work running the Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"Let me reiterate: The CVB is working," Shirley said.

Sloan told the council that bus tour bookings are up and his staff is making inroads in growing business for meetings and small business conferences. His office has also commissioned a comprehensive tourism study through Clemson University, the results of which should be available sometime in November.

Solid Waste Director Swain Still told the council that discarded televisions are becoming a problem for the county. The old sets with leaded glass tubes aren't welcomed by recyclers like the rest of Oconee's electronic waste. They can't go to landfills anymore, due to new environmental regulations, and cannot be recycled. He warned that the costs of handling old televisions could become a considerable expense unless the state Legislature acts to give counties some help.

In other business, the council voted to proceed with a master plan for Golden Corner Commerce Park. No spending was approved, but county economic development officials can now make firm site plans and price out how much the park's development will cost.

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