

Council looks at who should pay

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WALHALLA — When members of Oconee County Planning Commission get around to revisiting parts of the county's Zoning Enabling Ordinance, they'll also look at who should pay for zoning.

County Council Chairman Reg Dexter said the method for funding zoning administration is a council concern and that it should be looked into.

"Who ends up paying?" Dexter asked at a recent workshop with the Planning Commission, adding whether additional operating costs to the county should be paid by those benefiting from or asking for zoning.

Councilman Wayne McCall said that particularly in these tough economic times it would not be right to "saddle" the rest of the county for zoning initiated in a specific area, such as the Lake Keowee Overlay District.

The proposition quickly came under fire.

Bill Nelson, a member of the Planning Commission who supports the ZEO, said the real beneficiaries will be everyone who uses the lake.

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He said the restrictions imposed by the lake overlay are not onerous and would assure an aesthetically attractive shoreline for all to enjoy.

"The other issue that arises is that allocating county operating costs to beneficiaries opens up a real can of worms," Nelson said. "As I look at the county budget of both operations as well as capital expenditures, there are many expenditures for which I receive no benefit whatsoever. Does the county really want to go down that road? I would hope not." Others agreed.

Gary Owens, president of Advocates for Quality Development (AQD), said that following the reasoning that only those benefiting should pay, then it would follow only those who use county libraries or have school-age children should pay taxes used for those purposes.

AQD warned on its Web site that it would review the issue closely with its attorneys to determine whether the cost

issue is illegal.

Planning Department Director Art Holbrooks said his staff has not done a lot of research on the issue, but what little has been looked at so far shows there is no precedent for pay-as-you-go zoning in the state.

"Right now, I don't know of anything that requires a zoning charge," Holbrooks said.

In the meantime, with less than 90 days before the ZEO is scheduled to go into effect May 1, the county has yet to hire additional staff needed to oversee zoning.

Holbrooks said his office already has received several notices of intent from residents that want zoning.

County Administrator Dale Surret said it would cost about \$125,000 to get a zoning department in place.

He said the cost includes salary and benefits for two employees, adding telephone lines and furniture, as well as advertising.