



The Oconee County Council has asked the Planning Commission to review a possible memorandum of understanding with Duke Energy. The pact would allow Oconee and Duke to cooperate in monitoring and enforcing lake buffer regulations.

FILE PHOTO

Council resurrects Duke Energy MOU

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — An effort that was dropped months ago to hammer out a memorandum of understanding with Duke Energy on oversight of shoreline areas is being revived to the amazement of many who thought the issue was dead.

Planner Aaron Gadsby resurrected the Duke MOU proposition before the Planning Commission on Monday night.

"I know the (Oconee) County Council asked the Planning Commission to consider it," Gadsby said. "That's why it has been brought before you. It is what it is. Duke hasn't seen it."

Citizen activist Donna Linsin recently wrote to a regional aide of U.S. Rep. Jeff Duncan about her concerns that influential organized groups on Lake Keowee are really the ones trying to revive the MOU.

"Are special interest groups who are in alignment with several members of County Council using council's influence by using the MOU as a tool to push their agenda?" Linsin wrote to Walker C. Smith, Duncan's regional director in Anderson.

In the copy of the letter obtained by The Journal, Linsin asked that Duncan conduct an inquiry into the influence on local policy by non-governmental organizations such as Advocates for Quality Development, Inc.; Friends of Lake Keowee Society; Oconee Alliance and Mountain Lakes Community Association.

Among other things, the MOU provides for Oconee and Duke to cooperate in the sharing of data and the monitoring and enforcement of buffer regulations. The MOU also calls on Duke not to issue any permit "for activities in conflict with local plans."

Planning Commissioner Tommy Abbott made a motion to kill the MOU.

"I don't see a need for it myself," Abbott

said. "It's just another layer of regulations. As for the watchdogs, as many members as there are Advocates and FOLKS that are patrolling up and down the lake all day I guarantee that if they saw something the county would know about it."

Commissioner Howard Moore said both the county and Duke have phones to call each other if they see something that's out of line.

"I don't have to have a permit or a contract to call and tell somebody 'you need to go check this,'" Moore said.

Commissioner Andrea Heller disagreed.

"If you want a partnership with Duke, then this is what they suggested," Heller said, referring to the MOU.

Homebuilder Tom Markovich, a loud critic of the idea, opposed the MOU again. He said neither Duke nor the county could regulate a boundary that is in the federal domain.

"Going down this road, Duke doesn't have this authority, the county surely doesn't have this authority and I know DHEC (SC Department of Health and Environmental Control) doesn't have this authority," Markovich said. "I don't know why we're even talking about this."

Bill Gilster, one of two new commissioners, said he didn't feel comfortable not knowing the background.

"It sort of makes sense to have another public hearing," he said. "I would like to make a motion that we have a public meeting on this subject so we get all parties to explain why we need it, why we don't need it ..."

Gilster's motion carried.

Gadsby was asked to schedule a commission hearing on the MOU once a seventh member is appointed to fill the seat left open with the passing away of Randy Abbott last month.