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# Council seeks economic development help

## Officials agree to name a blue-ribbon panel to review options for developing I-85 corridor, Golden Corner Commerce Park

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WALHALLA — Over the next 90 to 120 days, the Oconee County Council wants a "blue-ribbon panel" to review every study, idea or proposal ever made on developing the Interstate 85 corridor and the planning of the Golden Corner Commerce Park and report back with recommendations that could help put an end to many years of doing nothing.

Council Vice Chairman Joel Thrift recommended naming such a panel and the idea won unanimous approval during Tuesday night's meeting.

In pitching the idea, Thrift made it clear he was not asking for another study.

"We've studied it to death," he said, eliciting chuckles from the audience.

By the next Council meeting Aug. 18, Thrift asked that each member come prepared to recommend two people who would "review what we have done" and report back.

Council Chairman Reg Dexter said the panel should also look at the previous Council's decision late last year to approve payments of $610,000 through 2038 to the Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority to assist in expanding sewer to unincorporated areas of the county. However, Dexter alluded to an appendix that stated a list of projects for which the $610,000 annual payments could be used. He said a sentence was added saying that none of the money could be used for development of the I-85 corridor.

"If we limit ourselves in that we can't move forward in the unincorporated areas, then no action is no progress" Dexter said. "I feel that if we don't move forward, that we buy a casket so we could be

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buried."

Earlier in the meeting, Council members recommended community leaders to help review the resumes of the final eight candidates vying for the county administrator job.

Councilman Mario Suarez selected former Oconee Medical Center Administrator William "Ham" Hudson and Gary Owens, who is president of Advocates for Quality Development.

Thrift picked Seneca City Administrator Greg Dietterick and Westminster Mayor Derek Hodgin, while Dexter chose School Board member Rosemary Bailes and Mendel Stone, who sits on the Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority and the board of directors of Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative. Councilman Wayne McCall selected Bozo Richards and said he would get back later with a second choice.

The eight finalists for the job must respond by Friday to Council Clerk Beth Hulse that they are still interested in being considered for the job. The community leaders participating would review the qualifications of those candidates and give their input to Council, which plans to select the final 5 or six candidates at a special meeting now being proposed for Aug. 21.