

Council to hear final report on 'Great

BY STEVEN BRADLEY
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WALHALLA — A final presentation will be made to Oconee County Council at tonight's meeting on the South Carolina Great Outdoors plan, an initiative that

seeks to develop comprehensive marketing and branding for tourism in the county.

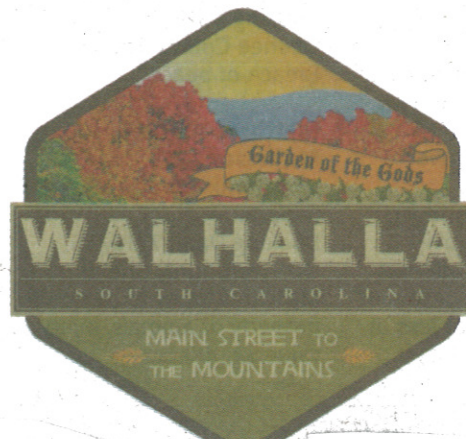
The South Carolina National Heritage Corridor team facilitated a two-year process for the plan that included public input, stakeholder interviews, municipi-

ality participation, case study examination and site visits.

The towns of Seneca, Walhalla and Westminster all participated financially and will also be receiving their own outdoor recommendations with the plan.

The Oconee Great Outdoors

team includes Mountain Lakes Convention and Visitors Bureau president Ken Sloan, Oconee Economic Alliance executive director Richard Blackwell, county zoning administrator Josh Stephens and county parks, recreation and tourism



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Outdoors' plan

director Phil Shirley.

1 S.C. National Heritage Corridor president Michelle McCollum and Blackwell and/or Shirley will give the presentation. Sloan told The Journal this

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as part of the Great Outdoors initiative.

will be the final report and recommendations for the project to council.

McCollum and Sloan previously spoke at a business forum in March and detailed the plan, which includes strategies to take advantage of the county's natural beauty.

Sloan said Oconee is dealing with what he called "the boomerang effect" in terms of tourism. "Neighboring commu-

nities have visitors that come into Oconee County — from Greenville, from Clemson, Clayton, Highlands, Anderson," he said. "They come in here, they ride on our roads, they visit our waterfalls and raft on our rivers and play on our lakes, and they turn around and go back home at the end of the day."

Sloan said during research for the initiative, tourists who were interviewed said Oconee

lacked "the cool factor" to get them to stay in the area after they had visited.

McCollum said Oconee County didn't have to go far to find examples of places where a similar initiative had produced benefits.

"Just look at your neighbors — look at Greenville, look at downtown Anderson, look at Greenwood, look at Greer," she said. "People are doing it, and it's working — and eco-

omic benefits are coming because of it."

McCollum has also discussed plans for a South Carolina Great Outdoors Center at Sanctuary Pointe on Lake Hartwell near Fair Play. The center would be an outdoor recreation hub and host events such as archery programs and hiking and biking.

"We're going to introduce people to a variety of different sports, and then what we want them to do is get out from the Sanctuary Pointe Great Outdoors Center property and explore Oconee County and the Upstate," she said.

Following the presen-

tation at tonight's 6 p.m. meeting, council will hold a discussion regarding taking action on the initiative.

Adoption of the plan would allow staff to begin prioritizing direction for implementation and strategies moving forward, and county staff has recommended that council adopt the Great Outdoors plan and direct staff to begin drafting action plans related to the recommendations included within the plan for council's future action.

A 102-page document detailing the project — which includes goals and recommendations for tourism in the county and

unique branding strategies for each of the municipalities — is available on the county's website along with the meeting's agenda.

"The goal is to marry our distinctive outdoor treasures and strong economic development environment to create jobs, diversify economies, improve our quality of life and inspire stewardship," according to the agenda for the meeting. "The plan addresses branding, marketing, tourism destination recommendations, guidelines for growing Oconee and funding options."