Council to take up strategic plan

BY MIKE EADS
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WALHALLA — An economic road map for Oconee County tops the agenda for the County Council on Monday night, the first meeting of the new year.

Consultant Kyle Talente of RKG Associates has delivered the five-year strategic plan his firm was hired to compile last summer.

County Administrator Scott Moulder said he likes what he has seen of the work thus far.

"Its priorities help to define a lot of what we have already been trying to accomplish and continues with additional recommendations that will prove to be extremely valuable to our efforts," Moulder said Friday. "This is a long-term evolving plan that can be modified to fit our realistic goals for Oconee County and much discussion will be required to identify a work plan to accomplish the recommendations he has presented."

The proposal, completed with the input of Economic Development Director Richard Blackwell, his staff and members of the county's Economic Development Commission (EDC), includes several proposals:

- Stronger ties to private site selection firms, the Upstate SC Alliance (of which Blackwell is a former staffer) and existing Upstate industries;
- Better marketing outreach to manufacturers and logistics companies of Oconee County's proximity to Interstate 85, the Norfolk Southern rail line, the proposed inland rail port in Greer and the Port of Charleston;
- Using the county's existing manufacturing base to woo metal and electronic component makers, medical and bioscience vendors and automotive parts manufacturers;
- Latch onto the Upstate SC Alliance's commitment to bringing in new manufacturers of sustainable and renewable energy technologies;
- Studying the possible demand for centralized processing and distribution facilities for local farmers;
- Spinning off the EDC into a 501©(3) non-profit corporation, in order to allow investment and partnerships with private companies.

The council is expected to accept an executive summary of the plan and schedule a workshop to delve into the recommendations further, possibly at its retreat, slated for Thursday, Feb. 7, at 9 a.m. in the council chambers.

In other business, council members Reg Dexter, Wayne McCall and Joel Thrift will be sworn in to new, four-year terms and members will divide up subcommittee assignments for the coming year. In addition, council members will take up local developer John Powell's financing plan to turn the old county courthouse into an upscale hotel with bar/restaurant and retail space along Walhalla's Main Street.

meads@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6685