Council trims lake overlay to 750 feet

Wording nixed that would have made a 25-foot vegetative buffer a requirement retroactively

By Carlos Galarza
carlos@dailyjm.com

WALHALA— In a surprising move that pleased some and irritated others, the Oconee County Council reduced a controversial 1,300-foot boundary around a Lake Overlay District by more than half, Tuesday night.

The setback had always been considered as a key provision by supporters of the Lake Overlay District as a means to keep high-rise development away from the shores of Lake Keowee and Lake Jocassee.

Councilman Joel Thrift introduced a motion that would reduce the 1,300-foot setback to 750 feet and Wayne McCall seconded the move. Thrift said he presented the motion in response to calls he had received from people opposed to the setback.

George Blanchard, who led the County Council as chairman when the Zoning Enabling Ordinance with its Lake Overlay District was approved, argued against reducing the setback.

"I'd like to know why a couple of phone calls would overturn the will of the people," Blanchard said. "What is the reasoning and logic?"

Blanchard said the vast majority of the people who live around the lake district had strongly supported the 1,300-foot setback through thousands of petitions and showing up in large numbers to county meetings in which zoning was discussed.

Chairman Reg Dexter voted with Thrift and McCall to trim the setback.

Earlier, at the advice of County Attorney Tom Martin, the County Council unanimously moved to eliminate wording that proposed making a 25-foot vegetative buffer at lakefront properties a requirement retroactively within 24 months.

However, the buffer would still be required at the time of sale or transfer of the property, at the first inspection of Building Codes and all new residential and non-residential buildings.

The action was taken during the second reading of the ordinance. Public hearings on the changes to the ZEO will take place at next Tuesday night's County Council meeting.