

Councilman McCall rides hard line against new taxes

By **CARLOS GALARZA**
carlos@dailyjm.com

WALHALLA — Councilman Wayne McCall did not have to say: “Read my lips,” to let it be known he wants no new taxes in Oconee County’s 2009-10 budget.

Unlike the first President Bush, who made the ‘read my lips’ line famous, only to turn around and raise taxes anyway, McCall appeared more emphatic about the touchy subject when it came up during the

first Oconee County Council budget workshop Tuesday.

“I don’t want to tax the people anymore,” McCall said. “The way the economy is now, if we have to cut capital improvements so be it. How can I say: ‘We’re going to stick ‘em with two more mills.’”

McCall bashed the thought of any tax hike when Councilman George Blanchard, who chairs the council’s Budget, Finance & Administration Committee,

See **TAXES**, Page 6A

TAXES

Continued from Page 1A

suggested members not lock themselves or County Administrator Dale Surrett by telling him to not raise millage. Blanchard said the council did that last year and suggested it was a mistake.

Surrett said the millage had been kept the same the past two years.

When Blanchard asked if it was OK not to lock in on not having a millage increase, McCall wasted no time making his feelings known.

The workshop did not get started until about 6:06 p.m. because council went into closed session with County Attorney Tom Martin to discuss pending litigation.

When council reconvened, new Finance Director and Assistant Administrator Kendra Brown presented an overview of the county’s finances that Surrett said are surprisingly better than would be imagined given the weak economy.

For instance, as of Dec. 30, year-to-date total revenues through the second quarter of fiscal 2008-09 was a little more than \$19 million, or 58 percent more than the \$12.2 million collected during the same period of fiscal 2007-08.

Furthermore, the county’s total undesignated general fund balance as of June 30 was \$7.8 million. That is the

unencumbered fund that could be tapped in an emergency.

According to Brown the undesignated general fund balance is 23.1 percent of \$33.7 million of total general fund expenditures.

Brown said that is a low cushion when compared to Pickens County and its undesignated general fund balance of \$20 million, which is 61.2 percent of its total general fund expenditures of \$32.7 million.

“We’re not as bad off as in other places, but we could do better,” Brown said, about having a bigger cushion. “I’m conservative when it comes to that.”