Deal near for spec building

BY MIKE EADS
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WALHALLA — Oconee County officials appear to be close to a deal with an aerospace firm for the purchase of the spec building in the Oconee County Commerce Park.

"We are working through an agreement with a company," Richard Blackwell, executive director of the county economic development commission, said Wednesday.

An announcement could come "within a month," according to Blackwell.

He declined to name the buyer, but did say it was an aerospace company with expansion plans that could double the size of the 50,000-square-foot facility.

Blackwell told members of the Capital Projects Advisory Committee (CPAC) Wednesday about the possible sale.

He said there are still several details to be worked out and asked committee members to "keep your toes crossed."

The Oconee County Council is expected to bring the deal up for a vote at its next meeting at 6 p.m. Aug. 14.

The council has already approved two readings of Ordinance 2012-27, a $1 million land sale in the commerce park that is rumored to be the spec building.

Council member Paul Corbeil, who also chairs CPAC, has endorsed the possible deal for the building, completed last year at a cost of $1.5 million.

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DEAL: 'Keep your toes crossed'

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He would not reveal any details, but he did say last week that Blackwell did an extensive cost-benefit analysis of the deal that indicates the economic impact of this company coming to Oconee County far outstrips the discounted price for the building.

Blackwell said the shell building has been a magnet for industrial prospects.

"It's amazing how many looks we've gotten because of the shell building," Blackwell said.

The county needs to start planning to build another shell building to keep them coming, Blackwell added. He said most of the county's existing supply of vacant industrial space is not up to what industrial prospects are looking for today.

"We are limited in what we are able to sell," said Blackwell. "We have options, but we need more options."

Blackwell also emphasized the need to take care of the companies that are already here.

"They will go somewhere else ... you always have to think about that," he said.

The point was not lost on Corbeil.

"Any of our existing companies have first dibs on anything we have," Corbeil said.

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