

# Destination OCOONEE



JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Expanding on the success of Ram Cat Alley is one of the recommendations for the city of Seneca included in the “Destination Oconee” tourism initiative accepted by county council this week. Specific recommendations were also made for Walhalla and Westminster, as well as the county as a whole, all of which partnered with the S.C. National Heritage Corridor to develop the tourism-driven branding and marketing plan.

“If we’re going to do this, there needs to be residents — maybe one or two from each district — that would have a say-so in this thing,” he said.

County administrator Scott Moulder suggested creating a “Destination Oconee” committee that would be chosen similar to other committees in the county, and council amended Cain’s original motion before voting unanimously in favor.

While council was unanimously in support of the plan, some residents who spoke during public comment were not.

One resident who spoke, Mike Hamor, said additional tourists using the county’s natural resources would ultimately spoil what made Oconee special.

“We can’t even handle what we’ve got — let alone

bring more people in here,” he said.

Another resident, Donna Linsin, said the plan would force businesses into complying with its requirements, which could hamper their ability to operate.

“This will only eat into the profits of the businessman, while the customer is paying higher prices for goods and services,” she said.

Other residents attended the meeting in support of the initiative, however.

Darlene Greene said implementation of the branding outlined in the plan would help promote the scenic features of the county.

“In addition to advertising our county’s natural resources, we must also invest in our county’s infrastructure,” she said. “We need better signage, entrances built to our highways (and) implementation of countywide codes to ensure controlled planned growth that is in keeping with the ‘rustic elegance’ theme proposed in the plan.”

After voting to pursue the plan, council directed Moulder to begin upgrading signage on main corridors leading into the county. The two primary locations for those signs were U.S. Highway 123 from Clemson and S.C. Highway 11 from Pickens County.

Moulder told The

Journal on Wednesday he would begin by getting price quotes and taking inventory of sign locations to determine if any additional right of way would be needed to install the larger signs.

“The conceptual plan gives a couple of examples of signs which could be used, so I will need to obtain approval of which particular design they like most,” he said.

Moulder said he believes at least five new signs will be purchased and installed, perhaps including some new locations where a sign doesn’t currently exist, as well as an old sign on S.C. Highway 24 coming from Anderson County.

# Council to create committee to guide newly approved tourism initiative

BY STEVEN BRADLEY  
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Oconee will move forward with a marketing initiative that seeks to capitalize on the county's natural attractions to make it a tourist destination.

Dubbed "Destination Oconee," the plan was unanimously passed by county council at its meeting

Tuesday night, though not without some opposition from the public.

The results of council's approval were to accept the plan's recommendations, work toward creating an advisory committee to guide the initiative and begin upgrading signage on the major thoroughfares leading into the county.

Michelle McCollum, chief executive officer of the S.C. National Heritage Corridor — which part-

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**Michelle McCollum**  
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nered with the county and cities of Seneca, Walhalla and Westminster to develop the tourism-driven marketing and branding plan — made a presentation to council that detailed the plan.

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**This sign on U.S. Highway 123 entering Oconee County from Clemson is one of the signs leading into the county that council directed administrator Scott Moulder to begin working to upgrade after it voted unanimously to move forward with the "Destination Oconee" tourism plan.**

the state," McCollum said.

Among the strategies McCollum discussed were the need for more high-quality accommodations, improved public access to natural attractions in terms of signage and parking, better lake access at Jocassee, Keowee and Hartwell, and the need to create a "buy local" campaign.

She also discussed strategies to market each city involved and take advantage of the assets that make them unique.

For Walhalla, McCollum suggested that the city highlight its German heritage, plan a spring event similar to Oktoberfest, develop a beer garden and antique district and encourage businesses to promote the county's new

brand ("rustic elegance") and the city's proposed tagline ("Main Street to the Mountains").

For Seneca, McCollum's recommendations included expanding on the success of Ram Cat Alley, creating a streetscape plan, developing an art and culture district and focusing on the importance of cooperating with Clemson to promote local events, as well as planning an annual arts festival.

In Westminster, the plan includes improving the backside of Main Street, enhancing visitor services with kiosks and outdoor displays to connect the downtown area with the outdoor recreation opportunities in Long Creek, and focusing on a "market and music"

atmosphere with events.

McCollum also discussed funding options such as grants and tax incentives, as well as case studies where similar plans had seen success, such as Greenwood, Florence, York County, Lexington, Ky., and downtown Anderson.

District 3 council member Paul Cain, spoke up in favor of the plan and motioned to accept the recommendations. He also disputed arguments that the plan would put too much government influence on the local economy.

"I own a business in this community ... and I am a conservative and I don't like big government, but the free market is sending

jobs to Costa Rica," he said. "When the jobs are tied to natural resources, those jobs do not leave. As long as people want to go on vacation in the United States, this is a place that people will come."

District 1 member Edda Cammick also supported the plan, but said moving forward with the recommendations was "just a step" in bringing it to fruition.

"We will have plans down the road at some point, and they will be brought to the public for input and approval," she said. "I'm getting a little frustrated with the negativity in this county."

Chairman Wayne McCall also supported the plan but stressed the need for public input from residents as it is implemented.

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