Draft ordinance stirs planning debate

Ordinance would give Planning Commission input on major developments

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WALHALLA — A draft ordinance stirred debate at Monday night's Planning Commission meeting.

The proposal struck a raw nerve with Tom Markovich, who sits on the board of the Oconee Home Builders Association.

Markovich called the draft of a Major Developments Ordinance another layer of bureaucracy that would slow down the permitting process and cost developers money.

"I think that thing is designed to stop any sort of development at all in this county," he said. "You'd might as well put a big old billboard on I-85 and say we don't want anybody that supports affordable housing or anything else to put in here, just keep on moving."

The ordinance would give the Planning Commission input on certain major developments that could be controversial.

During the discussion on the draft ordinance, Commissioner Tommy Abbott sought out Markovich's opinion, which prompted Abbott to call for a vote to kill the ordinance.

Bill Gilster and Andrea Heller argued in favor continuing to work on the draft ordinance.

"Every once in a while there is some key project that comes up that we say 'Hey, this is something out of the ordinary and we as a planning commission should have some visibility on it,'" Gilster said.

Heller agreed.

"The public should know about it," Heller added. Just like Pioneer Water, the public should know."

Heller's reference was to Pioneer Rural Water District's plans to build a water processing plant near residential homes in Fair Play that no one was aware of.

"It puts it in front of the public," Heller said about having a major developments ordinance in the books.

The discussion prompted Ben Turetzky, executive director of Friends of Lake Keowee Society (FOLKS), to give his reasons why the ordinance is needed. He gave as examples the proposed Palmetto Pointe Marina and the former MonteLago plans to develop high-rise condos on Lake Keowee.

"I don't think it's appropriate for somebody on your body to ask a question of somebody who has a vested interest not to have this kind of 'impediment' in place," Turetzky said.

The Commission voted to keep the ordinance alive and work on its language.

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