Economic projects on county council agenda

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WALHALLA — One economic development matter will be up for final approval, while another project is up for first reading at today's 6 p.m. meeting of Oconee County Council meeting.

An ordinance to amend the fee agreement between the county and Ulbrich Precision Flat Wire to incorporate Ulbrich Solar Technologies Inc. as a sponsor will come before council on third and final reading after a public hearing on the matter.

Later in the meeting, council will take first reading in title only on an ordinance that would authorize a fee-in-lieu-of-tax agreement with Project Mackinaw.

A supplier for BMW, Project Mackinaw would become the first tenant for the Oconee Industry and Technology Park — the future home of the Oconee County Workforce Development Center to include a Tri-County Tech campus — on S.C. Highway 11.

"That is something we have been working hard on doing since the land was purchased and made into an industrial site," Oconee economic development director Richard Blackwell told The Journal on Monday. "Landing this BMW supplier on top of having the future Workforce Development Center inside the park will truly be a 'win-win' scenario."

PROJECTS: BMW supplier would be park's first tenant

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As for the Ulbrich agreement, it allows the subsidiary, Ulbrich Solar Technologies, to receive the economic development incentives agreed upon when an expansion agreement was finalized with the parent company in late 2013, when the firm agreed to invest $5 million in an expansion at its Oconee facility.

The agreement called for a reduced assessment to 6 percent and locked millage of 213.0, and includes clawback provisions if the company does not meet the $5 million minimum investment.

In 2001, Ulbrich acquired the flat-wire division of Steel Heddle, which was renamed Ulbrich Precision Flat Wire. The Ulbrich facility produces specialty wire for various applications from medical devices to electronics and has more than 100 employees.

Ulbrich Solar Technologies Inc. is a manufacturer of tin-plated copper, silver-plated copper and aluminum flat wire for the solar industry. It is also on the grounds of the Westminster site and headquartered in Westminster.

While the expansion deal was done nearly two years ago, Blackwell said amending the economic development tax agreement is a wise endeavor because it allows the "headquartered business unit" to invest in the county.

"This shows that Ulbrich is committed to Oconee, and that is always something you want to see from a company," he said.

As for Project Mackinaw, Blackwell noted there has been more than $188 million in new capital investment and more than 900 new jobs announced in the county in the past 36 months.

"Our economic development efforts continue to build the pipeline for future successes," he said. "It takes time, but it is resulting in a lot of positives for our community. ... The future is bright, and Project Mackinaw will add to Oconee's accomplishments.

"County council is doing a great job of balancing being aggressive on the economic development front, but also working to protect what makes our area so special with the natural assets."

A third incentive agreement is also on tonight's agenda, as council is slated to take second reading on an ordinance involving Historic Oconee Courthouse LLC and local homebuilder Tom Markovich, who plans to develop the former county courthouse into a boutique hotel in downtown Walhalla.

The ordinance, which passed 5-0 on first reading, would authorize execution of a $10 purchase agreement on the property, along with approving a $500,000 grant — half upon approval and half upon completion — in exchange for Markovich and his Aiken-based partner Herb Witter agreeing to invest at least $2 million in the project.

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