

Federal grant door closes on Seneca library

USDA tells Oconee officials to focus on getting a loan

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SENECA — U.S. Department of Agriculture representatives flatly told Oconee County Public Library officials Wednesday to forget about getting a federal grant from them to finance a new library in Seneca.

Instead, USDA officials said Oconee County should focus on getting a USDA loan.

Jesse Risher, local director of rural development for the USDA in South Carolina, and Debi Green, out of the USDA office in Anderson, met with local officials for the first time since Oconee County failed to make the cut for a USDA grant and loan program in September.

Oconee applied for a \$2.9 million grant that was packaged along with a low-interest federal USDA loan of about \$5.6 million.

LIBRARY: USDA suggests scaling down project

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The USDA officials explained the options available to Oconee County going forward.

"It's unlikely the grant portion will be funded ..." Risher said. "I think you have to forget about a grant. It won't affect a project this size."

Risher said the county's options could be to seek a

bigger loan to help finance the building of an \$8.9 million new library in Seneca, or scale down the project.

"Or both," interjected Oconee County Councilman Paul Corbell, who attended Wednesday's meeting. "We could ask for \$7.5 million, for example, to cover a scaled project without the county getting involved with the principal."

John Adams, who chairs OCPL's Capital Projects Committee, said he would not like to see changes made to the project because it would affect plans at the main library in Walhalla. He said funding cuts to the Seneca project would ultimately have to be spent at the Walhalla branch to balance services needed.

Risher and Green said there is no federal stimulus

money available that would have funded Oconee's original request.

Any new funding arrangement for the library would have to go before County Council.

Other elected officials at the meeting were District 3 Councilman Mario Suarez and District 3 Councilman-elect Archie Barron.

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