Fiber optics project still has a chance

Bids for broadband to go out next week

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — Oconee County's maligned broadband project still has a pulse.

To the dismay of a growing number of critics, it appears as if the $14.3 million project anchored with a $9.6 million federal grant is not dead after all.

County Administrator Scott Moulder gave an optimistic prognosis on Friday when he said that a request for proposals to install approximately 260 miles of fiber optics underground in phases would likely be advertised next week.

Some had pronounced last rites over the project given that officials on Pine Street have been mum about its future for weeks.

Moulder broke the silence.

"Attorneys are revising the RFP (request for proposals) and contracts for the phased approach," Moulder said. "It should go out next week."

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Moulder



McCall

BROADBAND: McCall said he is concerned about total cost

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County council members voted at their May 17 meeting to re-bid the project after Southern Pipeline & Utility, the contractor awarded an $8.2 million contract to place the fiber optic casing in the ground, could not obtain a performance bond for the full amount of the contract.

Moulder said part of the delay in advertising the RFP has been that map changes are being made to take into consideration the new phased approach to constructing the broadband network.

Councilman Wayne McCall, who was the lone dissenting voice on re-bidding the project, warned Friday that his sources are telling him the $14.3 million price tag for the broadband network "only scratches the surface."

McCall said that retired fiber optics engineers presented him with a cost analysis of Oconee's project that puts the total cost at more than $24 million.

McCall said engineers told him that establishing a fiber optic network for broadband is an elaborate undertaking that employs sophisticated and highly expensive equipment.

"All these prices they've given me are about three years old," McCall said.

Furthermore, McCall said county staff has provided little information about how much it would cost to hook up some 75- community anchor institutions, including schools, fire departments, law enforcement and libraries.

McCall said that included on the list of community anchor institutions are some 10 Baptist churches, which he thinks leaves the county vulnerable to criticism from other denominations and separation of church and state issues.

carlos@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6685