

Final call for runway

Oconee looks to close book on messy airport project

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WALHALLA — Plateau Excavation Inc. — the contractor suing the county for almost \$2 million — was handed a punch-list of items that would finally close the book on the trouble-ridden runway-extension project at the Oconee County Regional Airport.

In what was perhaps their last meeting before a likely day in court, representatives of Plateau, the county and Talbert & Bright Inc. made a final inspection of the project site Thursday.

Plateau is seeking damages from Oconee because the company claims it has not been fully compensated for additional expenses sustained by having to keep men and equipment at the airport while the project was shut down for several months last year by state regulators.

The county in turn is suing Talbert & Bright for more than \$1.8 million. In a countersuit filed June 10, Oconee accuses T&B of breach of duties and professional malpractice for its lack of supervision of an employee who faked a Department of Health and Environmental Control permit, which led to the project being halted.

Airport Director Kevin Short said he and T&B representatives handed Plateau official Shane Hall a punch-list of about a half-dozen items.

The to-do list includes correcting issues with the taxiway light-power supply, mitigation work in the Lake Hartwell area, mowing the high grass in some of the areas and reseeding in areas where the grass didn't take

and spots that had been washed out.

Short said the lake level has to drop before the Hartwell mitigation work could be completed.

"There's no hard deadline for getting the punch-list completed," Short said.

Also participating in the walk-through Thursday was Paul Werts, executive director of the South Carolina Aeronautics Commission.

Short said Werts expressed that he would like to see all payments related to the project made no later than 120 days as of Thursday.

"He would like to have the project wrapped up," Short said.

Originally estimated to cost about \$4.2 million, the delays to the runway project have pushed costs closer to \$5 million.

The Federal Aviation Administration is funding 95 percent of the project with Oconee and the state Aeronautics Commission splitting the other 5 percent.

Anna Lynch, the program manager for the FAA's Airport Improvement Program, was invited to Thursday's walk-through, but Short said she could not make the trip because of FAA travel budget restrictions.

Short said the 5,000-foot runway has been fully functional for more than a month despite the remaining punch-list items.

"We're looking forward to the (Clemson University) football season with the added runway and taxiway," Short said. "We'll get bigger airplanes and sell more fuel."