Final push for spec

numbers of residents lost their jobs and homes to foreclosures, elected officials shoved the Economic Development Commission's pet project to the back burner.

Tonight, the EDC will ask Oconee County Council once again to move ahead with a spec building.

This time, with the exception of Councilman Wayne McCall, who adamantly argues that Oconee has enough empty buildings to attract businesses without spending money to build new ones, the idea likely has the support of a majority on council.

Councilman Paul Corbeil has championed the EDC's call for its second spec building.

Corbeil and EDC officials point out to critics that the first shell building was a success despite it being vilified as wasteful government spending. The county recouped its more than $700,000 investment in that building, which sold in 2007 after being on the market 23 months, a year faster than the national average.

Lift Technologies, Inc. took possession of the first spec building, doubled its size to 80,000

IF YOU GO:

What: Oconee County Council meeting
When: 6 tonight
Where: 415 S. Pine St., Walhalla

building expected

square feet and created 50 new jobs.

Corbeil has also argued that the investment in a spec building does not preclude the county from continuing to pursue finding tenants for existing buildings.

"We need to have as many lines in the water as practical," Corbeil told The Journal. "I think we've agreed before that we need to be making decisions on good business rationale and not just political or other subjective considerations."

Specifically, council will be asked tonight to award a Request for Proposal to Spartanburg, S.C. contractor Roebuck Building Co., which had been selected for the job almost 19 months ago just as the economy was tanking.

Roebuck sent county officials a letter in May stating its prices

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SPEC BUILDING: Decision due

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and percentages are still valid.

Council approved almost $3 million of economic development initiatives in the $42 million 2010-11 county budget that included funding for the spec building.

EDC Director Jim Alexander has hammered home support for the spec building every opportunity he gets.

"We need to show products because people are looking now," Alexander said.

Council members Reg Dexter and Joel Thrift, who previously were reluctant to support funding a spec building, appear more willing to do so this time around. One reason why they'll likely line up behind the project is the more than $700,000 in utility tax credits that would help pay for it.

McCall is not so convinced. He insists the county is far from an economic recovery and would rather see the money used for other priorities, such as solid waste.

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