

# Fire deal talks off to slow start

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**WALHALLA** — Oconee County Council finds itself under the gun trying to hammer out a new county budget and a fire-service contract with the city of Seneca without the services of an administrator.

The county's two-year contract with Seneca expires June 30. Currently, Oconee pays Seneca almost \$292,000 to cover areas outside city limits.

Seneca Mayor Dan Alexander said Tuesday he remains confident that a new deal can be worked out to everyone's satisfaction on time, although he was surprised to hear that a proposal the city mailed out to the county April 20 had not yet made it into the hands of county officials.

During Monday night's budget workshop, Council Chairman Reg Dexter made reference to a letter Seneca City Administrator Greg Dietterick

said was mailed to the county. However, Council Clerk Beth Hulse said she had not seen it.

Hulse said she would check into it and get back to County Council at its next meeting May 5.

The incident underscores the difficulties faced by council as it forges ahead with approving a new budget and negotiating a fire deal with Seneca without an administrator.

Alexander said the fire-service contract has worked well for the city and county and does not see any impediment to getting a new deal worked out.

"We're proposing a contract for more than two years," he said. "The county signed five-year contracts with Walhalla and Westminster for fire service. I think it allows for better planning and would be better for everybody."

The county pays Westminster almost \$116,000 and more than \$81,000 to Walhalla for fire service. Both those contracts expire in 2012.