Fired Oconee County administrator to get nearly $175,000

Payments to Dale Surrett will come from Human Resources contingency fund

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WALHALLA — The firing of Oconee County Administrator Dale Surrett will cost taxpayers almost $175,000.

Interim Administrator Kendra Brown said the amount includes almost $16,000 in accrued but unused sick leave and vacation leave. The remainder owed Surrett is severance pay equal to his salary for 18 months, or $159,000.

In addition, Surrett, his wife and children will continue to have their medical insurance paid for 12 months through May 2010. The county also picks up for Surrett only life insurance benefits and short-term disability insurance benefits.

During its meeting Tuesday night, the Oconee County Council approved a motion to use county Human Resources contingency funds to make an initial payment of $63,000 requested right away by Surrett.

The remainder of the money owed Surrett would be paid in increments unless he chooses other lump sum payments.

"He hasn't indicated to us yet how he wants the remainder of the money," Brown said.

Surrett was fired April 14 and was placed on administrative leave pending a public hearing May 12 to air the reasons for his termination.

However, Surrett canceled the hearing and a week later signed a settlement agreement with County Council.

Aside from promising to pay severance pay and unused sick and vacation days, council also agreed to pull back a termination letter citing reasons for firing Surrett. Instead council issued a new letter stating that Surrett was removed for convenience so that it could select an administrator of its choosing.

In return, Surrett made several concessions, including promising not to renew a request for a public hearing, pursue litigation, nor disparage council or its members.

County officials are expected to begin circulating an ad this weekend announcing a vacancy for the position.