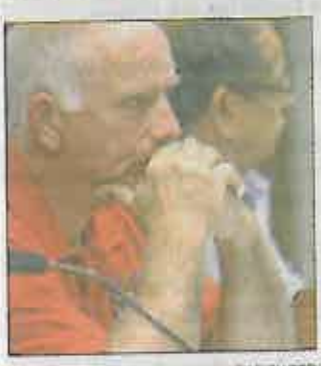
Firm: $10M needed to retrofit site

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Project North development could begin within a year



FILE PHOTO

Wayne McCall voted against the Project North purchase Tuesday night.

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Now that the $2.5 million purchase of the 415-acre Project North property is officially on the books, Oconee County officials must decide how quickly they want to plow ahead with retrofitting the industrial site with infrastructure.

A representative of BP Barber, the engineering firm Oconee hired to survey and test the soil at the site, presented County Council on Tuesday with cost estimates for putting roadways, water, sewer and electricity throughout the portion of property to be used for industrial development.

Engineers said the first phase of the industrial site on Highway 11 would cost almost $5.4 million.

Project engineer John Culbreath crunched the numbers. He said $2.8 million would go for water, $341,000 for wastewater and $2.1 million for roads.

Culbreath said the entire second phase would cost $2.9 million and it would take another $1.7 million to complete the third phase, for a three-phase total of approximately $10.1 million.

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Council members are motivated, for obvious political reasons, to see the site developed quickly. Members supporting Project North did so in the face of fierce public opposition.

Councilman Paul Corbeil told The Journal last week that the Highway 11 industrial property could be ready to market in 12 to 24 months.

Council Chairman Reg Dexter, who picked up on Corbeil's mantra that Project North is all about jobs, said last week that development of the property could begin "in the near future" because sewer, water and power are nearby.

Councilman Mario Suarez aligned himself with Corbeil and Dexter, while Councilman Wayne McCall

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PROJECT: Timeline unclear

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remained opposed. Councilman Joel thrift refused to cast any votes because of his long-time association with the seller, Snook England.

McCall said he voted against the purchase because he was never satisfied that the county had a real plan for how the property would be used.

County Administrator Scott Moulder told council that an engineered design is needed before Oconee could move forward with any phases of Project North.

"You need to have a cost estimate based on an actual design," Moulder said. "That needs to be done before you move into a phase development."

Economic Development Director Jim Alexander said Wednesday that any movement on the property is unlikely until "various opportunities associated with development of the park" are looked at.

Members have hinted that private investors might be interested in partnering with Oconee.

"After the first of the year when we start looking at budgets, we may have an idea of how and when development would start," Alexander said.

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