Growth key at Oconee Council meeting

BY MIKE EADS
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WALHALLA — Economic development was front and center at Tuesday's Oconee County Council meeting.

A new company was welcomed to the county and Administrator Scott Moulder asked the council to approve his plans to kick-start building in Echo Hills Industrial Park.

The council voted 5-0 in favor of Ordinance 2012-27, approving the sale of the shell building in the Oconee Commerce Center to A.I.D. Corp. for $1 million.

The aerospace manufacturer plans to begin expanding the 50,000 square-foot building immediately and be up and running there by June 2013.

Bob Crawford, an executive with A.I.D.'s parent company RBC Aerospace Bearings, praised the county's schools and foresight in building the shell building.

"I'm not sure we'd be here today if it weren't for that shell building," Crawford said.

Crawford was also effusive in his praise of the Oconee officials who helped close the deal, especially former Oconee economic development director Jim Alexander and his successor Richard Blackwell.

"Mr. Alexander and Mr. Blackwell were just phenomenal," Crawford said.

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Wanting to build on the momentum generated by the A.I.D. deal, Moulder received the council's blessing to proceed with negotiations with a local manufacturer in need of a new production site and craft a $3 million special revenue bond to prepare a parcel inside Echo Hills for that company, which Moulder declined to identify.

Moulder wants to use Economic Development millage money to finance the bond, rather than waiting "4-5-6 years" for money to accrue in the fund to pay for the work. He admitted that the company's $10 million investment and 100 jobs could go elsewhere even if he gets the money to prep the Echo Hills site.

"I'm asking for a leap of faith from the council and citizens," Moulder said. The bond issue will require an ordinance and three readings, but Moulder said getting that going is crucial to the county's discussions with the company.

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