Home construction surges

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WALHALLA — Building permits for new homes and other construction in Oconee County have spiked to their highest levels in five years.

"Compared with the past couple of years, we are very pleased to see this increase in building activity, especially on the new home front," said Oconee Zoning Administrator Josh Stephens. "Also, we have seen an increase in multi-family unit construction. These are very encouraging signs in terms of economic improvement."

Through April 25, Stephens said 88 permits had been issued this year for new homes – the most since 94 homes were permitted in the first four months of 2009. The number was nearly twice the number of new homes permitted in 2011 (45) and 16 more than a year ago.

Overall building permits in the county in 2013 reached 506 as of April 25, the most since 676 building permits in the first four months of 2008 and more than 100 permits more than the number issued through April 2012.

While the numbers are not as high as the pre-recession numbers of 2007 – when 730 building permits were issued, including 236 for new homes, in the first four months of the year – Stephens said he is happy with the growth he is seeing.

"It is not back to the 2007 numbers, but they were really booming then," said Stephens. "2007 was the bottom of the barrel. At this point we have seen a moderate increase of activity over the past few quarters. We anticipate this growth to continue into the sum-



FILE PHOTO

Permits for new home construction for the first four months of 2013 are the highest in five years in Oconee County.

YEAR	HOME PERMITS	TOTAL PERMITS
2007	236	730
2008	193	676
2009	94	384
2010	64	388
2011	45	306
2012	72	400
2013	88	506

Building permits in Oconee County through April of each year

* 2013 figures are through April 25

He said there are current plans for subdivisions being considered by his office, the first such movement in the past two years.

He said the increase in permits along with reports from Realtors about increases in existing home sales make

about the rebound in the housing market.

"If you talk to Realtors, we're all seeing the same thing – more movement in the market," he said. "There are a variety of projects going on."

Spec houses – homes being built without specific buyers – have been almost non-existent during the economic downturn, but Stephens said he is seeing some growth on that end as well.

"In 2007 and 2008, we were seeing a lot of spec houses being built because people were buying them, and it was worth the risk," he said. "When the recession hit, that was a risk people couldn't afford. We are beginning to see some spec houses being built, and some of the subdivisions are now open to it. When we start to see more of that happening, we're in for good times."

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