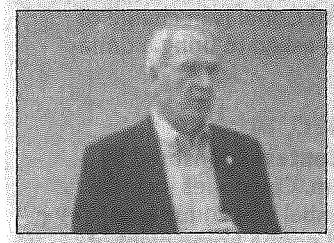
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Industrial park moves up

Planners put project back on 'important'



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Economic Development Commission Director Jim Alexander.

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — A $275,000 first phase of the proposed Golden Corner Commerce Park on Highway 59 north of Fair Play has made it back to the "Important Capital Projects" category for Oconee County.

Even so, it took a personal lobbying effort by Oconee Economic Development Commission Director Jim Alexander to convince Planning Commission members to move the project up during their regular meeting on Monday night.

However, planners' decision to move up the industrial park project came with a string attached.

Planner Ryan Honea argued that there would be no urgency to move ahead with the first phase of the project unless a $6.6 million first phase to bring sewer to the proposed commerce park and the Interstate 85 corridor is started. Everyone agrees that, without sewer, the chances of

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Oconee's priority list

list, but sewer plans must advance

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getting a tenant into the 400-acre commerce park site are virtually none.

Alexander made his pitch in favor of a five-phase plan to develop the industrial park at a cost of approximately $3.5 million when completed.

The Planning Commission is prioritizing a short- and long-term capital projects list that it must recommend to County Council before officials begin work on a new county budget.

There are 77 projects on the list, including four by the school district, that would cost more than $140 million.

As things stand now, topping the list are a new detention center estimated to cost about $15 million, a $650,000 C&D (construction and demolition) landfill and replacement of the Long Mountain radio tower at a cost of $300,000.

Alexander also lobbied for three other economic development projects on the list, including a spec building. The three economic development projects have a $7 million price tag.

Although the spec building has a cost estimate of $2.2 million, Alexander said the actual quote for the 50,000 square-foot building is $1.8 million. He said that cost could be reduced to $1.5 million, if the county acts quickly.

Alexander also pushed for an elevated water tank with a 1 million gallon capacity that would cost about $2 million and asked planners to consider $3 million for purchasing more land for economic development.

"We need to be planning ahead and be prepared for when the economy turns around," Alexander said.

Commission Chairman Tommy Abbott said the county just has too many needs on the list. He said those needs have to be balanced with consideration for burdened taxpayers. He said some people have had to take out loans to pay their property taxes.

"Some of these things can't be done until the economy turns around," Abbott said.

At the end of the meeting, the commission voted to retain Abbott as chairman. Ryan Honea declined to remain the vice chairman. Commissioner Howard Moore, who was not at the meeting, was chosen to replace Honea as vice chairman.

Commissioner Andrea Heller thanked Abbott for chairing the Commission the past 14 years, but suggested that the members be rotated in the future.

"You need to have a system for rotation," Heller said. "We all have to take responsibility."

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