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JESSICA NELMS | STAFF

Itron employees make electricity meters at the company's West Union facilities, recently. The company is making a new $31 million investment at the plant under a tax deal approved on Tuesday.

Itron to invest $31 million, bring new jobs to Oconee

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — The Oconee County Council unanimously approved a tax deal this week with a West Union maker of electricity meters that could bring up to 150 new jobs over the next five years.

Itron Inc. officials, with headquarters in Liberty Lake, Wash., will unveil details of the company's plans at the council's next meeting Dec. 15, said Jim Alexander, director of the Oconee Economic Development Commission.

The fee-in-lieu of tax agreement between the county and Itron is an extension of last year's similar pact between the two in which the company promised to invest $30 million. In the resolution approved Tuesday night, the document states that Itron invested in excess of $30 million to exceed the statutory minimum investment within the initial five years.

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>
> **Jim Alexander**
> Director, Oconee County Economic Development Commission

Alexander said he did not know the exact number of jobs to be created. However, he said the new $31 million investment would expand Itron's product lines and bring from 50 to 150 new jobs to Oconee.

"This is a great event," Alexander said of the deal. "When they make this investment it means they plan to be here for a while."

The announcement comes on the heels of a tax deal agreement with Greenfield Industries Inc., a maker of die-castings.

Council on Tuesday approved the second reading of an ordinance authorizing the tax deal. Under the terms of the agreement, Greenfield, a maker of die casting, agrees to invest $18.6 million.

Both deals are welcome news in the jobs-starved county hit with 14.2 percent unemployment.

Itron currently employs more than 600 workers at its West Union plant. Worldwide, the company generated $1.9 billion in revenues and employs more than 8,500 workers.

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