Keowee River project clears major hurdle

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WALHALLA — The $200 million Keowee River project — expected to be the next generation of developments to attract a new wave of residents to Oconee County — cleared a major hurdle at Monday night's Planning Commission meeting.

Planners approved an ordinance that allows Keowee River principals and Oconee County to enter into an agreement that stipulates development standards at the project on Highway 130.

Keowee River plans, which were unveiled last summer, call for an integrated residential and commercial community with a natural backdrop.

Developer Scott Vick could not hide a big smile after the commission cleared the ordinance. Commission approval was needed to allow the ordinance to move forward to Oconee County Council.

The next step calls for the council to hold public hearings on the ordinance before taking a third and final vote on the proposal.

The Keowee River Development Standards agreement is important to the developer. The document allows him to move forward quickly with pre-approved road and infrastructure specifications without having to apply for piecemeal variances that could bog down the project.

"We're excited about it," Vick said. "We're looking at the first of July to officially start the permitting process."

Vick said he already has preliminary approval from the state Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) for its plan to control stormwater erosion. State officials also have checked off on the development's fire safety plan, and the Department of Transportation has given preliminary approval to its roads configuration.

In other action Monday, planners put off consideration of proposed new Lake Overlay standards until they have a chance to hear from a Duke Energy expert next week on lakeshore management.

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