McCall planning ice rink in downtown Walhalla

BY STEVEN BRADLEY
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WALHALLA — An Oconee County Council member says he hopes to bring an ice rink to Walhalla by next year — and plans to do it without taxpayer funding — to help continue the resurgence of the city's downtown area.


McCall

Wayne McCall said at Tuesday's council meeting he was motivated by reports on the nightly news of downtown ice skating on the square in cities such as Greenville and Spartanburg.

"I said, 'Why can't Walhalla do this?'" he said.

McCall, who represents the Walhalla, West Union and Mountain Rest areas, said he plans to bring the skating rink to fruition the same way the city was able to reopen its pool a few years ago — with no taxpayer dollars.

The city pool fell into disrepair and remained unused for many years until it was refurbished and reopened in the fall of 2013 with the help of a communitywide effort spearheaded by McCall.

The councilman said he has already begun talking with "several corporate people" and received positive responses about supporting the project.

"We're trying to give something for the youth," he said. "The more stuff we've got for kids to do, the less problems they get into."

McCall said when he began studying the project, he was surprised at how "simple" an ice rink is to construct.

"A pool is pretty complex, as I found out," he said. "An ice rink is not that complex — except when I get on the ice. That's (probably going to end up) in broken hips, so I'd stay off of that thing."

McCall said it is too late to begin the project this year, but he hopes to have it in place by next year.

The ice rink would be another boost in the revitalization of Walhalla's downtown, which this year saw the completion of a $2.1 million streetscape project.

Additionally, the Palmetto Conservation Foundation is working to make Walhalla the terminus of a statewide network of trails that stretch more than 350 miles to promote outdoor recreational activity such as biking, hiking and camping.

Addressing county council Tuesday, Walhalla City Councilwoman Jennifer Crawford referenced the reopening of the pool as one of the examples of "great progress" being made in the city, which she said is in the process of adding a splash pad as well.

Crawford pointed to the relationship the city had with county council as a big reason for its progress and also offered updates on Walhalla's Main Street and downtown revitalization project.

The councilwoman said the project is geared toward "improving choice and quality of life for our citizens, as well as for our visitors and our guests."

She said the county's Destination Oconee initiative has been used to guide the city's development of its downtown master plan and, during the past year, city officials have worked closely with the Oconee Economic Alliance and Destination Oconee manager Janet Hartman to form the Walhalla Downtown Development Corporation.

The WDDC is comprised of city leaders and representatives from groups and committees in the city and is expanding to include community members and business and property owners.

"We're working with these volunteers in the areas of business recruitment, downtown development, city promotion and design, which will include creating design standards for our Main Street," she said.

Crawford also lauded the work of Bill Huggins, who was hired to a shared planner position approved by the county.

"Together, Bill and Janet have provided huge support in our short-term and long-term downtown planning," she said, "and I feel that those individuals — which are (the county's) resources and employees — have been direct contributions to the tremendous positive momentum that we're feeling as a council and the positive changes that we're seeing in our community and in our local economy."

Crawford said Walhalla is seeing "more people spending time and money" in the community, which in turn is translating to "more businesses and more jobs."

"Thank you for understanding that positive change and economic vibrancy in your cities means good things for all of Oconee County," she told council.

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