Merger approved

BY GREG OLIVER
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SENECA — Board members of Oconee Alliance Thursday voted unanimously to merge with the Oconee County Economic Development Commission, but the move isn't completely final just yet.

"We still have one more step in the process, and that's to get before County Council and have them weigh in on the subject," said Richard Blackwell, economic development director for Oconee County.


Blackwell

Blackwell said a presentation will be made to County Council at its November meeting.

Discussion regarding a potential merger between the two groups has been taking place for several months. A strategic plan for economic development presented to County Council in January called for the commission to have non-profit status, allowing for more private partnership with the county as well as combining

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some groups with the commission.

When Jim Gadd, who had served as executive director of Oconee Alliance, announced last July he was stepping down, Alliance Board Chairman Robert Halfacre said at the time that the resignation "enhanced" the timeliness of the discussion.

Following Thursday's vote, Halfacre said the board is encouraged with the new direction.

"We are pleased with the unanimous vote of approval to merge with the Oconee Economic Commission and look forward to presenting to the county in November and hopefully receiving their blessing of the new organization," Halfacre said.

Blackwell said the merger will bring a new economic synergy to the county since the board will be restructured to feature both public and private representation.

"The board structure will change, but I think there is excitement because it's a public-private partnership representing Oconee County, workforce development and community issues," Blackwell said.

Officials said any fund balance that currently exists with Oconee Alliance will remain as part of the new organization. They say missions will remain the same and that the new board structure will maintain the same responsibility for those funds as the previous board.

Norman Cannada contributed to this story.

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