Michelin would invest up to $250M in Oconee move

Council also moves east Seneca development forward

'This would be the largest investment this county has seen other than Duke Energy from a particular, single-point source.'

Scott Moulder
Oconee County administrator

BY STEVEN BRADLEY
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — An agreement to bring Michelin to the Golden Corner Commerce Park, representing up to a $250 million investment and 170 new jobs, passed second reading at Oconee County Council's meeting on Tuesday.

The project was still being referred to as "Project Sarah" in council chambers, but a legal notice of a public hearing on the matter by council chairman Joel Thrift, which ran in the Nov. 29 edition of The Journal, confirmed Project Sarah and Michelin North America to be one and the same.

The Journal previously reported Project Sarah would be located in the Golden Corner Commerce Park in the Fair Play area of southern Oconee County.

"Project Sarah will invest up to $250 million as part of the project over a five-year period and hire up to 150 or 170 employees," county administrator Scott Moulder said Tuesday.

Thirty employees would be full-time employees of the company, according to Moulder, and the remainder would be third-party employees, with an average wage of $22.50 per hour.

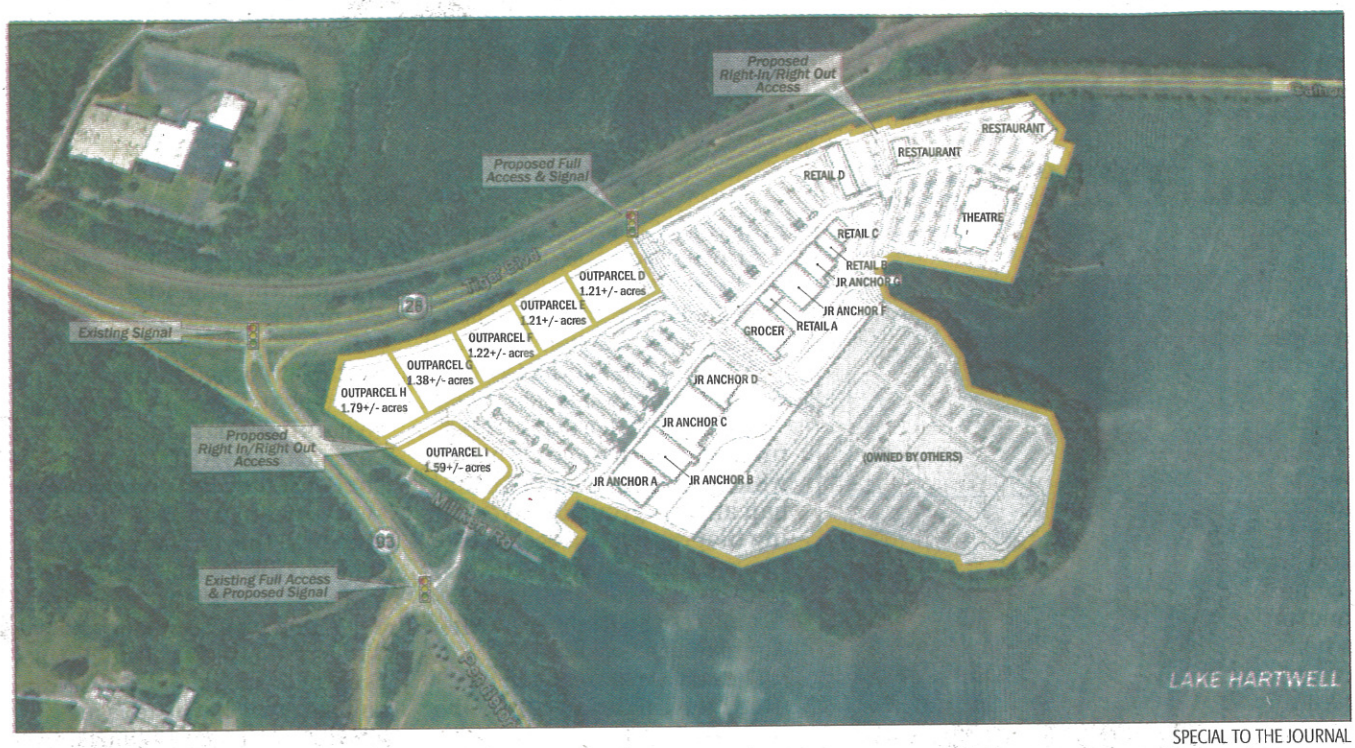
Moulder said the documents being drawn up for the

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JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Oconee County Council members passed second reading of an agreement to bring Michelin to the Golden Corner Commercer Park on Tuesday, a move that could bring an investment of up to $250 million and 170 new jobs.



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

This rendering shows the layout of a mixed-use development proposed on the shores of Lake Hartwell near the Oconee County border with Clemson.

MICHELIN: One of two projects on agenda

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deal, included in the backup material for Tuesday's meeting, reference a $175 million figure for the investment, but clarified that is the minimum — with a maximum of $250 million — over the five-year period.

"This would be the largest investment this county has seen other than Duke Energy from a particular, single-point source," Moulder said. "So we're extremely excited about this company looking to choose Oconee County as their new home."

A representative of Michelin declined to discuss specifics of the project, but did confirm its "collaboration" with Oconee County Council.

"Michelin continuously evaluates investment opportunities to support future growth," the company said in a statement from spokesperson Stephanie Tarbet. "We will not discuss specific details of the notice at this time out of respect for the hearing process. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with the Oconee County Council."

Planning commissioner Ryan Honea, speaking during the public comment session of Tuesday's meeting, commended council for "putting something in the hayfield down in Fair Play that we can call an industrial park now."

"It was a first-class company that you brought in, and I really appreciate it," he said.

The public hearing on Ordinance 2014-29, which would authorize the fee-in-lieu-of-tax agreement with Michelin North America, is set for 6 p.m. Dec. 16 in council chambers.

The deal with Michelin was part of two economic development projects that would mean up to $280 million and 470 jobs to the county that were on the agenda Tuesday.

A resolution also passed first and final reading regarding Casto Southeast Realty's plans for a $30 million multi-use development at the site of the old Milliken plant in eastern Oconee County that would yield up to 300 new jobs.

The commercial development would be located along the frontage of U.S. Highway 123 and S.C. Highway 93 and would establish roughly 300,000 square feet of retail/restaurant space near Oconee's border with Clemson.

The Casto project had been called Project Fountain by council — a reference to the large fountain visible from U.S. 123 in front of the old Milliken plant — and sits on approximately 45 acres on the shores of Lake Hartwell.

The site plan for the development, dubbed Hartwell Village on Casto's website, indicates three entrances — two on U.S. 123 and one on S.C. 93 — as well as the addition of a traffic light on U.S. 123.

The plan shows space designated for a movie theater, two restaurants and a grocery store, as well as several other non-designated spaces. The mixed-use development would border both U.S. 123 and S.C. 93 directly, while NewSpring Church — from which Casto bought the property — would overlook Lake Hartwell on the back end of the peninsula.

Thrift said he had met with executives from the companies involved in both projects — Michelin and Casto — in the last week and hopes the expansion will begin in the first quarter of next year.

"They are real enthusiastic," he said. "They will keep a low profile to begin with, but the expansion possibilities of these things are enormous.

"It will create a boomtown basically in other parts of our county instead of metropolitan Walhalla. We will have tremendous growth in the east end of our county on 123, as well as the southern end of our county."

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