Millage decrease possible

Duke assessment rises, tax notices delayed two weeks

BY NORMAN CANNADA
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WALHALLA — Tax notices will be delayed two weeks as a result of an amended assessment of Duke Energy property by the South Carolina Department of Revenue (DOR), which could result in a millage decrease for Oconee County taxpayers this year.

Oconee County auditor Ken Nix will be back on the agenda for Tuesday's county council meeting, just as he was Sept. 2.

In an email response to questions Tuesday, Nix said he will propose a tax decrease of approximately 2 mills at next week's council meeting.

Nix said he is still working on the numbers but said he expects the value of a county mill to increase by about $8,000 and the school district mill to increase in value by approximately $10,000. Nix said he is waiting to set the millage because of the extra time he has "to

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MILLAGE: No determination about changes, Moulder said

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get updates from various areas and sources" and said he plans to "make sure everything is as up-to-date as possible."

Nix recommended a 1-mill tax increase at the Sept. 2 meeting based on a $9.5 million decrease in Duke's assessment from the DOR, but the council members voted 4-1 to hold taxes at the same level as last year. Chairman Joel Thrift was the only councilman in favor of the 1-mill increase.

Nix said the assessment is now valued at $130 million, which is only $2.5 million less than last year's assessment. Nix said he and several other county auditors expressed concerns to someone at DOR and Duke was asked review its data. He called the adjustment to Duke's tax assessment "significant."

"I am very pleased that (Duke) and the DOR moved quickly so this could be adjusted before we processed all the tax notices," Nix said.

Bonnie Swingle, a spokeswoman for DOR, confirmed questions had come from county officials but added, "Duke found the error." She said Duke filed "an amended return, which is why there is a reassessment."

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> Oconee County auditor

Oconee County administrator Scott Moulder called the amended Duke numbers "a pleasant surprise."

He said there has been no determination about changes to the millage, saying, "I have no feedback from council." He added council members will likely decide at Tuesday's meeting whether to keep the millage the same or cut taxes after Nix makes his presentation to council.

Moulder said he had discussions with Nix, Thrift and county treasurer Greg Nowell about whether the Duke numbers were accurate.

"We had contemplated discussing the valuation with DOR just to make sure someone was verifying that the calculations were correct," Moulder said.

"With all the work that the county is doing to generate additional value in the mill, it's discouraging to see one corporation decrease can erase the positive work we're doing," Moulder added. "So it's reassuring and encouraging that we're seeing the value of our mill increase."

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