Millions of dollars in rollover money questioned

Oconee County Council wants to know how much cash has been 'squirreled away'

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WALHALLA — Oconee County officials came away from Thursday night's budget workshop in a daze trying to keep up with the paper trail of large amounts of money "squirreled" away for future use.

County Council members were surprised at the number of designated funds still floating from one year to another.

The situation came to light when the council's Budget, Finance and Administration Committee was asked to vote on a laundry list of "rollover" funds totaling more than $4 million from the current budget to the new 2009-10 budget.

The bulk of the rollover, more than $3 million, pertained to the Roads & Bridges account. The council approved $1.2 million that should have been used to pave eight roads.

However, council members balked when asked to approve an additional $2.3 million for "Unexpended Road Paving."

One of Webster's definitions for unexpended is: "Leftover meatloaf."

The revelation of such a hefty carryover made some taxpayers in the audience rustle in their seats.

Councilman Wayne McCall recommended using the opportunity to "do something for taxpayers."

Interim Administrator Kendra Brown tried to explain the carry over.

"Over the years the years, Oconee has set aside money in the past to pay for big-ticket items, whereas other counties would borrow to do those things," Brown said.

Council Chairman Reg Dexter was perplexed and frustrated at once.

"I assume this is a rollover of a rollover of a rollover," he said.

Councilman Joel Thrift, who chairs the Transportation Committee, said he was unaware of the money floating around.

"You can rest assured I'll be asking about that at the next road workshop," Thrift said.

Brown suggested that after the new budget is approved, the council needs to hold workshops to "find money squirreled away."

The issue also came up with money collected from 1 mill earmarked for economic development.

Brown said the mill set aside for economic development could be reallocated to operations.

"It frustrates me to see money sitting there and not know what it's for," Brown said.

Dexter said the council needs an understanding of what is taking place and "what money is out there."

"We're putting money aside for capital improvement," Dexter said. I have a concern of money sitting there without guidelines for using it."