

Millions in broadband material await

Southern Pipeline & Utility's performance bond application



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THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Oconee County purchased more than \$2 million worth of fiber it can't begin to put in the ground until the

contractor lined up to install it can get its act together.

Four weeks have passed since Oconee County Council authorized an \$8.2 million contract for Southern Pipeline & Utility to

undertake the critical job of boring 270 miles of roadway and set up a trunk line for Oconee's \$14.3 million broadband network.

Oconee officials have been waiting for more than a week now for

contractor

still needs approval

Southern Pipeline to get a bond application approved for the total amount of its \$8.2 million contract with the county.

County Administrator Scott Moulder said that the performance bond

application had not been approved as of Friday.

Initially, Moulder and a majority of council were willing to accept 50 percent bonding on the SPU

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contract.

They reasoned that they could minimize the risk by doing the project in stages and only paying the contractor when one stage had been successfully completed before being allowed to advance to the next stage.

Moulder changed his mind and said last week that he would require 100 percent bonding.

SPU executive Terry Stroud did not return The Journal's call Friday.

Fortunately for the county, while it waits on SPU, the fiber supplier — OFS Fitel, LLC of Carrollton, Ga. will store the optical cable until it is ready to be used.

The federal government awarded Oconee a \$9.6 million grant last year that would pay the lion's

share of the broadband contract.

The grant was made possible through federal stimulus money and is in keeping with a national initiative to extend broadband capacity to rural and underserved areas.

Once the broadband trunk is in place, Oconee would lease access to Internet service providers that could make the final hook-up for residences and businesses that either don't have service or would like more capacity and speed.

Furthermore, the trunk would be made available to enhance the telecommunications capabilities of anchor institutions such as schools, hospitals, law enforcement and emergency services in the county.

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