Moulder, County Council expect another busy year

BY MIKE EADS
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WALHALLA — 2013 is shaping up to look a lot like 2012 for Oconee County's government, save for contentious elections.



Moulder



Corbeil



Crenshaw

Oconee County Administrator Scott Moulder is coming up on three years in his current post, a tenure marked by an exhaustive overhaul of county government, including his hiring of like-minded younger men to oversee the various departments.

"I have spent an abundance of time working with my department managers and organizing the team in a way that this organization can be successful," Moulder said. "At this point, I am satisfied with where we are and will continue working with each department to become more effective and efficient."

Economic development and emergency services have gotten much of his attention, as he has followed the Oconee County Council's dictates to get both areas whipped into shape. The county's second spec building sold last year to a Georgia firm, and BorgWarner recently received tax breaks to expand its work in the county.

Moulder's successes have come in the face of dealing with an often-fractious County Council; at times it has appeared that the only thing Archie Barron, Wayne McCall, Paul Corbeil, Joel Thrift and Reg Dexter agree on is that Moulder is doing a good job.

If that has been a problem, Moulder shows no hints of it.

"I believe we have a great relationship," Moulder says. "I have worked for a number of different councils in my career and I feel my relationship with this council is the best I have had. There is a mutual respect on each side and I enjoy working for the council, my employees and the citizens of Oconee County."

Council members expect more of the same from Moulder and his staff this coming year.

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"I expect to see very aggressive business management style," Corbeil said, including reorganizing the county's planning and building departments with the county's DHEC office into a one-stop shop for builders and contractors.

"I think they've done a great job," Thrift said. "I think he's got a good grasp on everything and following the council instructions on jobs and creating an environment to create more jobs ... I think there's been good progress."

Moulder and the council also like what they have seen so far from Richard Blackwell, who took over the county's economic development reins from Jim Alexander last spring. They expect good things from him in 2013.

"Richard Blackwell is a very competent economic development director," said Moulder. "The two of us should always strive for more resources. The strategic plan we just completed outlines our work plan and we will be planning to implement the key components of the plan.

"I continue to work with the capital projects funding plan so that we can develop each of our (economic development) assets to 100 percent completion. The more developed and diverse properties we can market, the stronger we will be as a county in the recruitment environment."

That work very much includes getting sewers to the south end of Oconee County. The county has $6 million on hand for the work and is hammering out an agreement with the Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority for the remaining $2 million needed.

"Engineering has already begun on the sewer south line (to Golden Corner)," Moulder said. "I am extremely excited about the potential this project has for our county. I would expect construction bidding to occur around March."

Broadband is also coming to Oconee County, or at least 95 percent of it, in 2013. Public buildings are being networked and private service providers are already lining up.

"This project is on schedule to be completed by March (2013)," Moulder said. "We have already begun selling dark fiber. We should be able to ope up the entire network for (Internet Service Provider) access betwee now and March ... at lea three ISPs have contacte us and are ready to begi using the system now."

Moulder and the counc also intend to toe the lin on the 2014 budget, avoid ing millage hikes if at all possible.

"Personally, I do not se us wanting to increase th millage in 2014," Corbeil said. "We're trying to liv within our means ... we have enough uncertainty with regard to Duke Energy assessed value and we're going to continue t be conservative."

Moulder agreed, but refuses to completely rule out more revenues.

"At this point my goal is to present a balanced budget without requesting any additional millage," Moulder said. "I will know more as we begin the budget process next month. I want to continue with the (rural fire) substation plan and, if additional millage is needed, I will ask (the County) Council to approve the additional revenue."

Thrift echoes Corbeil and Moulder on spending, but he said they will start with a blank budgetary slate for 2014 when that process starts next month.

"We will look at all options when start budgeting process in January," Thrift said. "We have a retreat in February and we will look at all options."

Thrift didn't close the door on new revenues "as long as they're not hurtful to the population" and added that they will have to keep a "close eye on Columbia" to see what the South Carolina Legislature plans to spend on local government.

And it sounds like the new jail will finally get under construction next year, too. As of right now, it appears likely to go on land across from the county administration building since there is no semblance of further negotiations with the city of Walhalla about rebuilding on the current site.

"I would expect a decision on the jail early in 2013," Moulder said. "The new sheriff (Mike Crenshaw) will play a vital role in that decision. We have already solicited his assistance and he is working with us to establish the best direction possible."

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