Moulder leans toward lower taxes

Administrator: Millage rollback should follow drop in spending

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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SENECA — If Oconee County Administrator Scott Moulder had his way, every homeowner would see a lower tax bill this year.

Speaking before the Seneca Rotary Club on Thursday, Moulder said he is leaning toward recommending a rollback of the millage or property tax rate.

Addressing a handful of some of the hot-button issues he's had to tackle since taking on the job in June, Moulder updated Rotarians on the progress with Oconee's countywide reassessment.

According to the county boss, he's seen data showing that property values are coming down.

Moulder said that when property values go down the amount of taxes collected also takes a hit. He said that by law, when assessments go down county officials could increase the millage rate to make up for the loss in taxes.

"I, myself, feel we should roll back," Moulder told the Rotarians that met for lunch at Jimmy's Restaurant for their weekly meeting.

Moulder said his recommendation would be swayed by just how much of a drop in property values is recorded. He thinks the drop could be in the neighborhood of $500,000, which he said would not warrant higher taxes.

Oconee County Auditor Ken Nix expects to set the millage rate by the end of September and present it to Oconee County Council at either the Oct. 5 or Oct. 19 council meeting. Nix set the millage at 215.3 mills last year.



Moulder

Moulder said that as he sees it, if Oconee's elected officials are inclined to reduce spending by 8 percent or more in the coming years, he thinks that should translate to a reduction in taxes as well.

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Briefly injecting himself into the perennial debate on whether the county is overtaxing or underspending, Moulder said: "It's both."

As for reassessment, Moulder said the $1.8 million project is back on track after recent hiccups with the county's tax software program.

Moulder said he also questioned the decision to spend $1.8 million on reassessment and asked why it could not be done in-house.

However, now he thinks that getting a private firm in to do the work has a big up side.

"An outside firm brings an objective opinion," Moulder said. "It has nothing to gain and nothing to lose. It's a big benefit that values are done objectively."

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>
> **Scott Moulder**
> Oconee administrator

Moulder let it be known that by far his biggest test is to come up with a countywide fire plan.

He joked that the issue proved to be the downfall of the two previous administrators.

Moulder admits he's not an expert in the field, which is the reason why he's spent many nights and weekends meeting with the people in the know.

"I've not been home to see my kids go to sleep the last two weeks," he said.

Moulder said he's not ready to talk in detail about a plan because he's yet to meet with all the stakeholders. He said he goes into each of those meetings "exposed and vulnerable."

County Council expects Moulder to have a plan drawn up by the end of the year.

Moulder did give a glimpse of where he expects to go with it.

"I'm a supporter of the volunteer system," he said.

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