Neighbors upset with rezoning grab, seek protection with petition

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Quietly and respectfully, Jean Jennings and other long-time residents in the Fairview and Ebenezer communities are banding together to protect their way of life.

To do that, Jennings said Wednesday she's come up with a rezoning petition with 80 percent participation of other property owners as required by Oconee's Zoning Enabling Ordinance that would protect them as a "Traditional Rural District."

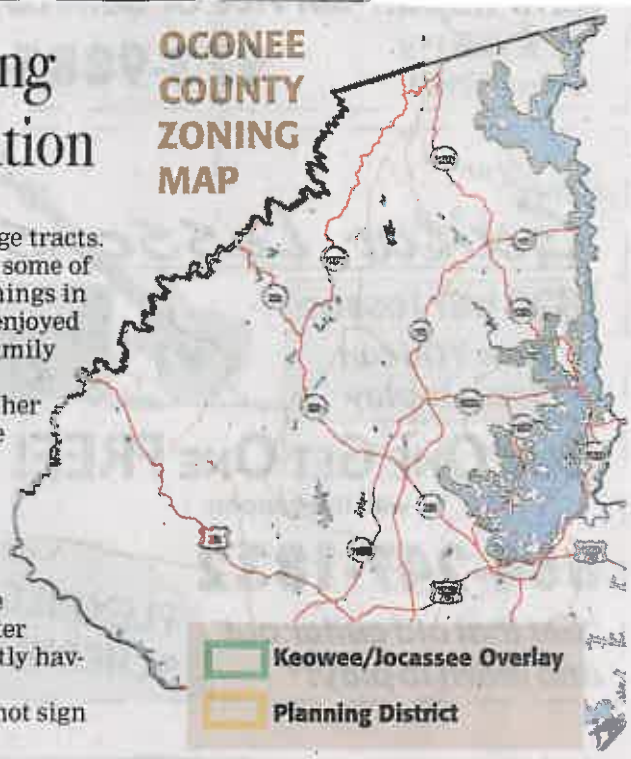
Jennings said she owns more than one property, including a 16-acre tract. Other neighbors joining her also own large tracts.

"We have agriculture, some of us have cows," said Jennings in describing the lifestyle enjoyed for generations by her family and others in the area.

Jennings said she and her neighbors are taking the initiative because some are afraid and others are angry at the aggressive petition drives being undertaken by mostly lakeside lot owners who are greater in numbers and are mostly having their way.

Jennings said she did not sign

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up anyone who was not first contacted by her.

Jennings said she contacted some property owners who she signed up that were later contacted by someone pushing a petition in favor of Lake Residential District or Residential District.

"We did not include anyone on our petition that we did not contact," Jennings said. "We believe each homeowner should decide. They should not be forced to accept zoning they don't want or is not right for them. Some neighbors are upset."

Planning Commission members point to Jennings' story and that of many others as the reason why they've voted to place a moratorium on reviewing rezoning petitions.

They've indicated that changes to the ZEO are needed.

Commission Vice Chairman Howard Moore said that if the ZEO is to be a "living document," as he said it should, then changes are warranted.

For instance, some critics say that the Small Area Rezoning method, which is the one being used by Jennings and others pursuing petitions, should be modified to keep lake property owners from overreaching areas that are agricultural or rural in nature.

As it currently reads, the Small Area Rezoning method considers as being contiguous even those parcels that are separated by a body of water, which could contribute to what some consider to be "overreaching."

Others are saying that the 51 percent of signatures needed of all affected property owners to move a petition forward should be higher.

In any case, the Oconee County Council is expected to receive Jennings' petition and another pertaining to the Cane Creek Basin next week.

The Planning Commission has not indicated a timeline or deadline for reviewing and recommending changes to the ZEO.

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A roadside poster on SC Highway 188 and Lakeside Drive is a sign of the times these days in Oconee County. The sign refers to a rezoning hearing on a Luther Land Road and Petty Road petition involving 371 parcels.