New 'Heritage Fair' still looking for a home

Oconee officials are drafting an agreement to allow the show at future industrial park site

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WALHALLA — Promoters looking to bring a new fair to Oconee in the fall are not giving up on trying to stage the event at the future industrial park site in Fair Play.

The brainchild of West-Oak Young Farmers, organizers of the Carolina Foothills Heritage Fair think the event featuring livestock, horticulture, crafts, music, entertainment, antique cars and tractors and food is a potential crowd pleaser that would be a boost to the county.

Local teacher Gwen McPhail, who unveiled preliminary plans for the fair two months ago, told the Oconee County Council this week that sponsors already are lining up behind the event. McPhail said one company, which she did not identify, indicated it would be interested in doing a follow-up event in April 2010.

McPhail said the sponsor is sure the follow-up event would "draw visitors from all over the Southeast."

"They have asked that we provide a copy of a written agreement between West-Oak Young Farmers and Oconee County," McPhail told council members.

On Thursday, Acting County Administrator Beth Hulse said County Council instructed County Attorney Tom Martin to draft an agreement.

Hulse said councilmen want representatives of West-Oak Young Farmers and county officials to discuss road-improvement plans near the potential site for the fair and costs associated with those upgrades.

"We'd like to get those numbers (cost estimates) closer to each other," Hulse said.

McPhail said professionals helping her group came up with an estimate of slightly over $44,000 for road improvements, but that during a recent meeting with former County Administrator Dale Surrett she was informed the county estimated the cost at about $150,000.

The roadwork would include building a small access road for emergency vehicles and a wide access point on Highway 59 to allow turning left or right efficiently.

"There are expenses in the county estimate that we believe are unnecessary," McPhail said. "We do not need gravel in the midway nor in the general parking area, nor will the areas need to be graded."

Tentatively, the fair is planned for Oct. 29 through Nov. 1.

"If agreement and work can be done in a timely manner, we can move forward to prepare for the fair in October," McPhail said.