New housing down in Oconee, Pickens

Building permit-trend report shows both counties trailing rest of Upstate

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — New housing construction in Oconee and Pickens counties remained sluggish in the second half of 2009 despite an uptick in the rest of the Upstate, a regional residential building permitting trend report shows.

Residential construction activity showed signs of coming to life in the greater Upstate area as residential building permitting increased by 5.4 percent in the final six months of 2009 when compared to the first six months.

This increase in permitting activity in the second half of the year could signal that the residential building industry hit bottom, "and the positive trends will continue into 2010," said Dale Akins of the Market Edge of Knoxville, Tenn., on Thursday. Akins founded the Market Edge, a company that tracks residential construction activity in the Southeast.

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JESSICA NELMS | FILE PHOTO

According to a residential building trend report, construction activity in Oconee and Pickens counties is lagging behind the rest of the Upstate.

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"The interesting trend is that more building permits were issued in the last six months of 2009 than the first six months," Akins said in his report. "This may not seem like news until you consider that since at least 2005, a range of 53 percent to 62 percent of all building permits were issued during the first six months of each year. That trend was reversed in 2009."

The positive trend, however, failed to play out in Oconee and Pickens counties where permits pulled declined in the second half of 2009 compared to the first six months.

In Oconee, 109 permits were pulled in quarters three and four of 2009 combined, or a drop of 7.6 percent from the 118 permits issued during the first six months of the year.

The situation was more severe in Pickens County, which issued 94 permits in the second half of 2009, or 25 percent less than the 127 permits issued in the first half of the year.

Akins could not be reached Thursday to explain why Oconee and Pickens are not faring as well as the rest of the Upstate.

The economic recession that began in late 2007 has severely curtailed residential building activity in Oconee and Pickens.

Oconee issued 227 permits in 2009, or 41 percent less than the 391 issued in 2008. For its part, Pickens issued 221 permits in 2009, or 51 percent less than the 453 issued in 2008.

Residential building activity peaked in 2006 in Oconee when the county issued 847 permits, and 2004 in Pickens when it issued 739 permits. Since then, permitting has dropped more than 70 percent in each county.

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