Oconee County Council taps 'Blue-Ribbon Panel' members

Appointed group to make recommendations on sewers to help jump-start development

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SENECA — The Oconee County Council pulled a diverse mix of names out of its hat this week to form a "Blue-Ribbon Panel" tasked with reviewing studies and plans for sewer in the southern part of the county.

Eight Oconee residents with diverse interests were nominated to the panel including the group's only woman — Salem resident and Town utility billing clerk Marti Jennings — who used to be environmental coordinator at the former WestPoint Stevens facility.

Selected by Councilman Wayne McCall, Jennings said Wednesday that she'll wait to get official word about the appointment from County Council, adding that she's looking forward to being a representative from Salem on the panel.

The group is expected to make its recommendations to the County Council in 90 to 120 days.

Councilman Mario Suarez added attorney Frank Holleman, an Oconee County native known locally as "Mr. Stumphouse," who helped lead a community coalition to save Stumphouse Mountain and Issaqueena Falls near Walhalla from private development in 2007.

Councilman Joel Thrift brought in government observer Larry Linson to participate in the group. Linson and his wife, Donna, are among a hardy core of informed Oconee County residents who rarely miss government meetings and are never shy about keeping elected officials' feet

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to the fire on matters of taxes and spending.

Suarez also picked high-profile businessman and community leader Neal Workman. Workman is owner of Trehel Corp., a commercial and industrial general contractor serving all of the Upstate, past chair of the Oconee Alliance and Anderson County Economic Development Partnership. He remains active in Upstate business, education and government circles and is partnering in the development of the master planned community, Highpointe of Clemson.

Thrift added Seneca City Administrator Greg Dietterick to the mix. Although less visible than some on the local scene, Dietterick is highly regarded as a behind-the-scenes dealmaker, mover and shaker. He is also a member of the Oconee County Sewer Authority Board of Directors.

Rounding out the panel are Oconee County Planning Commission Vice Chair Ryan Honea, Dick Hughes, a Democrat who mounted an unsuccessful bid for County Council last year, and Robbie Lee, who recently lost a bid in the GOP primary race for the open District 1 County Council seat.

The panel's recommendations to the County Council could prove pivotal as Oconee attempts to jump-start development and job-creation opportunities in an area that includes the Interstate 85 "Boom Belt" and the county-owned land in Fair Play being touted as the county's next industrial park.

Infrastructure decisions, particularly regarding sewer, could easily cost from $4.5 million to more than $10 million.

Hughes said this evening's meeting of the County Council's Planning and Economic Development Committee would make a good starting point for the panel.

"I plan to be there," Hughes said.

The meeting starts at 5:30 p.m.

