Oconee County land purchases top $3.4M since 2009

BY MIKE EADS
THE JOURNAL



WALHALLA — Oconee County has bought a lot of land in the last four years. The purchases have been earmarked for the yet-to-be-built jail, industrial parks, the rock quarry, a new library and more.

Much of it has been put into use or is about to, and the rest remains idle.

The biggest purchase by far was Echo Hills in 2010, according to documents provided by County Administrator Scott Moulder. The county paid England Properties LLP $2.5 million for 449 acres of woods and pasture.

The land south of West Union, now known as Echo Hills Industrial Park, is about to receive $2.4 million worth of site prep, including gravel pads for 300,000 and 50,000 square foot buildings, interior roads and the extension of sewer service from an Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority line running along S.C. 11.

Economic development aims also spurred the county to spend $400,000 for 111 acres of woods and fields on the old Propex site in Seneca.

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The city and county purchased the property jointly, then Seneca took over the old plant and Oconee County got the adjoining land, which has been redubbed the "Seneca Rail Site."

Economic Development Director Richard Blackwell has big plans for this site, including possibly two large industrial buildings and extending a rail spur to the bordering Norfolk Southern line. Money has yet to be appropriated to prepare the land for building, but that could come late this year or early next.

Two purchases have been tied to building a new Oconee County Jail. The first one, next to the Law Enforcement Center on South Church Street in Walhalla, came in 2010. The County Council had hoped the quarter-acre, which cost $60,000, would allow rebuilding the new jail on the same site as the old one; however, the City of Walhalla wouldn't give zoning approval for the new jail. Earlier this summer, the council agreed to spend $112,000 for 24 acres across Dietrick Street from the county and school administration buildings. Most of that land, purchased from Six Mile lumber dealer Cecil Durham, lies outside Walhalla's zoning authority. The County Council has more than $15 million left from a previous bond sale to build the new jail, but has yet to commission any architectural plans for the Durham property.

Moulder recently negotiated a deal to add two new parcels to the county's rock quarry operation. The added land, 9.6 acres bought from Maurice Thompson and 1.7 acres bought from Jesse Harvey, cost $342,000 and is expected to add another 30 years of operating life to the quarry, a profit center for county finances.

The county also paid:

- $30,000 to Francis Davis for land on North Main Street for the Westminster Library;
- $5 to Foxwood Hills subdivision for the site of a new county fire substation;
- $1 to the School District of Oconee County for land next to Blue Ridge Elementary School to build the new Seneca Library (a plan since shelved), as well another $1 deal for land at the Hamilton Career Center.

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THE DETAILS

2012
Rock quarry – $342,000
Cecil Durham lot for jail – $112,000
Foxwood Hills (fire substation) – $5
Propex – $400,000

2011
Westminster library – $30,000

2010
S. Church St. in Walhalla (at Law Enforcement Center) – $60,000
Echo Hills – $2,500,000

2009
Seneca library at Blue Ridge Elementary – $1
Hamilton CC – $1