Oconee County officials press for Duke Energy pact



FILE PHOTO

Oconee officials are pressing the Planning Commission to finalize a memorandum of understanding with Duke Energy that spells out responsibilities and mutual cooperation in protecting Lake Keowee.

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — The Oconee County Council and Planning Commission are swatting a proposed Memorandum of Understanding with Duke Energy back and forth as if engaged in a game of pingpong.

The game is intensifying.

First, commissioners voted last week to send the MOU back to council with a letter indicating it had too much on its plate with zoning issues. Planners did leave the door open to taking up the agreement with Duke at a later date.

Councilman Archie Barron wasted little time swatting the MOU back to the commission's court.

"I guess I'm a little disappointed we're not seeing active development on that," Barron said at last week's council meeting. "We've been kicking the can down the road for a long time."

SEE **PACT**, PAGE **A5**

PACT: 'This is good business'

FROM PAGE A1

There are two schools of thought on whether or not to have the MOU with Duke.

Some are of the opinion that cooperation between Oconee County and Duke on protecting Lake Keowee has worked well for decades without a signed agreement.

Barron represents the other side.

"I come from a background of having procedures and written documentation of what you're doing, and that is the purpose of the MOU," Barron said.

Council Chairman Joel Thrift agreed.

"Future councils, administrators and administrations in Oconee County will know what transpired in the past, what's expected of us, our obligations and our commitment to Duke Energy and to the lake," Thrift said. "This is good business."

Council voted to approve a motion made by Barron to get the commission to proceed with the MOU and provide regular updates "so that we can see some action and move forward with it."

Commission Chairman Ryan Honea said Thursday that he did not expect to do much with the MOU at the group's next meeting Oct. 17.

Honea said there are three new members on the seven-member commission that need to be brought up to speed on the intent of the MOU and what's been done with it in the past.

However, Honea said the commission still has more work to do with the Zoning Enabling Ordinance before it can turn its attention to coming up with a final MOU document to recommend to council.

The ball is back in the commission's court.

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