Oconee County's interim administrator set for first day

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WALHALLA — The man asked to keep the Oconee County Administrator's seat warm until a permanent replacement is found plans to start his new gig on Monday.

In a telephone interview Thursday from his home near Lake Murray in Lexington, S.C., James Eugene "Gene" Klugh said his first official duty as Interim Administrator will be to meet with Oconee government department heads.

The Oconee County Council named Klugh to the position during its meeting Tuesday night. He takes over for Kendra Brown, who can now concentrate on her duties as Finance Director.

Klugh brings to the table more than 40 years of local government experience, and Chairman Reg Dexter said he and the other members of council intend to tap his experience and expertise.

So as not to come in cold on his first day of work, Klugh said he's been reading the minutes of County Council meetings and reviewing pertinent ordinances, including the county's budget. He hopes to get an understanding of county operations when he meets the department heads.

"Basically, I understand the Council-Administrator form of government," Klugh said. "I understand how it works.

"I anticipate fulfilling the duties of county administrator. The services Oconee provides are the same services as other counties," he added.

Klugh said plans call for him to work Monday through Wednesday each week until a new administrator comes aboard. Dexter said the county would take care of his lodging, as well as travel expenses. Klugh will be paid $70 an hour.

It's possible that Klugh will be on the job through the remainder of the year and then some, depending on how the search for a new boss develops.

Council decided last week to hire a professional search team to find more candidates. Council's own search ended with one standout candidate, William Mark Watson, still in the mix. However, instead of offering him the job outright, council decided it wants to bring several candidates in for face-to-face interviews.

Oconee Procurement Director Robyn Courtright said she contacted five top search firms that specialize in government clients. She said each firm provided quotes and forwarded the information to council.

Klugh said it's not uncommon for counties to hire a search firm to find an administrator. He said it was done in Colleton and Spartanburg counties where he's also worked as an interim administrator.