Oconee OKs $1.5M

Vote preceded by testy exchange between councilmen

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — It came as no surprise that Oconee County Council approved the building of a $1.5 million spec building Tuesday night.

Nor was it a shock that Councilman Wayne McCall cast the only vote against the proposal.

What might have surprised some was a terse exchange between McCall and Councilman Paul Corbeil about the job Economic Development Commission Director Jim Alexander is doing to attract businesses and jobs.

Alexander found himself in the crosshairs of the exchange.

McCall said he had no problem with the cost of the building that is being underwritten in part by $730,000 in utility tax credits.

However, he looked straight at Alexander and said he had problems with the job the commission is doing.

"The commission isn't going after business," McCall said. "We've let one thing after another slip through our fingers."

Corbeil quickly defended Alexander and the commission. He said governance should be a team effort. But he doesn't think the commission has received enough support.

"In part, there has been

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spec building

OTHER ACTION AT TUESDAY'S MEETING

- **Voiced** support for the Blue Ridge Arts Council but denied a $20,000 request to cover three months of operating expenses. BRAC spokesperson Beth Ciupak said that without the money, the 44-year-old organization would likely close its doors by August or September.
- **Gave** final approval to an ordinance authorizing a fee-in-lieu-of-tax agreement to US Engine Valve in Westminster.
- **Approved** second reading of an ordinance authorizing a development agreement with Keowee River Preservation Group, which wants to build a $200 million mixed-use project off Highway 130. County Attorney Tom Martin said the agreement lists the variances up front so that the developer does not have to come before the council for piecemeal requests. A public hearing and final vote is scheduled for July 20.

SPEC BUI...

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lack of leadership on council," Corbeil said.

The council voted to award the job of building the spec building at the Oconee County Commerce Center on Highway 11 to Spartanburg contractor Roebuck Building Co.

This would be the county's second venture with a spec building. The first sat on the market for 23 months before it sold, which Alexander said is a year faster than the national average.

Eventually, Lift Technologies, Inc. took possession of the first spec building, doubled its size to 80,000 square feet and created 50 new jobs.

Advances

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