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Oconee OKs $3.5M bond deal

County Council also gives go-ahead to finance $9.1M library in Seneca

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WALHALLA — Amid a sprinkling of boos, the Oconee County Council gave final approval Tuesday night to a $3.5 million bond issue to jump-start a private development.

Council capped its regular meeting by voting to allow library officials to move ahead with an application for a federal grant and loan package to finance a proposed $9.1 million new library in Seneca.

Council's action on the library was met with applause mostly from supporters who have waited 10 years to move forward with plans for a new Seneca library.

Only three councilmen sat at the dais when it came time to vote on the controversial special revenue bond for the Highpointe/Pointe West development at the border with Pickens County near Lake Hartwell.

Council Chairman Reg Dexter, Paul Corbeil and Joel Thrift stood firm in their support for the bond despite another barrage of criticism during the public comment session. Councilman Wayne McCall excused himself from the vote, citing a conflict of interest. Councilman Mario Suarez was a no-show at the meeting.

Before voting, Corbeil responded to claims that the bond issue represents a risky venture. He said a solid regional bank, such as BB&T, would not place the investment in its portfolio if the venture were risky.

"I believe in the future of Oconee County," Corbeil said. "I'm not afraid to make quality investments in that future."

Dexter added that the council "had done its homework" and was not rushing blindly into something.

Detractors portrayed the action as a "public handout to a private

SEE COUNCIL, PAGE A5

COUNCIL: Grant to pay for bulk of library costs

FROM PAGE A1

developer" and as "preferential treatment" that sets a "dangerous precedent."

The clincher for the library's plans appeared to be the increase in the grant amount from $2.5 million to $2.8 million. The bulk of the cost would be financed by a U.S. Department of Agriculture loan at 4.125 percent interest over 40 years.

Interim County Administrator Gene Klugh said in his report that the Appalachian Council of Governments would be accepting closed bids June 8 at its offices in Greenville for the Tri-County Landfill property co-owned by Anderson, Oconee and Pickens.

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