Oconee Planning Commission keeps rezoning petition intact

Crescent Resources withdraws request to be zoned differently

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WALHALLA — Oconee County's first rezoning request under the new Zoning Enabling Ordinance (ZEO) is back on track after getting bogged down by a request from Crescent Resources.

Fairview community property owners, headed by Gary and Louis McMahan, are asking that their parcels on approximately 325 acres be designated as Traditional Rural District.

As originally submitted, the petition includes a handful of parcels that property owners want carved out as "Lake Residential."

Belatedly, Crescent Resources, the real estate arm of Duke Energy, wrote a letter to the Planning Department asking that their properties be taken out of Lake Residential and placed in "Residential," which is a less restrictive form of designation for the land developer. According to the ZEO, the residential designation allows for the building of condominiums.

The Fairview community is off Keowee School Road and Ebenezer Road.

When Planning Director Art Holbrooks brought up the Crescent Resources letter at the Sept. 1 County Council meeting, councilmen tabled a second reading of an ordinance incorporating the Fairview Community's original rezoning petition. Council agreed to send the issue back to the Planning Commission to take up Crescent Resources' request.

However, at Monday night's Planning Commission meeting, commissioners voted to keep the McMahan's original petition intact.

"We voted to send it back to council," Planning Commission Chairman Tommy Abbott said on Tuesday. "Crescent said it would be agreeable to withdraw their request."

Holbrooks said Crescent always has the option of requesting a rezoning for any particular project.

The Fairview community rezoning ordinance should be back before council for a second reading in time for the Oct. 6 County Council meeting, Holbrooks said. County Council also needs to schedule public hearings on the matter.

The Planning Department has moved slowly and cautiously with the first rezoning request to iron out bugs in the process. Approximately 30 more petitions are awaiting action.

Holbrooks said Planning Department staff is working on an appendix to the ZEO that would provide standardized petition requirements in simplified language and perhaps a checklist that would help speed up the process.

"After we've done a few of these we could consolidate some of them to cut it down significantly," Holbrooks said. "We don't want to do that until everyone is comfortable with the process."