Oconee council finalizes deal with plastics company

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WALHALLA — Oconee County Council gave final approval Tuesday to bringing ACI Plastics to a figurative industrial park it shares with Pickens County and 25 literal jobs to Westminster.

The Michigan-based thermoplastics processor and recycler announced last month it purchased a former textile warehouse on U.S. Highway 123 and will remodel the 88,000-square-foot facility for its operations.

Previously known as "Project PLUME" in council chambers, ACI Plastics will receive a fee-in-lieu-of agreement for 20 years that will lock its millage and reduce its property assessment to 6 percent instead of the standard 10.5 percent assessment.

The state gave ACI a one-time investment tax credit, as well as job tax credits, and provided help with a workforce-training grant. The state job tax credits amount to roughly $296,000, according to Oconee economic development director Richard Blackwell, and the grants equal approximately $2,000 per employee.

Some of the incentives provided to ACI Plastics to recruit the company come from provisions that make it part of an abstract industrial park Oconee shares with Pickens County.

The park doesn't actually exist, according to administrator Scott Moulder, but the tax incentives that come with being part of it do.

"It's not a literal industrial park," he said. "Years ago, in the state law, there was a provision that allowed counties to establish a multi-county joint industrial park, and it allowed for any business locating within that park to receive additional incentives that otherwise would not apply to the project."

Moulder said the company's status as being part of the figurative park is a legitimate economic development tool, but is "more of a designation than anything else."

According to the ordinance authorizing the agreement, Oconee will pay 100 percent of the expenses related to the project, while Pickens will receive 1 percent of the tax revenue.

While that may sound like an unbalanced deal, Moulder said no significant expenses are associated with it other than drafting the legal documents.

"The law allowed for the expenses to be shared, so the ordinance had to designate who was going to pay for what portion of the park," he said. "But since it's not really an industrial park, there are no expenses."

Moulder said Pickens would have to pass an ordinance to establish the multi-county industrial park in order to collect up to 1 percent of the tax revenue.

The actual value of the agreement for Oconee lies in the 25 jobs the company has agreed to create within the next five years, which will pay on average $17.42 per hour, the county per-capita average, according to Blackwell.

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