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Oconee County seeks matching grant for required tourism plan

Clemson University designated to design plan

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WALHALLA — Oconee County is pursuing a $7,500 matching grant that would pay for a state-required tourism plan.

Phil Shirley, Oconee's head of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, said Thursday his office is on track to have the grant application submitted by today's deadline.

Shirley went before Oconee County Council earlier in the week to get permission to go after the grant because the funds must be matched locally.

On Tuesday, Shirley said he had $5,000 in his budget for the match. He said the other $2,500 would come from the local Mountain Lakes Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"We don't want to miss this opportunity," Shirley told council, which gave the green light to go after the grant.

In the grant application, Shirley said Clemson University would be listed as the resource that would work with the county in putting together a Tourism Action Plan (TAP) for Oconee. To do so, Shirley had to ask the County Council on Tuesday to waive the bid process to let Clemson University do the work.

In 2006, South Carolina unveiled its own TAP to maximize the benefits of the more than $10.9 billion tourism industry. Among the plan's recommendations was to create a network of eight Tourism Destination Areas (TDAs) from which local entities and private sector investors could market and promote a tourism product.

Last month, state tourism officials unveiled in Seneca a product development concept for the Upstate in which Greenville would be a tourism hub. Oconee and Pickens counties would play a major role in the plan through the marketing of the area's outdoor natural attractions, parks and historical and cultural points of interest.

Shirley said that any tourism product marketed and promoted in Oconee would have to be in line with the TAP designed by Clemson University for the county. Shirley said a local TAP is required by the state.

Oconee should know in about two or three weeks whether it is getting the matching grant, which is being offered through the South Carolina Heritage Corridor.