Oconee engages in growth talks

More than 100 participate in Ten at the Top forum in Seneca

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — During the feedback portion of Monday night's community forum to discuss future growth planning, an unidentified stakeholder challenged the moderator with a burning question.

"How are you going to put this together?" he asked.

He explained the reason for his question. He said there was a diverse range of ideas among the more than 100 participants of the Ten at the Top forum at the Gignilliat Center.

Last week, a similar forum was held in Pickens County with more than 70 in attendance.

These forums will continue until residents from each of the 10 counties in the region have had an opportunity to have their voices heard.

With so many ideas thrown around, how are organizers about to make heads or tails of it all?

"The answer is to identify and focus on the things where we have commonality," TATT Executive Director Dean Hybl said.

There are areas of common ground.

Hybl asked the crowd in what area they thought Oconee and the regions would be best positioned for success over the next 20 years from a list of five vision elements and guiding principles — Human Potential, Entrepreneurial Vigor, Sustainable Growth, Natural Beauty and Resources and Community Vibrancy.

By a show of hands, about 90 percent chose Natural Beauty and Resources.

Hybl said that response is true not just of Oconee but throughout the region and is definitely a point of common ground. He said there is consensus on other issues.

Another stakeholder drew applause from some in the crowd when he linked the regional effort to plan for future growth as an extension to the United Nation's proposals

SEE **GROWTH**, PAGE **A5**

GROWTH: Discussed

FROM PAGE A1

in 1992, known as Agenda 21, to further worldwide sustainable development.

Some in the tea party movement think Agenda 21 would micromanage communities and strip individuals of their personal freedom.

Again Hybl addressed the concern.

"This is not about telling people you have to do this or do that," Hybl said. "I applaud you for being here and taking part. We need to be balanced as a community and as a country."

The forum attracted county and city elected officials, planners, administrators and business leaders.

Jean Ward, president and CEO of Oconee Medical Center, said OMC has a vested interest in being a financial sponsor of TATT.



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Oconee county residents discuss growth issues at Monday's Ten at the Top Community Forum.

Ward said the hospital wants the region to prosper and be an area where doctors would want to practice medicine.

Hybl said a final Shared Vision would be unveiled in the spring. Results of the Shared Vision survey are available at www.tenatthetop.org.

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