Oconee gets more transparent

BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — University of South Carolina professor Dennis Lambries says Oconee County has made "massive strides" in letting the public it serves know just how it's spending their money.

Lambries, a professor with the USC Institute for Public Service and Policy Research, was in town this week to facilitate a County Council planning retreat at the county offices in Walhalla.

"I think it's council's job to inform and show what's being done with the money," Lambries told The Journal after the daylong retreat concluded Thursday. "They've made massive strides, and I think that's critical."

Lambries, who also serves on the South Carolina Planning Education Advisory Committee as vice chair, said Oconee had a completely different reputation than it has now. He said the county's image has improved by the hiring of Administrator Scott Moulder and by council getting citizen input.

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Mark Pullium, administrative services director, told the public during the retreat that the county is doing more to let them know what is going on with their money. He said residents now can follow the money by simply clicking on "Financial Transparency" at www.oconeesc.com — the county's official website.

The contains annual financial reports and budget documents that go back to fiscal year 1995-96, bids and contract information and a brand new check register that names every person and entity that has received a check, and the amount, month by month starting with July 2013.

"We are now including on our website all the checks that we're writing for any kind of expense so that anybody who wants to can look and say, 'where are they spending our money on?,' — well there it is," Pullium said. "So we're as transparent, I think, as any government around. We've put documents out there, audits out there. Now we're putting copies of our checks out there."

Lambries, who has experience as an elected official in South Carolina, said sometimes all the transparency in the world won't satisfy some people.

"It's like the Shroud of Turin — for those who believe, no proof is necessary, and for those who don't believe, no proof is possible," Lambries said.

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