Oconee planners digest massive zoning request

Group asked to revisit Fairview community decision

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — Oconee County planners put their arms around a massive Keowee Key/Stamp Creek rezoning petition for the first time Monday night and also heard a plea to revisit the controversial Fairview Community zoning decision.

Gary Owens of Salem presented the 2,858-parcel petition encompassing 4,658 acres, which represents the largest rezoning request to come before the Oconee County Planning Commission to date.

During public comments, David McMahan called on the Planning Commission to revisit the North Fairview petition in light of emails the county turned over as part of a Freedom of Information Act request.

McMahan said the emails show that members of County Council and the Planning Commission, as well as Planning Department staff, the County Attorney and members of Advocates for Quality Development Inc., discussed how to handle the Fairview petition. He said members of the Fairview community were excluded from those email exchanges.

"We believe this was inappropriate and public business was being conducted outside a public forum through electronic communication," McMahan said in a written statement.

In presenting the petition, Owens called himself as the coordinator of the request because he said that others participated in collecting signatures as well.

As submitted, the petition seeks to rezone approximately 99 percent of the 2,858 parcels as Lake Residential District.

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ZONING: Petition seeks to rezone 99 % of 2,858 parcels

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Another 14 parcels would be rezoned into Community Commercial District, four properties would become Residential District and another parcel would be rezoned into the Public and Recreational Lands District.

Representatives from Keowee Key, Riverstone and Keowee Harbor communities also endorsed the petition during public comments.

The commission heard from Oconee County Councilman Wayne McCall and his brother, Keller McCall, who own commercial property within the petition's boundaries.

The brothers were adamant in their position that the courts have upheld their deeded rights and that those rights trump the zoning petition.

Roberta Barton requested that her family's property, which has been used to grow timber for more than 100 years, be removed from the Keowee Key/Stamp Creek petition.

"I agree in protecting the lake, but don't compromise other people's property," Barton said.

The commission put off making any decisions on the petition until next month so it has time to review the request.

In the meantime, McMahan asked each commission member in attendance whether they would look at a disk of the emails obtained through the FOIA request.

They all said they would.

"We are requesting remediation; we believe it starts with you the Planning Commission," McMahan said.

carlos@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6685