Oconee planners question changes to zoning district

Concerns raised about changing rules in midstream

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WALHALLA — Members of the Oconee County Planning Commission appeared to have a collective "Aha!" moment while tinkering with the Traditional Rural District zoning classification.


Honea

The light bulb lit up in Commission Chairman Ryan Honea's head when it was proposed Monday night that allowing for a hotel or motel in TRD be changed from permitted to conditional use.

Honea said he's already been hearing feedback from the public about the commission changing the rules on them.

Planner Aaron Gadsby, the designated zoning administrator, said the review of the zoning classifications was merely an attempt to improve the process and urged the commission to proceed. He added that in the final analysis, it was up to County Council to decide whether to accept commissioners' recommendation or not.

Honea insisted on a clarification.

"The only thing I'm hearing is that the Planning Commission is changing the rules," Honea said.

Commissioner Bill Gilster agreed.

"We are changing the rules," he said. "For people that have chosen Traditional Rural, we're changing the rules of the game."

Gadsby tried to get the group back on task.

"Should we have done (the changes) before the (Zoning Enabling Ordinance) was passed — sure. But what we're trying to do now is make it better."

Honea suggested that the commission would, in essence, be creating a Traditional Rural District 1 and 2.

Commissioners David Lyle, Howard Moore and Tommy Abbott also understood Honea's argument.

"What Ryan is saying is absolutely right," Abbott said.

Commissioners agreed to forge ahead with their review of TRD and other zoning classifications with the understanding that any changes would be for future zoning requests and would not apply to classifications already approved with a set of permitted uses.

Council would have the final say on any recommendations made by the commission.

Commissioners also suggested changes in the Agricultural District and Agricultural Residential District.

They'll have another eight districts to review.

Gadsby said one Planning Commission meeting would be set aside each month to allow the public to comment on any changes made.

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