Oconee seeks new blueprint for economic development

3 companies vie to produce strategic plan

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WALHALLA — Three finalists are vying to produce a new economic development strategic plan for Oconee County.

Still in the running for a contract are Genesis Consulting Group of Columbia, S.C., RKG Associates, Alexandria, Va., and Sanford Holshouser, Raleigh, N.C. Genesis Consulting developed Oconee's first strategic plan in 2007.

Procurement Director Robyn Courtright said the three firms confirmed they would participate in the interview round of an evaluation process scheduled Thursday. An evaluation committee that includes Courtright and Economic Development Commission staff, will conduct the interviews.

Eleven firms initially responded to a request for proposals (RFP) issued by the Procurement Office on March 15.

The RFP called on the companies to include in their plans statistical analysis of economic trends, identification and presentation of economic development initiatives, and stakeholder planning sessions to receive public input.

According to the RFP, the strategic plan to be developed "should help create jobs and foster a more sustainable and diversified economy."

The company selected is expected to complete the strategic plan in approximately 18 weeks.

The 2007 Economic Development Strategic Plan produced by Genesis Consulting Group concluded in its executive summary that Oconee's economic future "lies in the development of its (Interstate) 85 corridor."

Genesis recommended that the county identify and designate the "I-85 Growth Area." Furthermore, it called for the preparation of a master plan for allowing compatible land uses and design safeguards. The plan also called for an evaluation of how utilities would provide coordinated, short-and long-term service to the I-85 Growth Area.

Almost five years have gone by since the 2007 plan was unveiled, and to date, little has been done to advance the I-85 Growth Area. The most glaring shortcoming has been the inability of county officials to install sewer in the area to spur development.

Richard Blackwell, who took over as Oconee's Economic Development director last month, said he would greatly benefit from an updated strategic plan.

Blackwell said that, in his opinion, the current 76-page strategic plan is too broad in its scope.

He said he would like to see a more concise plan that focuses on achieving crucial goals and benchmarks.

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