Oconee set to begin YouTube broadcasts of county meetings

BY STEVEN BRADLEY
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Oconee residents will soon be able to watch county council meetings from the comfort of their own homes ... or anywhere else an internet connection is available.

County administrator Scott Moulder said at council's Dec. 20 meeting that testing was taking place on a camera and recording system to broadcast live feeds of all meetings in council chambers via YouTube.

Moulder said the hope is to start live broadcasting the meetings over the internet beginning with the first meeting of the new year on Jan. 3. The county will also archive the meetings for future viewing.

The subject was broached at council's budget, finance and administration committee meeting. Chairman Paul Cain said the county should consider offering a video feed because it is sometimes difficult for residents to attend council meetings.

"For transparency purposes, it might be good to allow the public to watch our meetings

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over the internet," he said. "Considering how technology costs have come down quite a bit and the quality of the videos and all that has gone way up, I thought now might be a good time to discuss whether we want to begin broadcasting our meetings — whether committee, planning commission or any public meetings that take place on behalf of Oconee County."

Joel Thrift said he also thought it was "a great idea."

"As long as you threw in a makeup artist," he joked.

Thrift said one thing that also needed to be addressed is the acoustic system in council chambers, which he labeled as "terrible."

Moulder agreed it would be necessary to upgrade the sound system.

"We could possibly drop some additional (microphones) just for that recording system," he said.

Moulder estimated the cost on the technology at "less than $4,000."

"We had the IT department do some research into how we could potentially set this system up, and one of our IT people is actually really big into YouTube and actually makes money on the side doing whatever he does on YouTube," he said. "And what he has recommended ... is basically to purchase a decent, high-definition camera, which is minimal cost — like $2,000 for the camera itself — and then you use YouTube as your platform to display the meeting. The meeting would actually be held live on YouTube, as well as a live feed on our website using a YouTube format."

Moulder said that would allow people to go to the county website — oconeesc.com — or to YouTube and watch the meeting live, while also being able to view an archive of past meetings.

"The beauty of it is it's a locked YouTube account, so if you go to YouTube — just out in the general public — and search Oconee County, you won't find these meetings just out on the internet," he said. "You have to be directed to it by a specialized locked link that we would provide on our web page."

Moulder said the system would not require the county to have any data storage capabilities by using YouTube.

"It truly minimizes your costs to nothing but a camera," he said. "The additional costs would be running the network wire, obviously the mounting and the power to run it and that kind of thing."

Moulder estimated the life of the equipment at three to five years.

Councilwoman Edda Cammick said she had been approached by four residents at a recent Republican Party meeting about the possibility of broadcasting the meetings.

"The problem isn't that they don't want to come to the meetings; it's that they don't like driving at night," she said.

The committee voted unanimously to advance the meeting to full council. Cammick motioned at council's Nov. 15 meeting to direct Moulder to proceed with the purchase of equipment in order to begin the broadcasting of meetings in council chambers. It was approved unanimously.

sbradley@upstatetoday.com

BROADCASTS: Meetings would be streamed live