journalmediagroup

PRINT THIS

NEWS

# Oconee zoning appeals board paves way for controversial Dollar General near lake community

*By Ray Chandler, Special to Independent Mail*
*Posted:* ***Yesterday 7:45 p.m.***

WALHALLA — The second round of a fight about a developer's struggle to build a Dollar General near subdivisions on Lake Keowee went to the developer.

The Oconee County Board of Zoning Appeals on Monday unanimously granted a variance for Patton Development to build the store on Ebenezer Road, despite wide opposition from residents of nearby subdivisions.

The approval, however, comes with the stipulation that Patton Development stick to submitted plans that call for a rustic design theme for the building. The store will be faced with stone and masonry on all four sides instead of metal and have shielded dumpster areas.

The zoning appeals board turned down the developer's request for a variance for a similar store also on Ebenezer Road, at the intersection with Keowee School Road, after subdivision residents cited concerns about increased traffic hazards and questioned the need for and appropriateness of the store in the area.

"We've listened to the community; we've listened to the concerns," said Greg Googer of Patton Development, citing the upgrades in the design of the planned building.

Googer said he did not see any potential traffic hazards because the Dollar General business model is to attract traffic already traveling the highway.

"Nobody goes out of their way to go to a Dollar General," he said, adding that the stores are located as close as possible to housing in rural areas purely for convenience.

The current proposed store site is between a quarter and half of a mile away from the Keowee School Road intersection, in an area within the Lake Keowee protective overlay and an area zoned traditional rural. Any commercial building that covers more than 5,000 square feet requires a variance. The proposed Dollar General building is 9,100 square feet.

Despite the shift in location, area residents cited the same concerns. Sue Dragoo with the Sunset Bay Homeowner's Association said increased traffic and its hazards were still her main concern and disputed Googer's claim that a Dollar General doesn't increase traffic volume.

Lisa McNally said that in opposing the store, area residents were "just fighting urban sprawl."

Thomas Smolen was more pointed.

"There's no need for a Dollar General," Smolen said. "There's plenty of retail just two miles up the road."

Furthermore, Smolen said, "(Dollar Generals) are cheaply built, they're eyesores, and they're detrimental to the quietude and pastoral beauty of the community."

Twenty members of the audience of about 80 people spoke out against the variance. Three people spoke in favor.

It is not true that the store is not needed, Keith Denny said.

"We do need it, and we want it," he said.

Lewis McMahan, present owner of the proposed store site, said local seniors need it and want it because they are less able to travel.

McMahan also took to task those opponents who said it was detrimental to the area.

"A lot of people here are talking about protecting their investment," McMahan said. "They seem to think their investment is the only one there is."

Board member Berry Nichols, the only member who voted in favor of the store in December, said development could not always be stopped just because some people disapproved.

Some Oconee County natives, Nichols said, had at one time said there was too much development around Lake Keowee that attracted newcomers.

"But that couldn't be stopped either," Nichols said.

Zoning appeals decisions in Oconee County can be appealed only to the 10th Judicial Circuit.

**Find this article at:**
http://www.independentmail.com/news/oconee-zoning-appeals-board-paves-way-for-controversial-dollar-general-near-lake-community-3164222e--377194981.html

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.