Official: 5 subdivision plans in pipeline

BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
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WALHALLA — Construction activity is on pace to eclipse its best figures since the recession hit in 2008, an Oconee County official predicted.

Driving the optimism, according to Josh Stephens, deputy director of Oconee County Community Development, are five subdivisions in the planning pipeline. He said preliminary plans for the subdivisions are under formal review.

"The most exciting news is the number of subdivisions under review at the moment," Stephens said this week. "We have not seen this level of subdivision development in a number of years."

Slowed by weather events, new construction activity in Oconee County is behind last year's pace, but officials are optimistic that 2014 will end up being a better year when all is said and done.

Through April 30, a total of 506 new construction permits had been issued by Oconee County, of which 81 are for new homes to be built. That is just slightly off from last year's pace through the same period, which saw a total of 524 permits, including 90 for new homes.

Oconee County building permits*

	Total	New Home
2014	506	81
2013	524	90
2012	422	76
2011	326	49

* Numbers through April of each year

SOURCE: OCONEE COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

PLANS: 'Another great year'

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Despite the small drop-off in permits from 2013, Stephens said the county "is having another great year in terms of development."

Stephens said he expects the numbers will only get better throughout the remainder of the year.

"If the 2014 permit numbers maintain the current trend and the subdivisions come to fruition, Oconee County is in a position to have the best year it has had since the recession in terms of development," Stephens said.

By comparison, in 2011 when the economy was still struggling to come out of the recession, the total number of permits through the first four months was 326, of which 49 were new homes.

Stephens is confident residential permits are on pace to eclipse the 2008 numbers.

Russ Price, executive officer of the Home Builders Association of Oconee, said he is cautiously optimistic that construction activity is back to where it was before the recession.

"The last month has been a little down on the permits, and I think that's partly due to the weather," Price said. "Overall, things are looking better. The national association of homebuilders is anticipating 2015 to be a real good year for building. If we can keep our government off of things, it would sure help a lot. I'm not talking about local (government), I'm talking about national."

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Oconee officials are excited about construction activity in the county, as five subdivisions are in the planning pipeline.