

Officials defend size of Seneca library project

Seeking political support for \$9.1 million, 2-story design

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WALHALLA — Trying to size up a proposed \$9.1 million library branch in Seneca with a smaller, \$4.6 million library recently built in Marlboro County would be like trying to compare apples to oranges, Oconee library officials contend.

Local officials are defending their plans for a larger, more expensive library after the Oconee County Planning Commission was recently shown what Marlboro had built at about half the cost in the S.C. Association of Counties' Focus Magazine.

Marlboro built a single-story library with a footprint of approximately 20,000 square feet on a 4.4-acre lot.

The Seneca branch would be a two-story building with 18,195 square feet on the lower level and 16,243 square feet on the upper level. The School District of Oconee County is providing a 5-acre lot adjacent to Blue Ridge Elementary School for the project.

Oconee County Public Library Board Chairman W.J. "Biff" Kennedy said it would be shortsighted to scale back the Seneca project.

"You could build a library for \$5 million, but would it work for the next 40 years?" Kennedy asked.

John Adams, who chairs OCPL's Capital Projects Committee, said it is unlikely that Marlboro County planned for significant growth in its new library because the county's 2010 population is 28,933 or almost 1.5 percent less than in 1990.

Adams said that during the same period Oconee's population grew 29 percent to



FILE PHOTO

A street sign points the way to the 5-acre lot that is to house a new Seneca library. Funding of the \$9.1 million project remains uncertain.

more than 74,000. He said Seneca's two zip codes represent about 37 percent of Oconee's growth.

By the same token, the Seneca branch accounts for 44 percent of library circulation in Oconee, and Adams said the demand is

expected to grow because of Lake Keowee's appeal to retirees.

"Oconee's growth demands a library such as the one planned for Seneca rather than one like Marlboro's," Adams said.

Kennedy said the existing 9,000-square foot Seneca branch is inadequate and becomes more so every year that the proposed project is unfunded.

"We've been talking about this project now for almost 10 years," Kennedy said.

The question now is whether there is political will to push the project forward, and if there is, would elected officials insist that library officials scale back to cut down costs?

Library officials have had discussions with County Councilman Archie Barron, who represents Seneca, and Paul Corbeil, who chairs the Capital Projects Advisory Committee. Corbeil's committee holds its first meeting May 18.

Barron said Tuesday he was hopeful that council will consider the project.

"It's an important project," Barron said. "It'll be one of the capital projects council will look at."

Adams expects to take every opportunity offered during up-coming budget hearings to keep the library project on everyone's radar.

Adams said that far from being up in the air, the Seneca library project is in the county's Capital Projects Fund with positive recommendations from the Planning Commission.

"All it needs is funding," Adams said.