

One-sided emails?

Locals complain of being left out of zoning talks

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Chris Rouen wrote to his Oconee County District 1 representative, Councilman Paul Corbeil, on Jan. 2, 2010, with a question about signs popping up in his neighborhood.



"Could you please enlighten two of your supporters about what this Rezoning Hearing is all about," Rouen wrote.

Corbeil passed Rouen's query on to Jim Codner, the president of Advocates for Quality Development Inc.

"Jim, with the Planning Office closed, can you help me with this question? Thanks for taking over the AQD leadership. I look forward to working with you even more in 2010."

The innocent exchange from those two emails soon escalated in number, tone and urgency.

The Rezoning Hearing in question dealt with Codner's North Cane Creek rezoning petition eventually approved by County Council earlier this year.

Most of the properties in Codner's petition sought Lake Residential District designation.

The petition bumped against another request presented by Jean Jennings on behalf of rural properties in the North Fairview community near the North Cane Creek homes on Lake Keowee.



JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Jean Jennings and her grandchildren pick berries at her North Fairview Community property. Jennings is in the middle of a rezoning dispute with Oconee County officials.

What do the records really say?



Wednesday: What went on during that uncommon eight-month delay in zoning action?



Thursday: Where did ag residential come from & who suggested it should be the Fairview answer?



Friday: Locals are not alone in believing that civil conspiracies can take place.



Saturday: Did county officials cross the line to help private interests effect change?

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To read the emails and attachments provided by Oconee County and referred to in this story go to: <http://upstatetoday.com/index.php/rezoning>

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ZONING: 'Done nothing wrong'

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Council denied Jennings' Traditional Rural District request and instead rezoned her and her neighbors' properties to a newly created and more restrictive Agricultural Residential District.

Last week, Jennings' neighbor David McMahan, officially cried foul.

McMahan said his community's petition never had a chance because Corbeil, Codner and others "participated in an attempt to change and alter our petition request."

Emails obtained from the county through a Freedom of Information Act request show a high level of influence from Codner. McMahan said the AQD president "conversed at least 65 times" with county officials by advising and recommending changes, which directly impacted the North Fairview petition.

Copies of the emails obtained by The Journal from the county show that Codner sent emails directly to Corbeil and County Attorney Tom Martin, as well as other county officials. Codner also was copied by others on most correspondence that dealt with his and Jennings' petitions.

Codner flatly said Monday there was no conspiracy.

"There was absolutely no collusion," he said. "We've done nothing wrong. We have every right to advocate our position with county government."

Codner said the deck was **not** stacked against Jennings and the **McMahan** family.

"They had ample opportunity to make their case," Codner said.

Corbeil received a series of written questions from The Journal on Monday related to the emails. Although he's written responses, Corbeil said he forwarded

them to County Administrator Scott Moulder for his input first.

"I don't know how (the answers) would be used," Corbeil said.

"Who knows where this is going to go."

Codner and Corbeil have yet to answer one question posed to both: Why were the leaders of the Fairview request not copied on the email discussions going on related to their petition?

One email dated Oct. 11, 2010, that was sent by Codner to Corbeil might explain why there was little desire to copy the other side.

"Paul, I think it is imperative that any (Traditional Rural District) revision to move allowed uses into conditional uses with stricter provisions be fully approved by Council before any current (TRD) rezoning request ... is approved by Council... There will be major opposition to the kind of changes contemplated, particularly when people understand just how restrictive they might be ..."

The Journal had not received Corbeil's answers at press time.



How transparent do you feel the county has been?