Pickens tourism board on hold

BY GREG OLIVER
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PICKENS — The Tour Pickens County Board has approved a recommendation to suspend its meetings indefinitely, saying that Pickens County Council has not adopted their tourism plan nor allocated any funds for tourism.

Board member Janelle Beamer made the recent recommendation, adding that the committee could reconvene at the request of County Council and if council provides resources.

"We've gone for nine months with no actual budget allocated and have done as much as we can," Beamer said.

Beamer said the committee has assessed all the county's tourism locations, held two tourism meetings — one of which was a countywide summit — approved a master plan for tourism development and explored the costs involved in implementing that plan.

Chairman Dick Krull, in a letter to County Council, said

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Beth and Elsen Smith take their son, Wyatt, to Abernathy Waterfront Park in Clemson. The park was among potential tourism areas identified by the Tour Pickens County Board.
FILE PHOTO

TOURISM: Board wants budget to proceed

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the committee has also researched and prepared recommendations, plans or action on a tourism director, as well as qualifications and funding for the position; written a basic marketing plan, identified and written brief descriptions of well over 100 county attractions that might be of interest to tourists; studied present and potential future county events and attractions; and developed a budget for 2010-11 and future fiscal years.

Krull said the committee heard and adopted guidelines from the Brookover/Norman Pickens County Strategic/Product Development Plan for Tourism initiated by council.

"To this date, to the best of our knowledge, council has not embraced the Brookover/Norman plan, approved the TPC 2010 business plan or any tourism expenditures," Krull said. "Now, another summer season, with its inherent marketing opportunities, has passed us by.

"In all honesty, the board is at a standstill and, as such, we are losing interest and enthusiasm."

Krull added that he planned to make a motion at an upcoming meeting to suspend board meetings and any board activities "until such time as the council informs us that we have a budget, a course of action and, hopefully, an executive director to direct county tourism efforts."

The decision came when the committee met less than a week later.

Last month, county officials said the $85,000 that was among the recommendations made in Tour Pickens County's 22-page report is not financially feasible. County Administrator Chap Hurst said there are other effective avenues for enhancing tourism efforts.

"We're in a recession, and we've been cutting staff and consolidating and improving our efficiency in the county overall, so it would be very difficult to explain to some departments why you're laying off people but adding positions in another," Hurst said.

While the $85,000 to fund the position was projected in the FY 2011 budget, that amount was projected to increase to $100,000 in FY 2012 and $110,000 in FY '13. Officials said the overall estimate for implementing the recommendations was around $250,000.

Hurst said he is currently seeking to fill the Project Coordinator position, which has been in place for some time. He added that the position, whose responsibilities include grant writing and overlapping economic development with tourism, remains a high priority.

"I want to hire the right person, but we're limited on what we can pay," Hurst said, adding, "It's not $85,000 — nowhere near that."

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