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Planner sees no end in sight for zoning debate

More issues come up as commission proposes changes to zoning law

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WALHALLA — Following an almost two-hour workshop Wednesday to discuss changes to Oconee County's Zoning Enabling Ordinance, Planning Commission Chairman Tommy Abbott was asked if planners were any closer to completing their work.

"Only the Lord knows," Abbott said. "It's not that I don't want to answer, it's that I don't know. We keep adding things to the discussion."

On April 5, the Planning Commission voted to place a moratorium on reviewing any new rezoning requests because landowners have complained they've been caught up in petitions that would change and even limit the way they could use their property.

Planners talked Wednesday about the need for a fee structure.

Commissioner Bill Evatt wanted to know exactly how much money the Planning Department has spent to process some of the more than 30 submitted rezoning petitions.

Planning Director Art Holbrooks did not have an answer.

"I don't know if the $6,000 you have in the budget will cover it," Evatt said.

He said costs would increase if the commission's recommendation that rezoning notices be mailed to property owners is adopted.

Abbott asked Holbrooks to provide an estimate of costs at the commission's regular meeting Monday night.

Planners briefly debated Abbott's proposal that rezoning petitions require signatures from 75 percent of the property owners that own 75 percent of the property to be rezoned. The law now requires the signatures of

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51 percent of the property owners.

Evatt said he agreed with getting the signatures of 75 percent of property owners but thought that it was too much to ask that they also own 75 percent of the land.

"I just don't think that will fly with County Council," Evatt said.

Commissioner Andrea "Andy" Heller said the 51 percent is reasonable.

Heller pushed a proposal to be looked at Monday that would strengthen the Lake Overlay District.

The additional standards, which would apply to construction and development within the 750-foot Lake Overlay, include a 100-foot setback for all fuel dispensing activities;

ZOE again at Monday meeting

25-foot landscape buffer; greenspace requirements; parking guidelines; and rules for building on a steep slope.

Heller said the strengthening of the Lake Overlay would help stop some of the problems caused by petitions that include parcels outside the overlay.

On Monday, the commission also plans to consider a proposal to create a new Agricultural Residential District. The new designation intends to protect existing residential areas in rural communities by limiting high-density development and high impact agricultural, commercial and industrial uses.

Abbott said he doesn't see the discussion ending any time soon.

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