Planners OK new lake standards

Proposal is aimed at commercial developments

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — The Planning Commission on Monday approved new standards to regulate commercial activity within the Lake Overlay District.

Friends of Lake Keowee Society (FOLKS) President Ben Turetzky, who spoke at the meeting in support of "rational development standards" around the lake, applauded the commission's action as a step in the right direction.

Turetzky said that the only way Oconee County will have control over commercial development within the lake overlay is to adopt development standards for special exception uses such as commercial marinas.

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Tommy Abbott
Commission chairman and opponent of new standards

Approval of the new standards gave commission member Andrea "Andy" Heller a hard-fought victory. She had been advocating additional controls for non-residential uses around within the lake overlay for months.

The proposal must still be considered and acted on by the Oconee County Council.

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Planning Department Director Art Holbrooks said the new standards likely would be discussed at a joint meeting between the County Council and Planning Commission next week.

Passage of the proposals did not come easy. It squeaked by on a 4-3 vote.

Opponents said the recommendations are too restrictive.

"It's going to be hell to open a business in Oconee County," Commission Chairman Tommy Abbott said. "This whole thing is to restrict marinas."

The new standards address six specific issues:

- Keeps all fuel dispensing activities 100 feet from the closest point of any parcel;
- Requires a 25-foot landscape buffer;
- Project site must dedicate 15 percent of area to green spaces;
- Establishes impervious surface requirements;
- Regulates parking areas; and
- Makes sure that lighting does not affect neighboring homes or traffic in the area.

Jim Codner, president of Advocated for Quality Development (AQD), said his group is not opposed to marinas around the lake but said these additional measures are needed to control development.

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