

Planners draw line in sand on zoning

Chairman thinks commission's advisory role being undermined

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — The stage appears to be set for zoning to be front and center at tonight's Oconee County Council meeting.

Planning Commission Chairman Tommy Abbott framed what could be a thorny issue surrounding zoning with comments he made at the conclusion of Monday night's commission meeting.

Abbott turned to Planning Department Director Art Holbrooks and asked him a ques-

tion about a resident's rezoning petition coming before County Council tonight. The petition by Jean Jennings has been kicked around since April and comes for a second reading tonight.

"My question is... what are they (the council) considering?" Abbott said, referring to the Planning Department's decision to submit its own recommendations along with the recommendation made by the commission.

Holbrooks said his staff is required to make its

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recommendation to council.

Abbott replied: "Then does the County Council need the Planning Commission?"

Abbott's remarks were in line with a question raised by Carey "Bo" Horne during public comments: "Who is in charge of planning?" he asked. "Micromanagement of the Planning Commission is against the law."

Calling the Zoning Enabling Ordinance that went into effect May 1, 2009, an "unfair process," Horne directed some of his harshest comments on how zoning was being handled at Council Chairman Reg Dexter, who was in the audience.

The Planning Commission and Holbrooks appeared to be at odds again over a rezoning

petition presented last month by residents of the Heritage Shores subdivision near Lake Hartwell in south Oconee.

Holbrooks said the Planning Department staff supports the petition as presented.

However, Devoe Blackston, who developed Heritage Shores, spoke up at the meeting to request that his unplatted property be taken out of the rezoning petition.

"How can we fix that?" Commissioner Bill Evatt asked Holbrooks.

Holbrooks said staff supported what was presented because Blackston's property is on the recorded subdivision plat.

The commission abided by Blackston's wishes just the same.