Planners have second thoughts

They defeat lake overlay proposal and ask for new draft

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WALHALLA — The Oconee County Planning Commission had second thoughts Monday night about the new Lake Overlay District standards it approved a month ago.

Commission Vice Chairman Howard Moore asked for a reconsideration. He said the new standards, which would regulate commercial activity within the 750-foot overlay, should be amended to apply exclusively to lakefront properties.

Commissioners Randy Abbott, Bill Evatt and Rex Ramsay agreed with Moore, and they voted to kill the new standards.

District 1 Commissioner Andrea "Andy" Heller, who championed the standards, and District 5 Commissioner Ryan Honea voted for keeping the new standards in place. Commission Chairman Tommy Abbott did not vote. He usually reserves his vote to break a deadlock, and his vote was not needed Monday night.

Prior to the vote, Abbott made his position clear.

"I'd hate to pass an ordinance that is not business friendly," he said. "That's my concern."

Evatt said he heard from businessmen opposed to the new regulations.

"We have enough standards in the county already," Evatt said. "We have business people say the original lake overlay has enough regulations."

Ramsay said the 750-foot overlay overlaps some of the major highways in the county. He wondered how many people are aware of the proposed changes.

Heller said she did not see the new standards as being anti-commercial.

The new standards included buffer requirements, landscaping, lighting and parking regulations.

On the recommendation of staff, the commission requested that a new draft be brought to the next meeting that incorporates the concerns expressed.

Commissioners also heard an update from Oconee County Public Library officials on the status of the loan/grant application to pay for a new $8.9 million library in Seneca.

Library officials said the application was transmitted last week from Columbia to Washington, D.C.

Once formal approval for the grant and bond funding is made, officials said a foundation would be established to raise the $500,000 balance needed for the project, which they hope to be completed in mid-2012.

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