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Planners place moratorium on zoning

Commission endorses financing plan for $9.1 million Seneca library

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WALHALLA — Concerned with mounting complaints from property owners about the zoning process, the Planning Commission voted Monday night to put a moratorium on all new rezoning requests.

Commission Chairman Tommy Abbott, who called for the action under "New Business," said planners would hold not take new requests until they have had time to review the zoning law.

Commissioners also endorsed a plan presented by library officials to finance a new $9.1 million branch in Seneca through a combination of a $6.1 million General Obligation bond at roughly 4 percent interest over 40 years and a $2.5 million federal grant. The remaining $500,000 needed for the project would be raised through private donations and or other grants, library officials said.

The library plan now moves to the Oconee County Council for consideration at its April 20 meeting.

The commission's call for a moratorium on zoning stirred a hornet's nest.

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County Council Chairman Reg Dexter, who was in the audience during the meeting, interpreted the commissioners' action as a decision on their part to defy the Zoning Enabling Ordinance.

Dexter, who took time during a Planning Commission meeting last month to explain how the zoning process works, said he obviously failed as a teacher.

Commission Vice Chairman Howard Moore said he's been getting phone calls from residents late at night who complain about getting caught up in rezoning petition drives.

At-large Commissioner Rex Ramsay said he's heard complaints, too.

"People who own large tracts find themselves in a situation they don't want to be in," said Ramsay, referring to petition drives pushed by smaller lot owners with numbers on their side.

"I wouldn't like it if it happened to me," Ramsay added. "I would wish lot owners would treat their neighbors with respect."

Oconee's landmark ZEO was approved in late 2008 and went into effect May 1.

During that time, three rezoning requests have been acted on by the council after a review by the Planning Commission.

The council is set to hold public hearings April 20 on the most recent rezoning request involving scores of Lake Keowee parcels near Luther Land and Petty roads.

That rezoning request ended with District 1 Planning Commissioner Andrea Heller working directly with dissatisfied residents to make sure they got what they wanted.

County Councilman Paul Corbeil, who also attended Monday night's planning meeting, said the Luther Land and Petty roads rezoning shows that the process works.

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