Planners work on zoning law

Super majority, standard petition form among proposed changes

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WALHALLA — The Planning Commission held back no punches Monday night in recommending wholesale changes to Oconee County's almost 1-year-old Zoning Enabling Ordinance.

Six of the seven commission members present took turns pointing out flaws in the law and proposing fixes.

The recommendations came two weeks after the commission voted at its previous meeting for a moratorium on reviewing any new rezoning petitions from the Oconee County Council.

Planning Department staff member Aaron Gadsby had to bring up two new requests from the council at the end of the meeting Monday.

"Council asked that the review be completed within 30 days, which would be May 12," Gadsby said.

Commission Chairman Tommy Abbott stood his ground.

"Does this not come under the moratorium?" Abbott asked. "I'd table it."

A hard-line opponent of zoning, Abbott proposed one of the biggest changes to the law that took effect May 1. He suggested that the threshold needed to implement a rezoning change under the citizen-initiated petition method be increased from 51 to 75 percent. On top of that, Abbott recommended that the 75 percent of the

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petitioners in agreement also own 75 percent of the land to be rezoned.

Commissioner Andrea Heller took note of the higher standard. "That's a double whammy," she said.

Abbott also called for any rezoning to be limited to the area within the Lake Overlay District.

Commission Vice Chairman Howard Moore read off a laundry list of recommendations that included adding a fee structure to pay the cost of mailing out petitions. He said petition letters sent to people should be uniform.

Commissioner Bill Evatt sees too many holes in the current law. "We owe an apology to the people of Oconee County for putting out a shoddy piece of work," he said.

Commissioners asked to meet in a workshop April 28 to discuss the proposed changes further.

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