Planning official outlines rezoning process

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WALHALLA — Existing staff from the Planning Department and Building Codes Office will begin processing in the coming days the first of 32 rezoning requests received to date.

Planning Director Art Holbrooks said Wednesday that the focus in the beginning is on making sure the permit review process works as planned.

"If the first groups have everything ready to go when contacted and there are no unexpected issues, we should be ready to present the first request to the (Oconee) County Council within the month," Holbrooks said.

Holbrooks said the length of time necessary to complete the process would depend on how fast the Planning Commission and County Council wish to proceed with the first few requests.

"We are going to be working out the bugs in the process," Holbrooks said.

Property owners began to submit petitions shortly after the county adopted a Zoning Enabling Ordinance in November. The ZEO went into effect May 1.

County Council Chairman Reg Dexter said that a third and final reading of an ordinance that amends parts of the ZEO would probably be done at the May 19 council meeting.

Dexter said he had hoped to have the third reading at Tuesday's council meeting, but there was not enough time to get it on the agenda because the Planning Commission made a final review of the document last week.

Holbrooks said he plans to make the initial rezoning presentation to council and recommend they refer it to the Planning Commission for the required review.

Holbrooks said the Planning Commission would decide on what would be the most efficient way to deal with each zoning request.

"I expect, especially with the first request or two, the Planning Commission may want to call a special meeting, or at least keep a regular meeting agenda clear," Holbrooks said.

Although he originally thought about requesting two more employees to help deal with zoning, Holbrooks said those plans were scuttled because of the slowdown in building and development activity. Instead, current staff will handle zoning requests.

The proposed Zoning Office is penciled to receive $13,602 instead of the $143,623 requested. Holbrooks said the funding request covers only the basics of signs, advertising and zoning-related training.