Project North unveiled

Moulder: Proposed Highway 11 development could cost nearly $30M

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — Conceptual plans for the development of 415 acres on Highway 11 that the Oconee County Council is interested in purchasing were unveiled Tuesday night.

The sketch proposes a recreational complex anchored with soccer and ball fields and more than 1.3 million square feet of light industrial space carved out on four sites with parking areas and loading docks.

"What is the cost to the taxpayers for building this recreational complex?" asked Councilman Wayne McCall, who is opposed to anything on the property that is not used to create jobs.

County Administrator Scott Moulder said each of the half-dozen baseball fields could cost between $500,000 and $750,000 to build.

"My guess is, if done properly, it could cost $20 million to $30 million," Moulder said of developing the recreational facility. "I may be a little high or a little low."

The figures drew gasps and snickers from some in the audience.

The unveiling of the conceptual plans drew a larger than normal crowd to Tuesday night's council meeting.

Seneca Mayor Dan Alexander and City Administrator Greg Dieterrick showed up to hear the presentation.

The Seneca mayor told The Journal that every municipality in the county has some form of recreation in place. He suggested that, if the county wanted to expand recreation, it could help fund the programs the cities already have in place.

Jim Alexander, Oconee's Economic Development director, prefaced the unveiling of the plans by stressing that they are just conceptual and could be changed and refined many times.

"It would be built over time," he said, noting that adding infrastructure to the property would cost about $10 million.

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SOURCE: OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL

This schematic, made public by the Oconee County Council on Tuesday night, shows the intended uses for more than 400 acres on S.C. Highway 11 that the county is considering buying. The western portion would contain ball fields, soccer fields and an amphitheater, as well as a civic center and recreation complex. The eastern part of the property would be used for commercial or light industrial development with buildings of various sizes (brown images on schematic).

PROJECT: Unveiled

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After the meeting, Councilman Paul Corbeil said he would not hesitate to vote in favor of purchasing the property, which is expected to cost the county about $2.5 million.

"It's a valuable piece of property," Corbeil said. "The price is about two-thirds of market value."

Corbeil said the deal is a great investment for taxpayers when you factor utility credits into the purchase. He compared the deal to a 401(k) plan that is matched.

Councilman Mario Suarez said that, while the economic times might indicate this may not be the right move to make, "my opinion is it's a good investment."

Moulder said that, from an administrative view, not having a way to fund the plans is "disconcerting."

"I have to make sure I can run it," he said, referring to operating costs. "I do want to make you aware that I have concerns. We have to pay for this down the road."

County officials have slated public hearings on the Highway 11 purchase for Nov. 23. The council is expected to take a final vote on it that night.

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