

Push for Council-Supervisor on in Oconee

Petition in the works for county to revert to elected supervisor

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WALHALLA — If those promoting a referendum that would return Oconee to a Council-Supervisor form of government get their way, it would not be a first.

Chester County did it in 2006. After decades under a Council-Supervisor form of government, Chester voters asked for and received through a referendum a Council-Manager government in 1998.

Eight years later, and after a stretch in which managers were hired and fired frequently, Chester voters opted in 2006 to bring back their former Council-Supervisor type of government.

Sound familiar?

Following the ouster of Oconee County Administrator Dale Surretts after less than two years on the

job, and the sudden resignation of District 1 Councilman George Blanchard, in part because of the way Surretts's dismissal was handled by the majority on council, some are calling for a return to an elected Supervisor to run the show.

Local attorney Julian Stoudemire, a promoter of a petition drive to have a referendum on the issue, indicated he might start collecting signatures outside the County Council Chambers on the night of May 12. That coincides with a public hearing asked for by Surretts to review the reasons for his termination.

"We've had six administrators in the past five years, let's go back to what has worked," Stoudemire said.

He is not alone. Former County

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Attorney Brad Norton and ex-Finance Director Phyllis Lombard, herself an interim County Administrator at one time, say there is more accountability to the voters by having an elected supervisor.

Walhalla attorney Lowell Ross, who also wants to return to an elected supervisor, said that having a revolving-door of administrators come and go disrupts continuity and does not allow important things to get done.

"We're drifting," Ross said.

Others to briefly hold onto the administrator job in Oconee include Ron Rabun, who was the first appointed administrator, and Tom Hendricks, who came in shortly after Rabun was shown the door. Oconee's last elected Supervisor was Ann Hughes.

To be successful, the petition drive must collect the signatures of 10 percent of registered Oconee voters, or about 4,200 names.

Former Councilman Stephen Moore, who plans to run for the seat vacated by Blanchard,

said that if elected he would ask for a vote on the council to have a referendum on whether to return to an elected supervisor. The council has the power to request such a referendum, which would preclude the need for a petition drive.

Chester County Supervisor R. Carlisle Roddy sees similarities with what's going on in Oconee and what transpired in his hometown located halfway between Columbia and Charlotte, N.C.

"I was supervisor for 24 years," Roddy said. "I got beaten in 1998, and I retired to do the things I wanted to do."

Roddy said the previous council in Chester put the proposal on the ballot in 1998 to go to a manager form of government.

A few years later, and after several managers had been hired and fired, Chester residents were fed up.

"All heck hit the fan," Roddy said.

Roddy said he was elected supervisor in 2006 and plans to run again next year.