Push for spec building gains

Leaders set their sights on July 6 Oconee County Council meeting

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Oconee County Economic Development Commission members marked their calendars and set their sights on the next key step to making a new $1.5 million spec building a reality.

From Chairman Hank Field to Director Jim Alexander and on down, the EDC believes that putting up a shell building would attract new business, create jobs and expand the county's tax base.

Commission members are so close to getting what they want that they can almost taste it. They cleared one major hurdle by getting funding for the shell building included in the 2010-11 budget that takes effect July 1.

During Friday's EDC meeting held at the Oconee County Regional Airport conference room, Field urged all members to circle the July 6 County Council meeting. That's when council could decide whether to move forward with another spec building.

"We want to show support," Field said. "Getting a spec building is an important step to attract visitors."

Marvin Carmichael, an ex-officio member who represents Clemson University on the Commission, asked how the specifications for the spec building are determined and how long it would take to sell it.

Alexander said nationally it takes an average of 35 months to sell a spec building, but Oconee sold its first shell building a few years ago in 23 months and broke even in doing so.

As for the specifications, Alexander said most of those could be gleaned from preferences expressed by companies to the state Department of Commerce.

Alexander said 60 percent of companies are looking for a building.

"Having a product available gives a company lead time over their competitors," Alexander said.

A good portion of the money needed for the spec building, approximately $730 million, would come from utility tax credits given by local companies to the county that only could be used to advance economic development.

Airport Director Kevin Short, who hosted the EDC meeting, gave members a report on the runway extension project, as well as other near- and long-term plans.

Short said earth-moving activity on the runway project remains stalled as workers continue to address erosion-control measures required by the Department of Health and Environmental Control.

Short said he still expects the project to be completed in time for the start of Clemson University football in September.

carlos@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6685

momentum

'Getting a spec building is an important step to attract visitors.'

Hank Field
Chairman of the Economic Development Commission