Journal 2/10/2010

Rezoning on Keowee stumbles

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THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — The rezoning of 371 parcels near Lake Keowee, including properties on Luther Land Road where plans to build a high-rise condominium project remain dormant, have hit a snag.

Dozens of residents from the area — some in support and others in opposition to the rezoning request — showed up at Monday night's Planning Commission meeting.

The citizen-initiated petition drive to reclassify the properties in the area had large support. Resident Bob Royer, who led the drive, said he sent out 200 letters and also tried contacting property owners by e-mail.

Royer said some of the properties, which are partially bordered by Keowee School Road, were canvassed door-to-door. In the end, Royer said he and his supporters collected 230 signatures or 62 percent of the 371 parcels in question. He said only 51 percent of the property owners are needed for the process to proceed, according to the Zoning Enabling Ordinance (ZEO) adopted by the county in 2008 and implemented in May 2009.

However, some of the other 38 percent of owners not on board with the petition also were on hand to complain about the process.

Joshua Ward said he found out from a letter sent by the Planning Department that his property would be zoned Lake Residential District. He said the group initiating the petition never contacted him and other property owners.

> **'I have** a problem that not everyone was contacted. I move this be tabled.'
>
> **Bill Evatt**
> District 3 planning commissioner

"The reason it's done like that is to exclude people who've been here all their lives," Ward said. "On Luther Land Road, half of the people that own there do not want zoning."

Luther Land Road gained notoriety almost five years ago when Marick Home Builders of Greenville proposed a high-rise condominium project overlooking Lake Keowee called MonteLago. The developer's plans met with resistance from Lake Keowee residents who stepped up their calls for zoning to protect the lake from unchecked development.

Bill Evatt, the District 3 Planning Commission member, said he supported zoning and would vote again for it, but found the process troubling.

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"I have a problem that not everyone was contacted," Evatt said. "I move this be tabled."

Ryan Honea, the District 5 Commission member, said the petition was flawed because it tried to have one massive petition that includes community and subdivision aspects.

"It should be separate," Honea said.

Commission Chairman Tommy Abbott said an effort should have been made to see the owners "face-to-face."

"The ZEO doesn't require it," Royer protested.

The Commission voted unanimously to table the petition pending the scheduling of a special meeting to deal with the rezoning request.

County Council Chairman Reg Dexter said he would ask County Attorney Tom Martin to be present at a joint Council-Commission meeting Feb. 22.