Salem to seek project grants

Town officials hope to make up for referendum failure

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SALEM — While a county sales tax referendum failed to pass in the Nov. 4 general election, the town of Salem is continuing to look at ways to fund the projects it had hoped to get if voters had approved the 1-percent capital sales tax proposal.

Salem Town Council members instructed town clerk Kim Alexander and town staff Monday night to look for sources of grant funding that could make the projects a reality.

The sales tax referendum, which failed by a vote of 11,136 to 9,013, would have brought $36.5 million in new and renovated building projects to the county. Included in those proposed projects were a recreation center and library in Salem and a new waterline project designed to bring economic growth to Salem and other areas in northern Oconee County.

"I feel like getting that (water) line would be a plus for us, so if you can find something, that would be great," mayor Diane Head told Alexander at the meeting.

Alexander said council's approval was needed before she and other town employees could explore efforts to get grant funding. The town

SALEM: Trying to broaden economic growth

FROM PAGE A1

is also looking into U.S. Department of Agriculture loans.

"We will continue to look and explore all avenues of funding," Alexander said. "We're just trying to back up and see what we can do."

She added she and other town officials were prepared for the possibility the referendum would not pass.

"Who wouldn't be disappointed," Alexander said about the town's response to the referendum vote. "But we didn't skip a beat. You just have to move on and look to the future."

Town utilities director Ryan Harbin said the water line would be a benefit to economic development in the northern end of the county.

"I think it would be good not only for the town but also for Oconee County as we try to usher in our portion of the Golden Corner," Harbin said. "We're just trying to broaden the economic growth of Oconee County and the portion we are fortunate enough to have."

In other business, the council voted to spend $5,500 on a piercing tool that will allow utility workers to bore holes for water lines. Harbin said the present tool needs repair and told the council it would be more cost-effective to replace the 13-year piece of equipment.

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