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Search for new administrator intensifies in Oconee

Council members hold phone interviews with five finalists

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WALHALLA — The search for a new Oconee County administrator intensifies next week when Oconee County Council is scheduled to hold a series of phone interviews with the top five candidates.

Council members will query the candidates during confidential telephone interviews Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at 7 p.m. with the yet unidentified candidates. South Carolina law does not require their identities to be released as long as there are more than three candidates being considered.

On Tuesday, Council Chairman Reg Dexter outlined the format for the special meetings and interviews.

Dexter announced that each member of council — including newly elected Paul Corbeil, Wayne McCall, Mario Suarez and Joel Thrift — would get to ask one question to each of the candidates. The same questions will be asked of all the candidates.

County Attorney Tom Martin advised councilmen to give themselves the time and flexibility to ask follow-up questions if need be. That's why the interviews were scheduled over a three-day period.

Dexter said recommendations made by a citizens' panel helping council with the search would be taken into account in crafting the questions.

More than 100 candidates applied for the vacant administrator position by a mid-July deadline. On July 25, council members selected the top-eight candidates from a pool of about 30 of the most qualified for the job.

Council narrowed the search to five during a special meeting Aug. 21. Dexter left the door open to the possibility of hiring a professional search team should council hit a roadblock in reaching a consensus on finding a new administrator.

The job opened up when County Council fired Dale Surrett on April 14. He had been administrator since the summer of 2007 and was drawing a salary of $106,000.