

'Spec' building plan continues

Staff Reports

WALHALLA — Members of the Oconee County Economic Development Commission (EDC) agreed informally Friday that the organization should push ahead with plans to construct another "spec" building in the Oconee County Commerce Center on S.C. Highway 11.

Oconee County Council has publicly expressed doubts about the need for another shell building at this time, but EDC members think otherwise. Vice Chairman Harold Gibson said contractors are hungry and anxious to build, with at least four in line to be interviewed for the job.

"In order to get ahead, we have to go ahead and get a spec building ready," Director Jim Alexander said.

Alexander said though most companies have put expansion or relocation plans on hold, many are looking to the future so they can be ready to move quickly when the economy returns to an upward track. He expects construction bids as early as February.

"We need to be ready and ahead of everyone else if possible," Alexander said.

Member and Tri-County Technical College President Dr. Ronnie Booth agreed. "There's a lot of tire kicking out there. We need to be ready when things pick up."

The group also discussed a need to promote the performance of Oconee County schools against a perception that Pickens County's system is superior, which may lead some businesses and individuals to

locate there instead of Oconee.

Dr. Michael Lucas, superintendent of the School District of Oconee County and an EDC ex-officio member, said the research proves otherwise. Efforts are under way to publicize the facts, he said.

Lucas also warned industrial leaders that educational funding cuts from the state would affect their businesses harder than residential property owners due to South Carolina's education tax policies.

"Responsibility has been shifted from residents to business and industry," Lucas said. "You will be hit."