Spec building work awaits go-ahead

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THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Oconee County wants to make sure it has all of its ducks in a row before pulling the trigger to start construction of a $1.4 million spec building.

Although a building permit has been issued for the project and permits have been approved by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, contractor Roebuck Building Co., Inc. of Spartanburg has yet to break ground on Spec Building II.

Allen Poole, Roebuck's vice president over project management, was at the project site in Oconee on Monday for discussions with DHEC officials.

Oconee Procurement Director Robyn Courtright said that as of Monday the county did not have a definite plan for groundbreaking.

"We want to make sure we have all permitting in place before we actually break ground," Courtright said.

Oconee is being careful to have all necessary permits after getting burned with the runway extension project at the airport.

County Administrator Scott Moulder reported to County Council last week that the spec building project was set to begin.

Moulder said that all contractual paperwork had been completed, as were the architectural, structural, civil and electrical drawings.

The spec building is a tool used to attract new business and create jobs.

Many economic development experts agree that products such as spec buildings and shovel-ready industrial sites are needed to catch the attention of businesses looking to relocate or expand operations in an area.

Oconee's first foray into investing taxpayers' money in a shell building in 2004 was the target of harsh criticism as it sat empty without a tenant for nearly two years.

Spec Building II, also to be located at the Commerce Center near Westminster, has its detractors too. Critics say the investment is too high.

Oconee and Roebuck signed a final contract last month that calls for a guaranteed maximum price of $1,470,500. Roebuck's fee would be 4 percent of the total cost of construction.

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