Steep slopes in Oconee County could face regulation

Planners want 'good practices' when building homes on hills

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WALHALLA — Property owners looking to build on steep slopes in Oconee County might face new rules and regulations down the road.

The Planning Commission this week began a preliminary discussion on the topic that could eventually end with standards in place for building on hills and steep inclines.

Oconee County's topography is dotted with steep slopes as evidenced in a map Planning Department Director Art Holbrooks showed planners during Monday night's Commission meeting.

The map showed clusters of red dots in many areas of Oconee that represent slopes with 30 percent incline grade. The average slope in the county is about 25 percent incline grade, but other slopes are greater than 45 percent incline grade

Holbrooks said a number of North Carolina counties already regulate hillside communities. He said regulations could include limiting structures above ridge lines, designing standards for "manufactured slopes," assigning minimum lot sizes tied to slope intensity, establishing a maximum area of impervious surface and establishing stabilization requirements.

Planner Howard Moore commented that the Commission should be careful in pursuing such regulations.

"If someone inherits a steep slope, that's all they have," Moore said.

Holbrooks agreed.

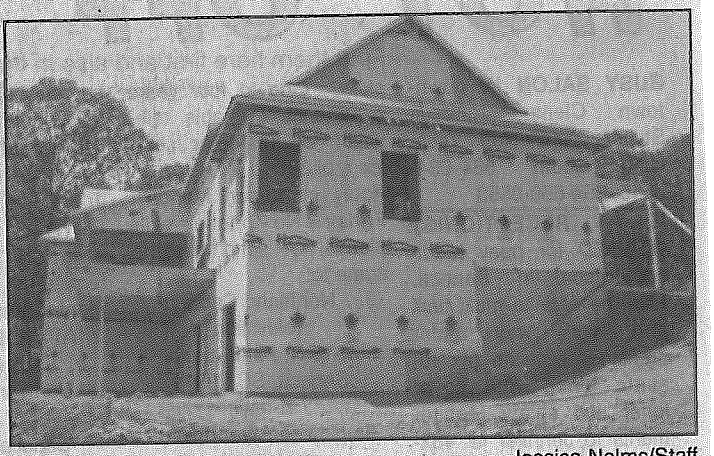
"I don't think this is trying to stop building on steep slopes," Holbrooks said. "All it wants to do is create some good management practices."

Holbrook's said future discussions should focus on defining a steep slope, what are the problems related to such slopes and how broad a program would be established by the Commission.

Commission Chairman Tommy Abbott directed Holbrooks to draft some guidelines for the next meeting in August.

In the meantime, the Commission agreed to take up the first re-zoning request made under the county's new Zoning Enabling Ordinance in a special meeting yet to be scheduled.

Holbrooks said that as the first re-zoning request to be looked at, he would like the Commission to develop a standard for reviewing such requests that would be applied to future requests.



Jessica Nelms/Staff

A home being built in the Waterford community of Lake Keowee sits on the type of steep slope that some Oconee County planning officials would like to see regulated in the future.