Taxpayers to see little relief

Oconee County millage rate is set at 215.3 or 1.4 mills less than in fiscal year 2008

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WALHALLA — Oconee County homeowners should see a small dip in their property tax bills being prepared to go out in the mail early next month.

Auditor Ken Nix recommended to the County Council on Tuesday night setting the millage at 215.3 mills or 1.4 mills less than the fiscal 2008 millage rate.

County Council approved the new millage by a vote of 4-1 with Councilman Wayne McCall being the lone vocal dissenting voice.

McCall said the council members, including him, could have done a better job trimming the school budget. According to McCall, the millage could have been set 10 to 14 mills lower.


McCall

"We have people taking loans to pay taxes," McCall said. "This is wrong. We could have done better."

Nix said the new millage means that a property owner with homestead exemption would pay $861.20 in taxes on a home assessed at $100,000, or $5.60 less than at the 2008 millage of 216.7.

Property owners could pay more in taxes even with the lower millage if they made improvements to their home that increased its assessed value, or of they sold the property.

Nix also established the value of the county mill at $481,048 and the school mill at $522,098.

Councilman Joel Thrift said be would like to see much less millage. However, Thrift said the council would try to improve in the coming years under the leadership of Council Chairman Reg Dexter.

"The only way to decrease

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millage is to decrease expenses," Thrift said. "We're trying to make it lean and mean and more efficient."

Approval of the new millage comes at a time when some voices, including County Treasurer Greg Nowell, were calling for a more sizable reduction in the millage rate.

Nowell and others claim that the county had accumulated $43 million since 2006 due to over-taxation.

Councilman Paul Corbeil read a statement saying the council understands the concerns and is working "to ensure a high level of confidence in our stewardship of County finances."

Corbeil said individual taxes can only be reduced if overall spending decreases or the tax base increases to lower the millage.