Council to talk Highway 11

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Oconee County Council Vice Chairman Joel Thrift said he intends to participate in today's workshop to discuss future plans for more than 400 acres officials want to purchase on Highway 11.

Thrift stepped outside Council Chambers as other councilmen approved the first reading of an ordinance dealing with the real estate transaction codenamed "Project North Property" at the previous Sept. 7 council meeting.

Thrift recused himself from voting on the purchase because his childhood friend owns the property.

However, Thrift said Friday that while he'll not cast any votes on the ordinance to avoid any appearance of impropriety, it wouldn't stop him from giving an opinion on how to use the land.

Council voted to move the ordinance forward by a 3-1 vote without Thrift present.

Councilman Wayne McCall said he cast the only dissenting vote because there is no plan on how to use the property.

McCall said the purchase would be a bad deal for taxpayers, unless the land is used to attract heavy industry to create jobs.

There is agreement among some council members that any plans for the land should include recreational facilities with soccer and baseball fields, hiking and nature trails and picnic tables.

Thrift said he has no problems with part of the 416-acre tract being used for heavy industry.

"If someone wants it for heavy industrial, we'll pull the trigger on it," Thrift said.

Thrift said 50-acres would likely accommodate an industrial project, which would leave ample space for recreational use.

Councilman Paul Corbeil said the tract is large enough to allow for a combination of light industry and recreational facilities open to the public.

County Administrator Scott Moulder said the property owner has agreed on a purchase price, but recommended that the council give him the time to carry out due diligence.

Moulder said soil samples should be taken and the land tested to avoid any embarrassing surprises.

carlos@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6685

IF YOU GO

What: Oconee County Council Workshop
When: 9 Saturday morning
Where: Council Chambers, 415 S. Pine St., Walhalla
Purpose: Discussion and possible action on plans for Hwy. 11 property

land deal today