Zoning bid surfaces again

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Lake Keowee resident Bob Royer spent hundreds of hours researching county property records in putting together a rezoning petition that would classify his home and most of 370 other properties that finger into the water as Lake Residential.

Royer's due diligence appeared to pay off. He contacted hundreds of property owners and got 230 of them, or 62 percent of the 371 landowners, to sign his petition.

To Royer's dismay, however, the effort was not quite good enough.

At a Planning Commission meeting Feb. 8, planners tabled Royer's petition out of concern that perhaps the voices of some of the property owners caught up in the petition had not been heard.

Bill Evatt, the District 3 commissioner who represents Seneca, was among the most vocal critics of the process. He said he had a problem that not all property owners had been contacted. Commission Chairman Tommy Abbott said an effort should have been made to see the owners face-to-face.

This week, during a joint meeting between the Oconee County Council and Planning Commission, Council Chairman Reg Dexter addressed the concerns raised at the Feb. 8 meeting.

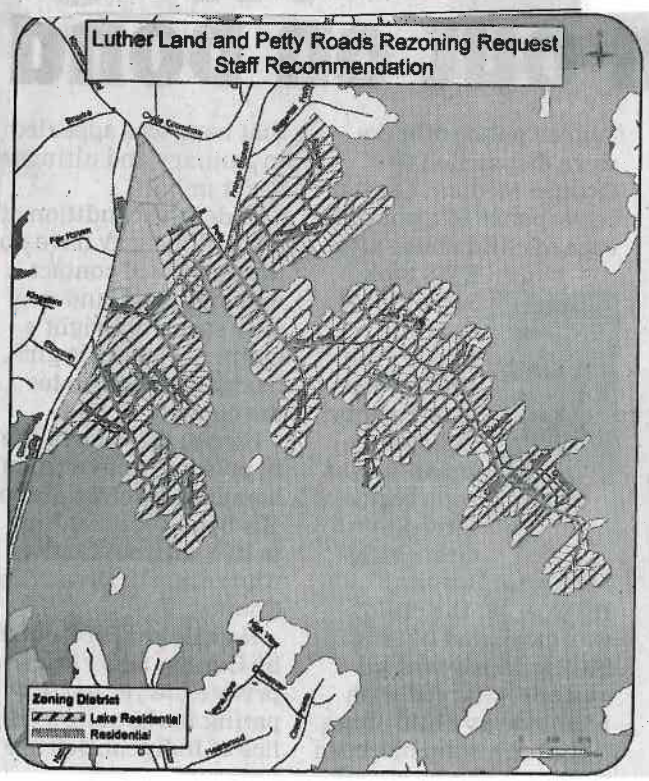
In a nutshell, Dexter said planners should simply follow the law, and that if there was fallout from any decision, the council would stand ready to take the heat.

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JESSICA NELMS | STAFF

A cluster of homes off Luther Land Road is among the properties petitioning for rezoning as Lake Residential. The petition comes back before the Planning Commission on Monday.



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Dexter said the citizen-initiated petition for rezoning calls for 51 percent of property owners to support it in order for the petition to move forward. He said any attempt by the Planning Commission to get 100 percent agreement on a petition would end in failure.

Royer's petition returns to the agenda at Monday's Planning Commission meeting, but the homeowner declined to predict how it will play out this time around. Royer is not critical of the planners, and if anything, is sympathetic.

"I think they're trying to do the best job they can," Royer said Friday. "We'll just wait and see what happens."

The Planning Department staff plans to make the same recommendation in support of Royer's petition as it did Feb. 8.

Under the county's Zoning Enabling Ordinance that went into effect last year, all of Oconee is designated control free. The ZEO dictates three methods in which areas may be rezoned, including the small area method utilized by Royer.

Under this method, property owners may petition for the rezoning of contiguous parcels that amount to 200 acres in size, or make up a platted subdivision of at least 50 acres and/or 40 lots. Another method allows for the rezoning of an entire planning district through petition, and finally, the Council can initiate rezoning.

The push for zoning in Oconee gained momentum after Greenville's Marick Home Builders unveiled plans for high-rise condominiums on Lake Keowee. Those plans remain dormant, in part, because of the weak economy.

Royer's petition encompasses parcels on Luther Land Road, which is where Marick is planning its project.

"We have a lot of money invested in our property," Royer said. "We've been here 10 years. We want to protect our property. We don't want somebody to come in and build something inappropriate."

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