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Zoning changes back in council's court

By CARLOS GALARZA
carlos@dailyjm.com

WALHALLA — Less than three weeks before Oconee's Zoning Enabling Ordinance (ZEO) becomes law, the Oconee County Council will take a close look tonight at some of the changes proposed by the Planning Commission.

The council will take up a second reading of Ordinance 2009-03 that addressed certain inconsistencies and concerns with the ZEO and includes other recommendations by planners. A third and final reading of the ordinance, along with public hearings, will take place at next week's County Council meeting.

Officials approved the controversial ZEO last fall after 18 months of debate during County Council and Planning Commission meetings. The ZEO goes into effect May 1.

County Council Chairman Reg Dexter said Monday he would like to see Planning Department Director Art Holbrooks explain all of the recommended changes to the ZEO.

"We need to deal with each (change) individually," Dexter said. "I want them to be brought up one at a time. I want each council member to say aye or nay to each."

One of the proposed changes would require landowners around lakes Keowee and Jocassee to establish as 25-foot vegetative buffer within two years of its adoption. The recommendation, made by Planning Commissioner Howard Moore and approved by a majority vote, gives homeowners the option of seeking a variance from the Board of Zoning Appeals. Homeowners would have to explain why they can't establish a buffer at their lakefront property.

Moore said the buffer should be required at all lake properties to maintain water quality.

Another recommendation is modifying the Interstate 85 Overlay District by including three sub-districts — Carolina Gateway (I-85), Fair Play Village and Cleveland Creek.

Although the Planning Commission left unchanged a 1,300-foot setback provision that stirred much debate, it remains to be seen whether the County Council plans to alter the required distance. During the debate, some commissioners wanted to completely scratch the lake overlay district, while others sought to shorten the setback by half or more.

If you go

What: Oconee County Council meeting
When: 7 tonight
Where: Council Chambers, Government Administrative Building, 415 S. Pine St., Walhalla