Zoning changes to be discussed

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — Almost two months after proposing major changes to Oconee County's zoning law, the Planning Commission will finally get a chance to make the case for change before the Oconee County Council on Tuesday.

Thousands of county property owners could be impacted if the zoning ground rules change as a result of Tuesday's workshop.

Among the recommendations to be discussed are whether the threshold of citizen-initiated petitions should include the signatures of 65 percent of the landowners of 65 percent of the area to be rezoned. Presently, signatures of 51 percent are required.

Another proposal would implement a $5 per parcel application fee for rezoning properties out of the Control Free District.

The proposed changes would not affect dozens of rezoning petitions already submitted to the Planning Department. Those petitions, representing hundreds of property owners, have been in limbo awaiting council action on the commission's proposals.

Commission Vice Chairman Howard Moore said Friday that he would be pushing a list of 17 concerns he would like to see addressed in the meeting with council.

Moore said one change he'd love to see is having some kind of system in place that would allow residents to call and speak to someone that could answer their zoning questions.

In speaking with residents caught up in a rezoning petition, Moore and other commissioners said it became obvious to them that these residents did not take zoning correspondence seriously until it was too late.

"Communication is the key to getting anything done," Moore said on Friday. "There has to be some form, some way to respond to these people."

Council Chairman Reg Dexter said he has concerns with some of the recommendations but withheld comment until he's had the chance to hear from planners.

"Does it need to be tweaked?" Dexter asked about changes to the zoning law. "Sure. I have concerns about competing petitions coming before the council and commission."

Tuesday's discussion also likely would include the commission's recommendation to add an Agricultural Residential District and a Public Recreation Land District to the list of rezoning options.

The two groups likely would also address the new standards to the Lake Overlay District recently approved by the commission. The new regulations would affect non-residential uses within the Lake Overlay District.

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

IF YOU GO

What: County Council, Planning Commission workshop
When: 6 p.m. Tuesday
Where: Council Chambers, 415 S. Pine St., Walhalla