Zoning dispute heads to mediation

Retired family court judge to referee Oconee-Walhalla impasse

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — Oconee officials got a flicker of good news this week related to the stalled jail plans.

County Administrator Scott Moulder announced at Wednesday night's county council meeting that pre-litigation mediation with Walhalla would take place Oct. 6 at the Oconee County Courthouse.

The announcement is welcome news for council given that Moulder and County Attorney Tom Martin reported at the previous council meeting Sept. 6 that Walhalla City Attorney Julian Stoudemire had not chosen a mediator from a long list of candidates the county presented.

Michael D. Glenn, of the Anderson law firm Glenn, Haigler, McClain & Stathakis, will mediate the zoning dispute between Oconee and Walhalla.

Glenn is a retired family court judge.

Oconee is appealing Walhalla's Board of Zoning Appeals' decision to deny its request for a special exception to build a new jail.

The Board cited residents' concerns for safety, nuisance from noise and lighting and loss of property value for rejecting the county's request.

Construction of the jail, which should have begun last month, is now in limbo.

PROPEX DEAL

Council approved a resolution to reauthorize an effort by the county to purchase the Propex property.

Before the vote, Council Chairman Joel Thrift assured the public that the county would make all due diligence. He said the county would walk away from the deal if there were any chance Oconee could be saddled with costly contamination clean-up at the site.

FACILITIES

Oconee is one step closer to finding uses for the Brown Building and the old courthouse in Walhalla.

Officials approved a recommendation by Councilman Archie Barron that would allow Tri-County Technical College to use the Brown Building as a small business incubator.

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ZONING: Cuts cost $3 million

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Council also agreed to work with Oconee Veterans Museum at Patriot's Hall for use of part of the old courthouse for an expansion of the museum.

LAMBASTING LAWMAKERS

Councilman Reg Dexter returned from a meeting at the South Carolina Association of Counties fired up against the way state lawmakers are pillaging the Local Government Fund.

Dexter said cuts to the LGF, which is money that is returned to counties proportionally based on population, have cost Oconee about $3 million over the past four years.

He said the money is used by the county to help pay for state-mandated services.

Council approved a motion by Dexter to have Moulder come up with a financial breakdown over the past four years comparing the level of county and state funding of these mandated services.

Dexter said the results should be used to let lawmakers know they need to send all the LGF money to the counties as prescribed by law.

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