

Zoning petition covers 2,900 parcels

Request is the largest to date in Oconee County *6/4/11*

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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WALHALLA — Oconee County Planning Department staff sent out notices this week on the largest zoning petition filed to date.

Planning Director Art Holbrooks said Friday that notices went out to inform property owners caught up in the Keowee Key/Stamp Creek petition encompassing approximately 2,900 parcels.

Holbrooks said the



petition would rezone the parcels from Control Free District into Residential, Lake Residential, Community Commercial and

Public and Recreational Lands districts.

Holbrooks and two others in his department needed help from Building Codes employees to have notices printed, envelopes addressed, stuffed and mailed out so that property owners could be informed of the zoning action before an ordinance containing the petition is formally presented to Oconee County Council on June 21 for first reading.

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The huge undertaking of verifying the addresses and matching the current property owner to the parcel tax number, and then printing and mailing out the notices had at least one Oconee County Planning Commission member wondering how much all this is costing the county.

"The time it takes to verify 2,900 parcels and verify the proper owner and tax number, it's a tremendous undertaking," said Howard Moore, the Planning Commission vice chairman. "Somebody's going to have to pay for that stuff."

Moore has recommended in the past that those petitioning for rezoning should pay for the costs instead of having all county taxpayers shoulder the burden.

Holbrooks told the commission more than a year ago that the estimated cost of generating and mailing out a notice is

about \$7.84 per parcel. That would bring the estimated cost of processing 2,900 parcels to \$22,736.

In this particular petition, Holbrooks said there would be a cost savings because of the bulk involved. He could not say how much those savings would be.

Holbrooks said that except for about 30 or so parcels, most of the properties are part of developments already covered by covenants. As such, he doesn't expect the petition to be controversial or contentious.

Holbrooks said his office fielded some 30 calls about the petition, but they were mostly to get more information.

"There were none that objected to the rezoning at all," he said.

Gary Owens, a former president of Advocates for Quality Development, is sponsoring the Keowee Key/Stamp Creek petition.