

# Walhalla council advances economic

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SENECA — Walhalla City Council furthered its goal of spurring economic development on Tuesday by introducing an incentives package for the city.

Council voted unanimously to give first-reading approval on an ordinance creating an incentive program to foster a business-friendly climate, according to Councilman Tjay Bagwell. General government and finance committee head Councilman Lamar Bailes made the motion.

"This is one more puzzle

piece in bringing economic relevance to Walhalla," Bagwell said. "Streetscape efforts by community members, merchants and the chamber of commerce are building blocks. The incentive package is one more of those."

The ordinance outlines a list of incentives for encouraging people and businesses to "invest in development or redevelopment of property" in the city. The incentives include fee reimbursements or refunds, tax grants and infrastructure costs.

Proposals must meet the guidelines in the Walhalla comprehensive and

master plans, be located in the city, have physical improvements or acquisition costs and be related to retail, tourism, cultural arts, offices, research and development, high tech or residential projects.

Walhalla Mayor Danny Edwards told The Journal the city has been working on the program "for some time" with Oconee County planner Bill Huggins, Oconee Economic Alliance tourism manager Janet Hartman and "lots of others." Making Walhalla "grow and prosper" is the goal.

"We want people to build homes and businesses in

our city," Edwards said. "Not only does it raise revenue, but it will create jobs. This council's goal is to improve the quality of life in our city. We think this ordinance will give us an avenue to do that."

According to the ordinance, the purpose of the incentives package is increasing property values, property tax revenue, tourism, job creation and "improvement of the character" of the city. The intention is the value of benefits to the city will exceed their value to incentive recipients.

Qualified proposals could receive refunds for

## development package

up to 100 percent of tap and solid waste fees and infrastructure costs, 50 percent of local hospitality and accommodations taxes and grants for 100 percent of business license taxes in the first year. Most incentives are for five years.

Bagwell said the incentives package will create jobs, increase the tax base and provide more economic and commercial opportunities for the community.

"Hopefully it will inspire somebody who may have been on the fence about making an investment or deciding on a particular area to come

to Walhalla and provide a better quality of life for citizens," he said. "It's one more piece in the puzzle for improving quality of life."

Bagwell is optimistic council will pass the ordinance on second reading in September. And he would like council to continue creating incentives after its passage.

"I hope it's followed up by a residential construction incentive package for getting people to build new construction on vacant land," Bagwell said.

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