

Duke plan projected to bring

Statewide energy grid improvements could have \$240M impact in Oconee

BY JUSTIN LEE CAMPBELL
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SENECA — A plan by Duke Energy to improve South Carolina's energy grid could create more than 1,300 jobs and have a \$240 million economic impact in Oconee County by 2025, according to an analysis by a research economist.

Duke Energy plans to invest \$3 billion in the state over

the next 10 years through the program Power/Forward Carolinas, according to a news release. The plan includes upgrades to protect against storms, outages, cyber-attacks and physical threats.

Duke officials expect the program to generate jobs and stimulate economic growth. Duke Energy spokesman Ryan Mosier cited a statewide and regional analysis commissioned

by Duke and conducted by Joseph C. Von Nessen, an economist at the University of South Carolina.

Von Nessen, who does research in the Moore School of Business, projects in the study the Power/Forward Carolinas initiative will produce a total economic output of \$240,459,634

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1,300 new jobs

Projected impact of Duke Energy's Power/Forward Carolinas initiative in Oconee County by 2025

Total employment (in jobs)	1,352
Total labor income (in U.S. dollars)	\$78,566,877
Total economic output (in U.S. dollars)	\$240,459,634

SOURCE: ANALYSIS BY DR. JOSEPH C. VON NESSEN

and 1,352 jobs in Oconee County. The Oconee projections are the highest of any area in the state.

Although Mosier said details for a hiring timeline in certain counties like Oconee County are “not exactly fine-tuned yet,” Duke has already started hiring across the state to “put the plan in motion” and build a ready labor force.

“We have a lot of positions to fill,” Mosier said. “To make a long story short, we’re getting there. We’re in the planning process and hiring, and that effect will continue to grow as we move beyond the beginning.”

Kodwo Ghartey-Tagoe, Duke Energy’s state president in South Carolina, said in the news release the company’s most important responsibili-

ties are safely powering the lives of families and ensuring the vitality of its communities.

“Investing in smarter, efficient energy infrastructure is more than just good business,” Ghartey-Tagoe said. “It’s an investment in our state that helps to attract jobs and industry and makes our economy and our communities stronger.”

Mosier said Duke’s investments come at a time when new demands based on advancing technology and customer habits challenge the electrical grid.

“We must make smart investments to provide customers with more choice and control over their energy use, while also ensuring reliable and secure electric service is available to everyone at a reasonable price,” he said.

Oconee Economic Alliance executive director

Richard Blackwell said the new investments by Duke are “fantastic” for the county.

“(Power/Forward Carolinas) will result in jobs in our area from construction-related jobs to install these grid improvements to jobs within the manufacturing facilities to utilize the stronger grid network along the lines of ‘Industry 4.0,’” Blackwell wrote in an email.

With more than 3,200 people in the county already employed by Duke Energy, Von Nessen projects in his study Oconee County is one of three counties “most likely to experience a workforce shortage” as a result of the project.

Von Nessen expects a workforce shortage in

Darlington, Oconee and York counties since Duke anticipates hiring a “relatively large number” of workers from and around those counties with already low unemployment rates, and therefore a low supply of unemployed workers.

The unemployment rate in Oconee County was 3.9 percent in September, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Blackwell said the alliance and its partners understand the “disconnect” between awareness of job availability and a workforce shortage in the county.

Blackwell said effort is going into using the new Oconee County Tri-County Technical College campus to develop the skills needed for jobs and

creating a “pipeline” at the K-12 level for tomorrow’s workforce.

“It is no lie that we need more workers,” Blackwell said. “We have many jobs currently available from retail to manufacturing. We must work together, as it will take the community as a whole to overcome this. Our approach must be comprehensive.”

Blackwell added the alliance is finalizing a workforce study to document the shortage and create a deeper understanding of the issue in early 2018.

Oconee County administrator Scott Moulder said partnerships with the School District of Oconee County, Tri-County Tech and local universities are

“extremely important” to preparing a workforce ready for filling new jobs.

“Marketing future opportunities such as Power/Forward Carolinas can spotlight the available positions, which will identify needed workers and skills required, hopefully encouraging those needing employment to obtain the needed training and education,” Moulder said.

He added Oconee County appreciates Duke’s investment in the state’s electric infrastructure and expects that investment to provide a “positive outlook” for the county’s future.

justin@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6685
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