

# City candidates talk economic development

BY JUSTIN LEE CAMPBELL  
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SENECA — Economic development dominated the conversation at the Oconee County Chamber of Commerce political forum for Seneca City Council candidates on Monday.

The four incumbents and two chal-

lengers running for the four seats up for grabs in the March election answered questions at the Gignilliat Community Center. The questions were submitted by the public, and several addressed improving downtown Seneca and attracting businesses.

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Councilman Scott Durham said council will introduce an incentives package soon and that he would discuss his ideas about economic incentives after council sees the package. Durham said he would like to see Oconee County Council help open more fields to bring in more revenue.

"There's not one of us sitting here on council who would not want to see downtown thrive," Durham said. "I believe without a doubt there are just one or two things that need to happen, like people showing pride in ownership of buildings."

Councilwoman Denise Rozman said she supports a countywide penny hotel accommodations tax to help with economic development. Rozman said people feel fear and trepidation when they hear the word "tax."

"I think the important thing is for us to look at our budget and see if there are any ways to cut things in the budget," Rozman said. "We as a city use our (hotel accommodations tax) money very, very well."

Councilman Joel Ward said he believes new businesses will come to Seneca with the right structure of incentives. Ward said he would like to see businesses be productive in the downtown district and throughout the city limits. But Ward would like to see more recreation.

"We've held state tournaments that have brought economic impact into cities," Ward said. "I truly believe we can be working together to build more fields and gymnasiums for tournaments to come to Seneca and have something for our kids and grandkids to prosper from."

Councilman Stuart Pohl said there is a lot to be done in the city of Seneca and that council is working on several projects, including the downtown area. Pohl said economic

development in the city is not just about giving incentives to build buildings downtown or move businesses downtown.

"The city has to have a presence from the minute people make contact with someone at City Hall," Pohl said. "You have to get that warm feeling, and incentives or not, people have to think, 'That's where I want to move my business.'"

Candidate WC Honeycutt Jr. said bringing businesses and economic development downtown is about making sure the city stands out and is unique. Honeycutt said the city should focus on creating appeal in the city with something different that attracts people.

"What are we doing to make Seneca unique and stand out?" Honeycutt asked. "We need something appealing, even to our young people, somewhere they can go that they can't go anywhere else. If you drive on (U.S. Highway 123), there are so many other places to stop you."

Candidate Robert Holbrooks said city councils in Seneca have talked for a long time about economic development and other issues without making much progress. Holbrooks said councils have wanted to do

all kinds of things since he was on council in the 1990s.

"Some of the things being talked about right now were brought up then, and yet we don't seem to get anything done," Holbrooks said. "That's the reason I'm running for council again."

The Seneca City Council election is scheduled for March 13.

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Seneca City Council candidates shared their ideas about economic development at a forum sponsored by the Oconee County Chamber of Commerce on Monday.