

OCONEE COUNTY

New signs across county to help visitors, residents

Hartman updates committee on economic efforts

BY JASON EVANS
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — There are a lot of “great, positive things” happening when it comes to Oconee County economic development, according to Destination Oconee manager Janet Hartman.

She spoke at the June 5 meeting of county council’s planning and economic development committee.

Hartman said she hopes to see installation of new wayfinding signage across the county within 60 days. County council approved the project May 15.

“We have 144 wayfinding signs being identified for placement and fabricated right now with a company out of Charlotte — Signs, Etc.,” Hartman said.

The bid for the project went out locally.

“We did get nine companies that submitted a bid,”

Hartman said. “We went with the lowest and most qualified bid.”

Work is already underway to flag and record the future locations of the signage via GPS so as not to interfere with utilities.

The signage will provide visitors with “that great first impression when they come into our community.”

Residents will benefit from the new signs as well.

“There are residents here that aren’t sure where all of our natural resources, wonderful places to go, museums, cultural assets (are),” Hartman said.

She also gave an update on economic development.

“Since 2012, we have ushered in just shy of 1,600 new jobs and over \$500 million in capital investment,” Hartman said. “I think that’s very significant and notable for the work that’s been done and the fact that it’s been spread over 38 projects.

We’re not just a one-hit wonder.”

Just so far in 2018, the Oconee Economic Alliance has worked with a number of companies, including JTEKT, Lakeside Lodge, RBC Aerostructures and two new breweries, Jocassee Valley Brewing Company and Keowee Brewing Company.

“We have worked with (them) to usher \$69.05 million in new investment into the community with an additional 123 new jobs,” Hartman said. “We’re having some great success.”

The success has been diversified, with large and small companies being represented, she said.

“The county’s now getting into the manufacturing of craft beer, which has been surrounding us,” Hartman said. “Now we have some folks in Oconee County (who are) going to run down that road. So there are a lot of great things happening in the community with a variety of different companies.”

Over the past six years,

the number of Oconee County residents working has increased by 4,500, she said.

“We feel really great and happy about that, that there’s opportunities at all levels, and that’s really what we’re working to continue to emphasize and promote,” Hartman said.

She reminded committee members that the county’s unemployment rate stands at 2.7 percent — the lowest it’s been in 20 years, she said. But that number brings with it a challenge.

“Now, that 2.7 percent number, for the folks looking for employees, is not a great number,” Hartman said. “We need to continue to work with housing developments and ways for people to locate to this area, to continue to help our employers (and) provide workers to them.”

Hartman also noted labor participation is up in Oconee County, as the number rose by 430 from April 2017 to April of this year.

Pickens and Anderson



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Destination Oconee Manager Janet Hartman gives Oconee County Council’s planning and economic development committee members an update from the Oconee Economic Alliance.

counties both saw labor participation rates fall during that same period.

“That could be that we have some of those folks coming over here working, but the participation on our side of the water has increased,” Hartman said.

Oconee County’s population grew by 1.13 percent from 2016 to 2017.

The positive numbers

“give us a lot of things to continue to celebrate,” Hartman said.

“But obviously, there’s always work to be done,” she said. “We have lots of companies that tell us there are jobs out there. If people want to work, we have positions. Now we’re at a point, we need to start matching those people and positions together.”

Part of that ongoing work is “continuing to tell our story,” Hartman said.

“So folks can recognize this is a great place to live, work and play,” she said. “After two years of working in this position, I see so much positive growth that has happened.”

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