

Oconee Nuclear Station expected to apply for license renewal in 2021

BY NORM CANNADA
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SENECA — The Oconee Nuclear Station is expected to submit an application for a second 20-year license renewal with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) next year, which, if approved, would allow the nuclear reactors there to operate until 2053 and 2054.

NRC Region 2 senior public affairs officer Roger Hannah told The Journal on Thursday the agency has received notice the Oconee plant plans to submit its subsequent (second) license renewal by the end of 2021.

The three nuclear reactors at the Oconee Nuclear Station were licensed for operation on three separate dates and have different expiration dates:

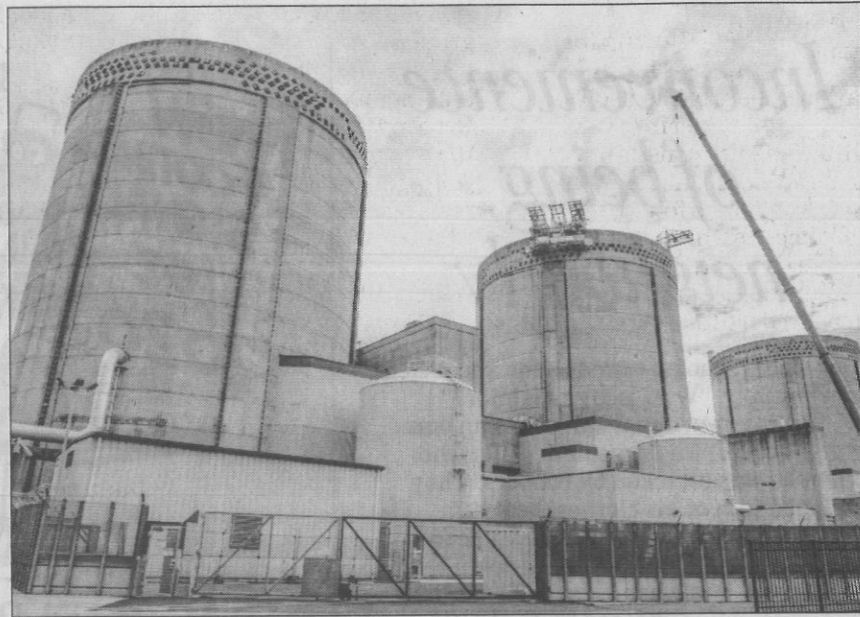
- Unit No. 1 was licensed for 40 years on Feb. 6, 1973. It was relicensed for an additional 20 years, expiring in 2033. If a subsequent license renewal is approved, the plant would be licensed until Feb. 6, 2053.

- Unit No. 2 was licensed on Oct. 6, 1973, for 40 years, which ended on that date in 2013. Its renewal license runs until Oct. 6, 2033, and a subsequent renewal could take it to Oct. 6, 2053.

- Unit No. 3 was licensed on July 19, 1974, and the renewal runs until that date in 2034. A subsequent renewal would license the plant until July 19, 2054.

Hannah said two nuclear reactors at a plant in Florida and two others in Pennsylvania have already been approved by the NRC for the first subsequent renewal licenses, giving them licenses for a total of 80 years of operation. He added the reactors are about the same age as the reactors at the Oconee plant. Hannah said the NRC is now reviewing another subsequent renewal license request for two units in Southeastern Virginia.

“Typically, it is done a decade or so ahead of time,” Hannah said. “There is a provision to do it late in the process, but obviously for utility planning purposes, and our purposes, everybody wants to get it



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done as early as they can. Therefore, if you run into issues and it takes longer than expected, you're not running up against the end of the license period.”

He said no plant has been turned down for a subsequent renewal license yet and expects “quite a few nuclear plants in the country will probably pursue subsequent license renewals.”

Duke Energy spokeswoman Mikayla Kreuzberger said a bill introduced Wednesday by U.S. Rep. Jeff Duncan to evaluate the current nuclear environmental review process and report findings back to Congress “would likely not be available during the Oconee SLR process” because of the timing of Duke's renewal process.

She added Duke Energy continues efforts to keep the plant operating safely as it moves ahead with plans for a second license renewal.

“Our nuclear plants are carefully monitored, expertly maintained and upgraded with state-of-the-art technology and components to ensure they operate safely and are available for our customers — now and in the future,” Kreuzberger said. “Just as homeowners maintain their investment in their homes through regular maintenance and home improvements,

we continuously perform preventive maintenance and implement new technology and other improvements at all our nuclear plants.”

She added Oconee has replaced some large equipment, including steam generators, “which are heat exchangers that operate similar to a car radiator; reactor vessel heads, which are the top of the reactor; and low-pressure turbines, which allows steam to spin them and the electrical generators,” she said. She added turbine controls, water piping, transformers and motors have also been upgraded or replaced.

Hannah said in addition to having a plan for replacing equipment, the stability of structures at nuclear power plants is important to the life of the plant.

“One thing we want to be absolutely certain is that you don't change containment and fuel-handling buildings — big concrete structures — that those structures will remain intact and remain able to perform that safety function over that period of time,” he said. “There are ancient buildings that are still standing from hundreds of years ago.”