

Proposed storage project in lake district still undecided

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THE JOURNAL

SENECA — A development denied a special variance in May is neither alive nor dead, leaving nearby property owners of the would-be storage facility on Rochester Highway in limbo after they fought against it earlier this year.

Approximately 2.9 acres of the 7.5-acre property fall within 750 feet of Lake Keowee, landing that portion in the lake overlay zoning district. Any development other than residential requires a special exception from the Oconee County Board of Zoning Appeals — the same board that denied the storage facility developers the OK to move forward.

The developers could build homes on the parcel with no need for intervention from the county or simply scale down the storage facility and construct the units outside the overlay, according to county ordinances, as any non-residential project that falls “fully or partially” within the overlay requires a special exception hearing from the board of zoning appeals.

The board’s vote in May implies it finds the project out of line with the lake overlay’s definition “to protect water quality, maintain the natural beauty and limit any negative impacts of

development around the lake.”

Should the developers of the property seek to tweak their plan and still place non-residential buildings within the overlay, they’ll have to go back before the board. Zoning meetings require advance notice, and, if the developers don’t file an appeal today, September is the soonest an appeal could be heard, according to Oconee County planning director Adam Chapman.

“No additional plans have been submitted, formally or informally, for any further development at the property,” Chapman told *The Journal* on Wednesday.

District 3 Oconee County Councilman Paul Cain said he’s aware of the project in the portion of his district that falls in an opportunity zone.

“It’s my understanding they’re still working with county staff,” Cain said.

Neighbors have expressed concern over the facility as driveway markers have recently been placed on S.C. Highway 130, he said, but the driveway isn’t a county issue.

“As SCDOT owns and operates Highway 130, they would be the permitting body for any driveway encroachment permits issued,” Chapman said. “SCDOT is not beholden to our lake overlay district.”

Chapman encourages Oconee

citizens to voice their opinions to the appointed officials of the Oconee County Planning Commission, which meets the first and third Monday of the month at 5 p.m. in council chambers in Walhalla.

CHOOSE YOUR ZONE

There are three ways outlined in the zoning enabling ordinance for land in Oconee County to move from control-free to one of the other 13 zoning options. One of those involves the county rezoning land it owns, or bringing parcels “into compliance with the goals established in the comprehensive plan.”

Citizen petitions to rezone small areas comprising at least 50 contiguous acres can move forward to council, provided 100 percent of property owners are in support of the change.

Any of the 17 planning districts, which coincide with the county’s fire districts, can be also be rezoned if enough property owners agree with the action. Fifteen percent of property owners can sign a citizen petition to begin the lengthy process, but 51 percent of the district must ultimately agree with the rezoning before county council can move forward.