

Council moves ahead hesitantly on fire station

BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR
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WALHALLA — Oconee County is moving forward with plans for a future fire substation in the Bountyland community, although officials agree it isn't the ideal location for one.

For more than 10

years, Oconee County officials have gone back and forth over the location of a potential substation in the area and appear ready to focus in on a 1.39-acre property on South Cove Road in Seneca. The property is near the former Fred P. Hamil-

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ton Career Center. The county has set \$460,000 aside for the project since 2016, but estimates for the cost of construction materials figure to boost the project's price tag.

Councilman Glenn Hart raised his concerns about the narrow roadway and congested area the substation would sit at.

"There's still not a way in and out of there for a fire truck," Hart said. "If it happens at lunchtime and kids are out there, you can't get off the road to let a truck by because the ditches are too deep. I'm all for it, I know we need a fire department there, but I think we need a better place that will serve that area better than this."

County administrator Amanda Brock said she shared similar concerns and had spoken with Oconee County Emergency Services director Scott Krein and Seneca Fire Chief Richie Caudill about the potential site.

"They have fire trucks and they

have sirens. They assure me they can get out," Brock said. "I have been assured that staff believes that this is the best location. There is such a small donut area where we have to build the substation to reach the ISO standard in both directions. That's the kicker."

Brock added that it was "not an ideal place," but fit the window of land the insurance services office requirements.

"It's not an ideal place. ... I think we'll have some backup from the city of Seneca," she said.

Caudill said the Seneca Fire Department received 2,469 calls for service for the department's contracted area in 2020 and a new substation would help alleviate the workload.

Caudill said fire officials want any new substation in Bountyland to be manned 24 hours a day — with living quarters — to provide full service to the community.

"It's not the most ideal place," Caudill said. "I would love to find a better location. It's going to be tough getting in and out of there,

but we can make it happen. The problem is we've been working on this for years and we're not providing any better protection by us keep talking about it. We need to find some stable area to put this thing, and let's move forward with trying to provide that protection."

Krein added the county could "make this happen" at the site and "not have to go purchase more land, do more development, do more clearing and then change it."

"If we need to get a secondary access, there possibly is an opportunity in the back to come through the school district's property to have a back access," Krein said. "We can add space on that road for access and the development of it."

Councilman Julian Davis abstained from the vote, which passed 4-0. Davis told The Journal he abstained from the vote due to a family member working at J. Davis Construction. Council will now go back to speak with J. Davis Construction officials for a new construction estimate for the substation.