

County eyes final step in energy savings project

BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR
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WALHALLA — A multimillion-dollar energy savings project between Oconee County and Johnson Controls is set for final approval next month.

Earlier this week, Oconee County Council opted to approve the second reading of an ordinance entering into

an energy performance contract agreement with Johnson Controls not to exceed \$3.4 million.

Michael Wilson, a senior official with Johnson Controls, called the project an "infrastructure refresh" during a presentation at a special council meeting Tuesday.

Late last year, Johnson

SEE PROJECT, PAGE A5

SATURDAY, JANUARY 23, 2021

PROJECT: Third reading expected Feb. 2

FROM PAGE A1

Controls evaluated current county facility equipment and performed an analysis of electrical energy, electrical demand, water, sewer and natural gas expenditures.

Should the project receive final approval, some 13 county buildings would have work done on HVAC units, lighting and thermostat adjustments for energy efficiency. If some system pieces are 10 years old, they likely won't be recommended for replacement.

"The current project yields benefits, which will provide the county with a funding source to replace major equipment that has reached the end of expected service life, including one of your

largest facilities within the project," a presentation slide said.

All project costs must be paid by project benefits under the energy performance contracting model, according to Wilson. He said new equipment should last at least 22 years and that the project would be financed over 15 years, paid annually at a fixed interest rate of 1.58 percent. When work begins, the project could be completed in 10 months.

"This program, to me, is awesome," he said. "It's like lightning to get everything up to speed and get in there and implement it properly and having the guarantee on top of it."

The second reading of the ordinance did pass, but Councilman

Matthew Durham asked whether county staff could handle the job in-house. County administrator Amanda Brock said it had been considered and the facilities maintenance department would have to be doubled from 15 to maintain current services and perform the replacements.

"Our facility maintenance department has 15 people. Oconee County maintains more than 1 million square feet," she said. "It is an impossible task considering the number of staff and number of square feet we have with regular maintenance all together."

A third and final reading for the ordinance is expected on Feb. 2.

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