



LAUREN PIERCE | THE JOURNAL

This portion of U.S. Highway 123 in Seneca would be affected by proposed ordinance 2021-06, which would implement traffic corridor design standards throughout Oconee County.

## Councilman frustrated by soon-to-pass design standards

BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR  
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — For several months, Oconee County Councilman Glenn Hart has voiced angst against a pair of ordinances seemingly poised to pass that would establish design standards throughout the county and lake corridor.

Hart spoke with The Journal this week about the source of his frustration, stemming from what he calls a “radical” set of standards paired with governmental overreach.

“They like our climate, they like all the resources we have — yet they want us to be like New York,” Hart said. “I’m against any type of zoning that takes away any personal freedoms that you enjoy. I won’t support them.”

Ordinances 2021-05 and 2021-06 contain amendments to Chapter 32 of the

Oconee County Code of Ordinances in establishing lake corridor signage standards and traffic corridor design standards, respectively.

Hart’s lone council supporter in the battle against the ordinances has been Matthew Durham, a man

he called a “reasonable thinker” who “votes his mind.”

Durham, who took office last month, said the ordinances are an “attack on small businesses.”

“It’s nothing but top-down, forced zoning,” he told The Journal. “It’s pretty much every major highway in the county. If you’re going to operate a small business in the county, more than likely you

are going to need to be on that highway. If someone has enough money or are politically connected, they’re going to get around it.”

Separately, Councilman Paul Cain

**‘It’s nothing but top-down, forced zoning. It’s pretty much every major highway in the county.’**

**Matthew Durham**  
Oconee County councilman

### WHAT IS INCLUDED?

**Lake corridor signage standards (ordinance 2021-05) affect county portions of:**

- S.C. Highway 130
- S.C. Highway 183 from S.C. Highway 188 to the Pickens County line
- S.C. Highway 188

— Ordinance is up for a public hearing and a final reading at the Feb. 16 county council meeting.

**Traffic corridor design standards (ordinance 2021-06) affect county portions of:**

- S.C. Highway 11
- S.C. Highway 28
- S.C. Highway 59
- S.C. Highway 130
- S.C. Highway 183
- U.S. Highway 76
- U.S. Highway 123

— Ordinance is up for a public hearing at Tuesday’s county council meeting and at the Planning Commission on March 1. A first reading passed on Jan. 19.

# STANDARDS: 'Building communities takes

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— who chairs council's Planning and Economic Development Committee — said there is a delicate balance to planning and that he didn't want the county to turn into a "Myrtle Beach in the mountains" without any standards.

"We see the growth occurring in the county. You have a bunch of people who complain about the growth we are having and saying it removes the characteristics of Oconee County and why they moved here," Cain said. "At the same time, you have people complaining about the government interfering with development and they say that the free market should be allowed to do its thing and that there should be no government regulation of development.

"I think the answer is probably a balance of both of those. We must maintain the qualities and characteristics that make Oconee County so attractive."

## THE STANDARDS

Proponents of the standards believe the ordinances would preserve the natural state of the county. On the Lake Keowee corridor, advocates are pushing to keep roadways clear of any billboard or sign obstructions. The lake corridor ordinance includes language that would limit the height and number of signs along the lake corridor and even restrict "moving/rotating signage." There are exemptions for temporary

signs for construction, politics, special events, real estate listing and yard sales. Anyone violating the standard could be subject to a misdemeanor and fine of up to \$500, according to the ordinance.

County planning director Adam Chapman said the sign ordinance is essentially for Lake Keowee and was initiated by Councilman John Elliott last fall. The ordinances were taken from models in the Destination Oconee workbook, he said. Cain said he believed in the Destination Oconee plan, which was developed through numerous meetings with public stakeholders and was approved in the mid-2010s.

"Planning takes time, and building communities takes time," Chapman said. "Looking at building communities over time, however the community wants to build, is a good thing."

"I think the goal is to have every main highway entry into the county to have updated and nicer signage, like you see coming from Clemson on (U.S. Highway 123)," Cain said. "Those are not huge things, but this is all part of the Destination Oconee plan."

The traffic design ordinance would affect county portions of S.C. Highways 11, 28, 59, 130 and 183 and U.S. Highways 76 and 123.

Any new development or existing development expanding by more than 50 percent of its existing area will be required to abide by the new ordinance. The ordinance calls for standards to

a building's makeup and entrances, building materials and colors — encouraging the use of timber framing, stone foundation, rough wooden siding, stucco and glass — along with prohibiting fluorescent and phosphorescent colors. Appeals can be submitted to the Planning Commission within 10 working days after a decision is rendered by the county planning and zoning department.

Chapman pointed to the city of Greenville's efforts in revitalizing its downtown through planning.

"When this gets put in place, it won't just impact today and what building goes on today. It will create how the community looks over time," Chapman said. "The reason people like being in downtown Greenville isn't because they created a zoning ordinance yesterday. They started rebuilding Green-

## time,' Chapman said

ville in the mid-'90s."

He also noted that when the lakes and protected national forests are subtracted from Oconee, only 12 percent of the county is zoned.

## HART CALLS OUT GROUP

During a recent council meeting, Hart took shots at Cain and the Planning and Economic Development Committee — which also includes Councilman Julian Davis and Elliott —

saying proper procedure wasn't followed in the reading of an ordinance about the traffic corridor design standards.

"This was not done in the proper procedure. This is following the top-down zoning by Mr. Cain and his committee," Hart said at the Feb. 2 council meeting. "You would think they would know what the format is."

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