



**Advocates for
Quality Development**

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*Advocating for
sound land planning
that protects
what we treasure
as we prepare
for the future.*

*AQD's unpaid
volunteers attend
scores of meetings &
forums to represent
property owner views
on key land &
lake use issues.*

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2020 Comprehensive Plan Reflects Oconee Outreach Efforts

Oconee County has completed its required 10-year Comprehensive Plan update. AQD is optimistic this Plan will be referenced more than its predecessor.

Mike Smith, the Planning Commission's District 1 rep, believes adding a succinct Executive Summary will help ensure Plan goals and strategies are acted upon.

Gwen McPhail, District 5 Planning Commissioner, and Adam Chapman, director, Planning, collaborated with Smith to succinctly summarize citizen-identified priorities and challenges, and to propose accountability measures.

Maintaining, Managing Growth

The Comp Plan is designed to forge a coordinated, long-term effort to maintain, enhance and manage County growth and viability. It lays out ways to achieve progress on multiple fronts, from housing needs and job training to recreational options and environmental protection.

The County's Planning staff made a heroic effort to solicit public input with radio and newspaper ads and public outreach meetings in every voting district. Some 1,600 citizens either attended meetings or completed surveys.

What Residents Want

The following strategies gained the most comments/input from citizens:

- ◆ Create recreational options unrelated to hiking & lake, especially for youth
- ◆ Upgrade libraries/learning centers
- ◆ Economic incentives for businesses
- ◆ Road upkeep, planning, construction
- ◆ Build trails, walk & bike connectivity
- ◆ Discourage littering
- ◆ Preserve & enhance land resources
- ◆ ID & address water quality issues
- ◆ High speed Internet throughout county

An Implementation Plan

The Executive Summary includes an Implementation Plan to guide public

investment and private initiative. Plan implementation requires adoption and revision of ordinances and completion of projects and programs outlined in Plan goals, objectives and strategies sections. Some strategies are easy to measure; others more subjective. That means there's no single system to measure success. However, County Council will be updated periodically on progress or the lack of it on the Plan's strategies.

Rapidly changing technology, national demographic shifts, and changing market preferences are reshaping Oconee County.



Libraries high on citizen list of priorities

Many of the changes experienced over the last decade present challenges. But the County also had successes addressing needs and cultivating its unique assets.

Challenges To Overcome

- ◆ Stagnant workforce growth
- ◆ Transportation Infrastructure planning for cars, bikes, and pedestrians
- ◆ Need for more higher paying careers
- ◆ Lack of training for skilled jobs
- ◆ Critical shortage of affordable & available housing
- ◆ Shortage of housing & planning for care of our aging population
- ◆ Limited internet availability
- ◆ Divided opinion about managing growth
- ◆ Limited entertainment options

Ways To Get Involved Through AQD Membership

Input from citizens & community organizations like AQD are critical to success. AQD researched Comp Plan elements & offered written input to Planning. AQD members also attend & speak at Planning Commission & County Council meetings. Please consider joining our issue leaders in such efforts. For Council & Commission meeting times & agendas visit: www.oconeesc.com

Guest Speakers Discuss Oconee Initiatives

At AQD's fall 2019 annual meeting, Amanda Brock, Oconee County Administrator, John Elliott, District 1, Oconee County Councilman, and Adam Chapman, Oconee County Planning Director, spotlighted a variety of economic good news, including

- ◆ a \$5 million Sewer South grant
- ◆ a \$2.2 million FAA grant to expand Oconee County's Airport
- ◆ a 30-40 monthly volume of new home & addition building permits
- ◆ work on four new Hwy 11 Industrial Park sites
- ◆ relocation of the Hamilton Career Center to a new Hwy 11 campus
- ◆ progress redeveloping Newry mill buildings & Hartwell Village growth.

Answers On Key Challenges

However, the most impressive part of the presentation came when Brock and Elliott answered questions posed by audience members.

Brock seemed to have encyclopedic knowledge of recycling efforts when she was asked if the County truly recycled cardboard or if it wound up in

a landfill. Brock described a period when many counties could find no market for cardboard waste. Rather than dumping cardboard in a landfill, Brock ordered County vehicles parked outside to free inside storage space for the cardboard until a market could be found.



Brock mentioned her visit to a high-tech, \$1.27 million Abbeville waste-to-energy plant she hopes might be a future Oconee County alternative if it can find neighboring counties willing to partner. The Abbeville waste-burning facility meets EPA standards and offers a viable disposal solution as available landfills disappear.

A question about possible County efforts to regulate short-term rentals prompted Elliott to say the County will

wait to see the fate of legal challenges to City of Seneca's rental ordinance before it considers any action.

Corridor Plans & Billboards

Councilman Elliott also answered questions. He told AQD members he favored a moratorium on new billboards and reaffirmed his hope that Council would make corridor plans that address both safety and design standards a priority.

Bountyland Traffic Circle?

When asked about looming Bountyland traffic congestion given Seneca's approval of a large South Cove Road development, Brock said investigations were ongoing regarding efforts to lessen the impact, including a possible traffic circle at the South Cove-Hwy. 188 intersection.

The Administrator also stressed the importance of the 2020 Census. She said County staff will work hard to encourage a high response rate and ensure the County receives a fair share of state and federal monies. Online and simplified paper forms should help.

Infrastructure Expanding

Bob Royer, the AQD member who regularly attends Oconee Joint Regional Sewer Authority (OJRSA) meetings, reports several newsworthy 2019 developments.

◆ OJRSA received \$5.2 million to fund its "Sewer South" project that will provide service along I-85 from the Georgia border thru Fair Play and north along Hwy. 59. Preliminary design is complete and final design is underway. The Authority hopes construction will be complete by November, 2021.

◆ Due to growth near the Hwy. 123-Clemson border, cities will need to expand feeder lines & address pump station capacities to meet increased demand. Clemson University has substantial Oconee County land holdings and land swaps are partly responsible for the area growth surge. In 2019, the Authority permitted an additional 180,000 gallons per day, and added service to 76 residences, 30 commercial & 3 industrial clients.

◆ Infiltration/Inflow (I/I) problems dilute sewage, decrease treatment efficiency, and can cause sewage volumes to exceed the capacity of pump stations and feeder lines causing overflows. Sewer overflows during heavy rain periods continue to be a problem. Member cities are using monies returned to them by the Authority to address the problem.

DHEC is inspecting all cities and the Coneross plant to ID problems and press for improvements.

◆ Today, the Authority treats sewage for some 20,000 residents plus several industries at a cost of 68-cents per 1,000 gallons. It processes an average of ~3 million gallons a day. Current capacity is 7.8 million gallons per day. In 2019, it treated & released 1.2 billion gallons to Coneross creek.

◆ Authority assets are estimated at \$28.9 million. In 2019, its revenue of \$3.315 million was \$680,000 less than its \$3.944 million in expenses.

AQD Board

At AQD's 2019 annual meeting, three directors were elected to the Board. Two—Gary Owens and Robert Royer—are prior directors, while John A. Eagar is serving his first term. AQD's seven directors live in six different Oconee/Pickens communities.

Here's a list of AQD's 2020 Board members and their neighborhoods.

Jim Codner, South Oak Pointe

John Eagar, Indian Oaks

Gary Owens, Wynward Pointe

Robert Royer, Beacon Shores

Jim Schoonover, Wynward Pointe

Ginger Strong-Tidman, Keowee Key

Sue Williams, Highlands (Pickens)

AQD Officers for 2020

President, Gary Owens

VP, Ginger Strong-Tidman

Secretary, Gary Savercool

Treasurer, Phil Soper

Want To Help Work On Issues?

We'd love to have you help us on AQD projects. To find out how, just email us:

office@AQDUpstate.com

Water Protection Team Identifying Watershed Quality Priorities

The Lake Keowee Source Water Protection Team (LKSAPT), formed in 2017 with \$1 million in Duke Energy funding, is a multi-faceted program to protect water quality within Keowee-Toxaway reservoirs & watersheds.

Rob Aulebach, AQD's member on the team, reports the group hopes to complete a comprehensive, actionable Watershed Based Plan (WBP) for all of the Keowee-Toxaway watershed by May, 2020. The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control awarded a \$50,000 grant for this ambitious project.

Pinpointing Trouble Spots

"The WBP will help us target parcels that should be priorities for land protection, wetland and stream enhancements, septic repairs and agricultural runoff," Aulebach says. "Prioritizing efforts to address the more serious problem areas first is sound policy."

All the necessary data has been gathered for an analysis of stormwater and shoreline management impacts on sediment and nutrient loads. The

analysis will determine priorities for load reductions.



Fertilizer run-off, failed septic systems, feral pigs are among many water quality culprits.

He notes the group is working toward several goals concurrently.

One is to develop a clear understanding of current and anticipated watershed conditions by compiling and evaluating water quality test results, identifying key data parameters, and determining what information gaps exist. This will help the group decide desired locations for additional strategic monitoring.

Septic Tank Repairs

The water protection team is also planning a program to subsidize septic tank repairs and pumping for homeowners who may need financial assistance.

Clemson provided the final septic suitability analysis at the beginning of December. The results are being incorporated into the WBP.

Public Meetings, Concerns

In late October, 2019, the LKSAPT held a public meeting at the Seneca Light and Water facility. It also hosted an online survey that generated more than 300 responses.

At the public meeting, Team members noted that Lake Keowee water quality is good. However, they also stressed that it's easier to adopt preventive water quality measures than to treat problems after the fact.

Lake Keowee is a source of drinking water for a lot of people. Unlike water drawn from some other lakes, it is not only safe but it has no taste or odor problems. The Team's efforts are designed to keep it that way.

HEP Grants Approach Half-Million Dollars

In 2019, six Habitat Enhancement Program (HEP) proposals for the Lake Keowee-Toxaway watershed received grants of nearly one-half million dollars.

The Review Committee vetting the proposals includes AQD representative Sue Williams. Created as part of the Duke hydro-relicensing agreement, HEP is designed to create, enhance, and protect aquatic and wildlife habitat within Lakes Jocassee and Keowee and the watershed draining into these lakes.

Vital Habitat Preserved

"HEP funded in full or in part proposals from Naturaland Trust, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Friends of Lake Keowee Society, and Trout Unlimited," says Williams.

"The most dollars were dedicated to the Naturaland Trust and SCDNR's purchase of important habitat within the watershed to protect it from future



Regal osprey are among wildlife species HEP aims to protect.

development."

Other funded requests approved included converting open areas in

the Jocassee Gorges used for emergency helicopter landing zones into pollinator habitats, installing bluebird boxes around Lake Keowee, installing additional Lake Keowee fish attractors and fishing tackle disposal containers, and restoring habitat in the Crane Creek and Moody Creek watersheds.

Permits Help Fund HEP

HEP projects are funded by an original Duke contribution of \$1 million with ongoing funding provided by \$500 HEP fees levied with each Duke permit granted for docks and shoreline activities.

The fund currently has a balance of about \$1.5 million to fund HEP requests.

Williams hopes that the HEP Review Committee continues to receive top-quality proposals in coming years.

Renewed Hope for Plans To Manage Corridor Growth

The 2020 outlook is improving for Oconee County to address the need to plan for busy, rapid-growth highway corridors, including Hwys. 11, 123, 130, 28 and 76.

All these corridors are experiencing or expect to see rapid growth in the near future.

For instance, Hwy. 123 is booming due to Clemson growth pressure, while sewer expansion to I-85, South Carolina Exit 1, is likely to trigger renewed

interest in new types of development in the area from commercial enterprises to trailer parks.

Why Corridor Overlays?

Corridor Plans or zoning overlays can help ensure growth along these busy byways is managed to lessen traffic hazards and congestion. Overlays also can provide design standards for new commercial sites, businesses and residential activity.

Without such regulations, key corridors can quickly become a



developmental hodgepodge with multiple highway curb cuts, forests of competing signage, and structures of every size, shape and design.

Council Directive

At the direction of County Council and Administrator Amanda Brock, the

Planning Department is addressing possible standards for traffic and curb cuts, signage and design standards. The Planning Department will send its proposals back to County

Council's Planning and Economic Development (PED) committee for review.

A proposal to regulate billboards is being studied separately by County Attorney David Root.

Public Can Voice Opinions

AQD representatives will attend County Council meetings and share our concerns about key corridor topics once the Planning Department proposal is ready for review. We encourage AQD members to do the same.

Mid-Rise Construction Concerns

In late January, 2020, Oconee County Council asked the Planning Department to consider how student housing might fit with development plans. It also asked Building Codes and the County Attorney to research potential safety issues associated with wood-frame construction of mid-rise (4-11 story) buildings.

A Clemson student housing moratorium may increase permit requests in eastern Oconee County.

Wood-frame construction of mid-rise structures is often favored over masonry and steel options as it is cheaper, faster, and is permitted by existing building codes.

However, over the long term, wood-frame construction of mid-rise buildings can be more costly and raise safety concerns.

For example, water intrusion is associated with attendant risks of structural compromise and mold.

In addition, dynamic loading due to excessive weight and vibration is a special worry in wood-frame student housing. Dynamic loading has the potential to result in floor-truss failure and collapse.

Fire is another concern in mid-rise wood-frame construction.

AQD Membership Form

Join AQD or renew your membership today! Choose the desired membership type on the form below. Family Members be sure to list everyone in your household. Memberships may be canceled at any time. However, contributions are nonrefundable. Though Advocates for Quality Development, Inc., is a nonprofit corporation, contributions are NOT tax-deductible.

Make checks payable to AQD. Return form to AQD, P.O. Box 802, Seneca, S.C. 29679

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MEMBERSHIP TYPE:

NEIGHBORHOOD _____

INDIVIDUAL \$30 FAMILY \$50
 DONOR \$100 HOA/BUSINESS \$100

COMMENTS: _____

ADDITIONAL DONATIONS WELCOME!
