



**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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# Oconee County Council Considers Design Standards, Corridor Signage

On January 19, 2021, Oconee County Council had first reading of ordinances to create new design and signage standards on specified busy, high-visibility corridors.

## Impact of Design Standards

These standards aim to manage growth along key Oconee County highways to ensure corridors that welcome visitors and serve residents are inviting, visually attractive, and safe. The proposed architectural design standards would encourage construction of more buildings like the Blue Ridge Bank branch pictured here.

The standards would apply to commercial and mixed-use residential/commercial developments and multi-story residential projects. Single-family homes, agricultural and forest uses are exempt.

## Two-Tier Design

There are two sets of architectural guidelines—

Standard 2 for fastest growth areas, and a less-stringent Standard 1 in moderate growth sectors. For details, visit the County website: <https://oconeesc.com/>. The ordinances are attached as background materials for the January 19th Council agenda and minutes.

## Design Standard 1 Highlights

- ◆ Avoiding buildings with blank facades facing public or private right-of-ways.
- ◆ Encouraging pedestrian-friendly entrances that shelter folks from weather.
- ◆ Using windows, doors, accents or other design elements for visual diversity.
- ◆ No painted concrete blocks or asphalt shingle siding on high-visibility facades.
- ◆ No florescent/phosphorescent colors.

## Design Standard 2 Goals

Standard 2 expands on the above to list timber framing and stonework (natural or artificial) as exterior design requirements with minimum facade percentages:

- ◆ Timber framing, 15% minimum
  - ◆ Stonework structure or veneer, 20%
- Exteriors can feature up to 65% of other approved materials like glass and rough wood siding.

All projects would require SCDOT to verify traffic and safety standards are followed. Projects also would need to

provide adequate off-street parking for customers, employees, and deliveries to avoid blocked roads and congestion. The design ordinance is now at the Planning Commission. A public hearing is tentatively set for Mar. 1. Strong public support is key to its future. Please consider attending this hearing or emailing supportive comments.



*Commercial design standards can encourage construction of attractive buildings like this Blue Ridge Bank branch in Bountyland.*

## Signage Ordinance

The proposed Lake Corridors signage standards would apply to portions of roads ringing Lake Keowee—Hwy 188; Hwy 183 from 188 to Pickens County line, and Hwy 130 from Seneca to Salem.

These standards would limit individual properties to one free-standing and one building-mounted sign. Free-standing signs would be limited to 7 feet in height (versus the current 20 feet) and 33 square feet of total area (versus the current 75 square foot maximum).

Nuisance signs, like garage sale flyers, would be prohibited in public right-of-ways.

A second Council reading is expected on Feb. 2nd with a hearing on third reading.

## Design Standard 1 Corridor Sectors

Hwy 11, I-85 to Walhalla  
Hwy 28, Walhalla to NC line  
Hwy 59, Hwy 24 to I-85 Overlay  
Hwy 76, State line to Westminster  
Hwy 183, Walhalla to 188

## Design Standard 2 Corridor Sectors

Hwy 11, Walhalla to Pickens Cty (PC) line  
Hwy 28, Seneca to Walhalla  
Hwy 123, Seneca east to Pickens Cty west to Westminster  
Hwy 130, Seneca to Salem  
Hwy 183, Hwy 188 intersection to PC line  
Hwy.188, entire length

# Duke Energy Updates & Answers on Plans

At AQD's fall 2020 annual meeting, Alan Stuart, Senior Project Manager, Duke Energy, offered updates and answered questions about Lake Keowee and Lake Jocassee projects, plans, and shoreline enforcement.

## Lake Recreation & Habitat

Stuart said 2020 COVID restrictions dramatically increased lake recreational use and access-area traffic as people sought escapes in boating, fishing, camping & hiking. This created trash and parking challenges.

Duke has filed a conceptual improvement plan with FERC to help alleviate trash, restroom and parking challenges at Warpath

Landing. The plan will expand parking, add trash receptacles, and install vault toilets at this access area.

At Devils Fork State Park, 2020 recreational enhancements include a designated diver access location, a new Toxaway River suspension bridge for hikers, and separate canoe/kayak launch facilities. During 2021, Duke will add parking and a new courtesy boat dock to minimize conflict with commercial providers.

Stuart also cited Habitat Enhancement Program grants. (See Pg. 4)

## Lake Levels & Water Plans

Stuart said Duke completion of pump modifications now allow the Oconee Nuclear Station to operate in severe droughts with a Lake Keowee level of 790-feet. He added planning frameworks are in place to guide creation of added River Basin Councils & Plans and a State Water Plan.

## Answers to AQD Questions

**Q.** Is Duke enforcing clearing and non-permeable path restrictions below the 804 contour? In the 2019-2020 period did Duke require any Keowee lakeshore property owners to restore vegetation?

**A.** Duke's Project Boundary varies on a tract-by-tract basis. Many Keowee

property owners own to the 800' full-pond contour. In this case, County, HOA or deed restrictions may apply.

Within our boundary, the Shoreline Management Plan spells out vegetation management restrictions and prohibits impermeable surfaces. We routinely require removal of concrete walks, firepits, etc., within the Boundary.

As of fall 2020, we were working

boats or other boating activities, which in South Carolina are under the Department of Natural Resources.

**Q.** What buoys can lot owners place in the water near their docks?

**A.** Lake Services can approve small mooring buoys, which may not extend beyond an approved structure. No-wake buoys beyond a dock aren't allowed. Duke Energy addresses these

as we do any other compliance issue.

**Q.** Why is Duke burying a power line under Lake Keowee on Hwy.188, and does it plan to do the same on other bridge crossings?

**A.** Utility line attachments to



with 30-plus Lake Keowee owners to correct violations. Typically restoration work is scheduled November-February when plants are dormant to improve survivability.

Duke Energy reps monitor shoreline during lake-use site visits made for every permit application. A contract employee conducts "close-out" dock and stabilization construction inspections. This person also monitors shoreline activities and reports violations.

**Q.** Is Duke open to a Memorandum of Agreement with Oconee or Pickens County to codify/simplify cooperation regarding shoreline violations?

**A.** Yes. Duke and Oconee County discussed creating a memorandum years back. Duke has such agreements with other counties, but we already work closely with Oconee on buffer violations and other compliance issues. So it may be unnecessary.

**Q.** Is Duke monitoring island erosion? If so, has it increased due to wake boat traffic?

**A.** Duke has completed stabilization efforts for 9 islands and 3 access-area shorelines identified as problem areas during a Relicensing Agreement study. No erosion studies are now underway.

Duke has no ability to regulate wake

bridges used to be the norm. SCDOT is moving away from that. The 188 bridge is scheduled for replacement, and Duke's investing \$2.6 million to bore under the lake for underground utilities. This investment will upgrade the power line and install a second line to increase reliability, support growth, and make the energy infrastructure around Lake Keowee more resilient against power outages.

While the Hwy.130 bridge near the top of Stamp Creek is on the state's replacement list, work has not been scheduled. When it is, we'll follow all permitting procedures.

**Q.** In the fall of 2020, water leaving the Oconee Nuclear Plant looked rather oily and thick. Why?

**A.** Tony Garland, ONS Environmental, investigated reports of what appeared to be an oily sheen below Keowee Dam. No leaks were found. The sheen was attributed to Lake Keowee "turn over" created when colder temperatures cool surface water, causing it to sink and the warmer bottom layer to rise to the top. Reduced oxygen and decaying material in this layer creates sulphurous gases that can have a rotten-egg smell. This is a temporary, natural phenomenon.

# Oconee County Progress, 2021 Challenges

District 1 Councilman John Elliott and Planning Director Adam Chapman briefed AQD annual meeting attendees on Oconee County progress and challenges. Both men praised County response to the pandemic and an April tornado that caused \$12 million dollars damage.

Chapman lauded County efforts to provide supplies, heavy equipment and labor for the massive cleanup.

Both speakers also discussed economic health and progress.

Elliott noted the County's economy remained strong in late fall with an unemployment rate half the national average. He cited plans for redevelopment of the Newry Mill site with apartments and retail as a major gain.

Documenting economic successes in the past five years, Chapman cited capital investments of more than \$400 million that created 1,177 new jobs. In the same time frame, the County

issued 253 new commercial construction permits. Throughout 2020, the Planning Director said residential



construction permits for remodeling/renovation and stick-built residential dwellings remained high. But, he noted the huge disparity in the value of homes built illustrates more affordable housing is needed for workers.

## 2020 Council Achievements

Here is a sampling of the Council actions Elliott deemed as 2020 wins.

- ◆ Enacted new signage standards,
- ◆ Hwy 11 Tri-County Tech campus.

- ◆ Addressed RV Park sanitation/safety.
- ◆ Provided \$1 million tornado aid.
- ◆ No 2021-budget-year tax increase.
- ◆ Tied annual performance reviews to employee salary increases.
- ◆ Littering fine upped to \$500 with 8 hours community service added.

## 2021 Agenda Challenges

Both men identified trash/recycling as a major problem as landfills near capacity and recycling markets vanish.

Elliott also hopes to tackle corridor planning for curb cuts & safety, requiring shooting/archery ranges to be subject to exception hearings, and potential impact fees for student/multi-family housing to offset related law enforcement and fire protection costs.

Chapman noted civic engagement has been lacking at public Council and Commission meetings. If COVID worries or schedules prevent in-person attendance, he said people can write letters to be read at the meeting.

## Voicing Member Concerns

Most AQD members know we try to represent their interests at Council and Planning Commission meetings in Oconee & Pickens, but may not realize AQD also acts as their voice in less-publicized forums and as stakeholders on public/government committees.

Here are two examples.

### Zoning Exception Opposition

During 2020, the Oconee County Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) considered a request for a proposed Hwy. 130 development across from Keowee I, II, and III subdivisions to erect commercial structures within the protected Lake Overlay.

The appeal prompted AQD to alert concerned citizen groups about the upcoming hearing and ensure opposition to this exception precedent would be strongly voiced.

AQD believes preservation of Lake Overlay protections is one of Oconee County's most important land planning and lake preservation measures.

The request was denied, and the developer submitted a new plan in compliance with the Lake Overlay.

### Source Water Protection Team

AQD is represented on the Lake Keowee Source Water Protection (LKSWSPT) team by Rob Aulebach and Sharon Hamilton. LKSWSPT focuses on preserving our pristine Lake Keowee and Jocassee watersheds.

Working with DHEC, LKSWSPT provided its first grant to help a low-income homeowner locate and repair a failing septic system in the Cane Creek/Little Cane Creek area. Funds for area owners with failing systems come from LKSWSPT and the state. LKSWSPT is working to increase awareness of financial assistance.

Formed and funded by Duke Energy, LKSWSPT recently completed a Watershed Based Plan for Lake Keowee that identifies and prioritizes where and how to focus best management practices related to land protection, wetland and stream enhancement, septic repair, and agriculture. The goal is to protect, maintain and improve water quality. The plan is posted on the LKSWSPT website:

<https://www.lakekeoweewatershed.org/>

## AQD Board

At AQD's 2020 annual meeting, two directors were elected to the Board—former president and director Jim Codner, and Sharon Hamilton, who is serving her first three-year term.

Our directors live in seven different communities. Here are AQD's Board members for 2021.

Jim Codner, South Oak Pointe  
John Eagar, Indian Oaks  
Sharon Hamilton, Port Santorini  
Gary Owens, Wynward Pointe  
Robert Royer, Beacon Shores  
Ginger Strong-Tidman, Keowee Key  
Sue Williams, Highlands (Pickens)

### AQD Officers for 2021

President, Gary Owens  
Vice President, Robert Royer  
Secretary, Gary Savercool  
Treasurer, Phil Soper

### Want To Help Tackle Issues?

The Board would love your help with researching issues, member communications, position statements, stakeholder commitments and other projects. To find out more, email us:

[office@AQDUpstate.com](mailto:office@AQDUpstate.com)

# HEP Grants Preserve Habitat Restore Fishing Stream

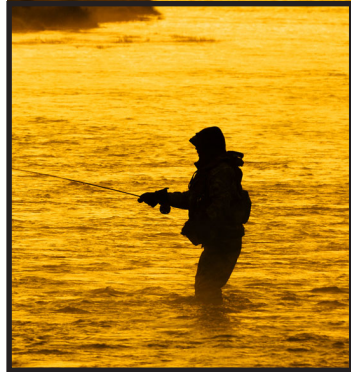
In 2020, the SC Department of Natural Resources (DNR) received a \$190,000 Habitat Enhancement Program (HEP) grant for Eastatoe Creek Stream Restoration and Angler Access, while Naturaland Trust won a \$150,000 HEP grant for a 238-acre Chapman Bridge Oconee Bell Preserve.

The SCDNR effort includes a Duke Energy vegetation management plan and stops creekside herbicide use.

By expanding the Lake Keowee watershed acreage it

protects, Naturaland Trust preserves Oconee Bell habitat while providing for non-motorized public access, hunting and wildlife management patrols. The preserve will connect with other conservation tracts.

HEP is funded by an original Duke contribution of \$1 million with ongoing funding provided by \$500 HEP fees levied with each Duke permit for dock or shoreline activities. HEP is designed to create, enhance, and protect aquatic and wildlife habitat within Lake Jocassee and Lake Keowee and the



watershed draining into these lakes.

The grant Review Committee includes AQD representative Sue Williams.

## Reports on Prior Projects

At its final 2020 meeting, the Review Committee heard progress reports on prior grants.

- ◆ Naturaland Trust closed on the 193-acre McKinney Creek Preserve.

- ◆ SCDNR is completing its Wildlife Opening Pollinator Species Conversion project with a final seeding in early 2021 and is proceeding with the 12-acre Wadakoe

Land acquisition. But it couldn't complete its 64-acre Rocky Bottom Land acquisition.

- ◆ FOLKS installed 75 Eastern Bluebird nesting boxes, 84 fish attractors, and 20 fish tackle disposal containers.

- ◆ Trout Unlimited has assessed habitat along 6.4 miles of Crane and Moody creeks, and is making improvements to aid fish migration .

- ◆ Native plantings this fall completed Oconee County-South Cove Park shoreline restoration efforts.

# Oconee County Greenway Trail?

At Oconee County Council's January 19th meeting, Mike Smith asked Council to consider funding a feasibility study for a Greenway System similar to Greenville's Swamp Rabbit Trail as part of its 2021 budget planning session.

Smith suggested the study look at potential routes along Hwy 123 from Lake Hartwell to Seneca, and along SC Hwy 11, which offers scenic and topography advantages.

While the concept was endorsed two years ago at a meeting hosted by Blue Ridge Electric, a feasibility study is needed to move forward.

Council Chair John Elliott read a sampling of letters from the project's many proponents, including bicyclists, walkers, health-care providers, and businesses.

## Potential Benefits

- ◆ A greenway system could connect Oconee communities, a key Comprehensive Plan goal.

- ◆ It would benefit children and adults, offering safe active-lifestyle options and encourage tourism.

- ◆ The amenity could help attract new industry to the area, since businesses are interested in providing leisure activities for employees.

- ◆ It would boost property values and help support small businesses.

## 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**

NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

MEMBERSHIP TYPE:

NEIGHBORHOOD \_\_\_\_\_

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

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDITIONAL DONATIONS WELCOME!**

\_\_\_\_\_