



MINUTES
OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
Tuesday, June 6, 2017
4:00 p.m.

MEMBERS, OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL
Mr. Paul Cain, District III
Mr. Wayne McCall, District II
Ms. Edda Cammick, Chairwoman, District I
Mr. Julian Davis III, Vice Chair, District IV
Mr. Glenn Hart, Chair Pro Tem, District V

Oconee County Council met at 4:00 P.M. in Council Chambers, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC with all Council Members, County Administrator Scott Moulder, County Attorney David Root, and Katie D. Smith, Clerk to Council present.

Press: Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, notice of the meeting, date, time, place of meeting and agenda were posted on the bulletin board at the County Administrative Offices, 415 South Pine Street, Walhalla, SC, and the County Council website [www.oconeese.com/council]. In addition it was made available [*upon request*] to the newspapers, radio stations, television stations and concerned citizens.

Members of the press present: Dick Mangrum / WGOG

Call to Order

Ms. Cammick called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. She noted this is a special meeting to discuss the changes in the Building Codes Department.

Discussion Regarding Building Codes

Mr. Moulder thanked everyone for coming in concerning the Building Codes Department. He noted there had been some significant changes with regard to the operation of this department over the last couple of weeks. Additionally, he noted this format is a special meeting with an opportunity for the County as well as County Council to hear from the citizens and allow questions to be answered about the current state and future of the Building Codes Department.

Ms. Cammick asked speakers to state their name and the business that they work for the record.

Mr. Harold Knight, former owner of Knight Builders since 1972 with his son now owner, addressed Council with concerns regarding adopting a county code book so they are not operating out of 2012, 2015, etc. He noted he doesn't have a problem with codes but does have a problem with jumping around from one to the other and you never know what you are supposed to do.

Mr. Moulder noted the inconsistency and the application of the code is some of the concerns they have heard over the last couple of weeks. An Ordinance is in the process of being established to adopt the standardized

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International Building Code.

Mr. Frank Massey, who has been a builder in Oconee County for about 45 years, addressed Council with concerns regarding changing the codes and not informing anyone of change whether it be electrical, framing, etc. He noted Scott Carroll would be capable of overseeing the Building Codes Department. Further, he noted the present two inspectors and the women in the office did a good job. He noted this needs to stay in-house and let the ones that are there continue to do their job.

Mr. Brad Kisker, owner of Kisker Construction for about 21 years, serves on Home Builders board and a member of the Planning Commission, addressed Council noting there needed to be consistency and communication, which has been lacking. He noted it is extremely difficult to permit a house in Oconee County. To receive a building permit in Oconee County, it takes approximately two to three weeks, whereas in Pickens County, he noted, it takes about 15 minutes.

Mr. Kisker also noted the automated system should have made the process faster. He noted he had an inspection today and was not notified by phone call or email so he doesn't know if he passed the inspection or not. Oconee County enforces the Energy Code that was adopted in 2013 like no other county. Finally, he noted that Oconee County requires more paperwork than other areas around.

Mr. McCall asked Mr. Kisker why Pickens County was faster than Oconee County. Mr. Kisker noted when he builds in Pickens County, he can walk in with a set of plans, septic tank permit, fills out a form, hands them a check and gets a building permit. He noted they have driveway permits and subdivisions that are platted that they have to pay \$65 and wait two weeks for someone to come out. They have to get septic tank permit and zoning permit and apply online and then there is plan review. This is a two to three week process. He noted that it has taken some time to get used to uploading and downloading documents and submitting and resubmitting documents.

Mr. McCall apologized to Mr. Kisker for all the trouble that he had endured.

Mr. Massey addressed Council and agreed with Mr. Kisker about the permits. He noted when you go and apply for a septic tank permit it takes four to six weeks and in Pickens County it took him four days. The septic tank permits and driveway permits are a big holdup. He noted you will need a driveway permit before a septic tank permit and you will need a septic tank permit before you can get a building permit and this process could potentially take up to ten weeks to complete.

Mr. Moulder stated that the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC) is responsible for septic tank permitting and that Oconee County has no control on delays. The County is responsible for driveway encroachment permits and can address this issue.

Mr. Tom Markovich, owner of Markovich Homes and president of Home Builders Association in Oconee County. He noted he was not speaking on behalf of the Home Builders Association. He addressed Council regarding third party inspections. He noted he does not have an issue with this but does want to see the consistency and communication. However, he had concern regarding the use of building inspectors that were specifically contracted with the County or would the use of a third party inspector be adequate

Mr. Brad Lecroy addressed Council regarding the Building Codes Department noting some issues with

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consistency but did not need to get rid of the Building Codes Department. He noted there is still highly qualified staff employed. He noted from a County standpoint revenue is being thrown away. He objected to taking money being paid in permit fees and sending to a company that is not in our County. He noted he has concern that permit costs will go up. He noted he has seen the wait time increase for inspections. Historically, it has been a 24 hour wait period and now to expect a 48 hour wait period.

Mr. Moulder noted the appeal process is through the Building Codes Appeal Board, and that the process for filing appeals is a matter of state law, and would not change regardless if the inspection process was contracted through third party vendors or not. Any further appeal opportunities pass the Building Codes Appeal Board would still apply and that right would still be afforded. The process would remain the same except the independent contractor building official would hear the initial concern and the procedure would stay the same.

Mr. David Gulley, owner of Central Signature Homes / Central Contracting Corporation since 1971, and has been past state President and two time local President of the Home Builder Association, addressed Council thanking everyone for having the discussion. He has concerns regarding third party inspections as it relates to the appeals. He noted there would be no control over the official that would be put in place as they are not an employee in the County. In the past, they would receive emails to let them know if they passed or failed the inspection. At this time, builders have to wait until the end of the day to find out the results of the inspection and this effects how the schedule will be for the following day.

Mr. Flay Dalrymple, owner of DALCO Builders, addressed Council and thanked Mr. Hart, Mr. McCall, and Ms. Cammick for their help in resolving an issue. He noted the problems are not with Building Codes but rather all the way through the culture of Oconee County but as the old Council as it existed. He noted on one job, it had taken him months to get a building permit from the time he received the septic permit, which is a monetary loss for the homeowner. He noted he has built in Oconee, Anderson, and Greenville, SC and Stephens, Habersham, and Raven, GA and was not pleased with the way Oconee County handled the situation.

Mr. Tim Murphy with Tre-Hel Corporation addressed Council regarding the student housing project he has had over the last four to five years near Clemson. One is High Pointe, which are condominium apartments and the other is The Pier, which are cottages and recently tiny homes. He noted they have built multiple phases of each of the projects. He noted that over this time frame, he has had consistent help from the Building Codes Department. However, everything time wise did not fit his schedule but did not experience problems the other builders have stressed about.

Mr. Murphy also stated that Tre-Hel is currently constructing 85 buildings which would have 85 individual building permits. He noted the Building Codes Department helped him fill out 85 applications for permits, which was very helpful. Further, he noted if the department is no longer in existence and use only third party resources, the opportunity to get any assistance is lost as a customer. Additionally, he noted it would not be in the best interest as a builder and the County to abandon the Building Codes Department. He noted to use the third party on an as needed basis. If he has a problem with a field inspection and the third party official is also the code official who completed the inspection, he has no one further to speak with. He recommended keeping the department and how it is staffed should be in the best of the customers. Finally, he noted he wanted a department to serve and help him and third party officials could potentially get busy with other calls.

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Mr. Buddy Smith with Builder Smith addressed Council regarding the Building Codes Department. He noted the staff is knowledgeable and has helped him when needed. He further noted it would be a mistake to lose the Building Codes Department and bring in a third party. Additionally, he noted it is a lot more than just the inspection; it's what you lose in time and money spent and would give builders a good opportunity to get on a good schedule to be able to build more houses and bring more income into the County.

Chad Cromer, owner of Cromer Design and Construction, addressed Council regarding keeping consistency and in-house staff. He noted he had passed all of the code inspections when he built the first home in Oconee County. The problem he encountered was one inspector came out and inspected the job and told him there were problems and they fix them and then have a different inspector come back out to tell him there is another problem that has nothing to do with the first inspection. He noted there was a gray area in the codes and this costs him money. Finally, he noted to keep consistency but if outsourcing is the way they are heading, hold them accountable and have in-house staff to help with customer service.

Mr. Cain thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. He noted he received two phone calls regarding this issue. Further, he noted if there is an issue in County government to contact your Council representative. He does not want to outsource the Building Codes division, however, noted the department did need some work.

Mr. Davis thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and was appreciative of Mr. Moulder to set up the special meeting. He noted it is important for Council to hear the concerns and the problem.

Mr. Hart noted he has received phone calls from builders indicating they would like for the Building Codes Department and the present staff to remain and to increase the department by two more inspectors.

Mr. McCall noted after hearing the concerns from the builders, the main issue was the hold-ups and the wait time for inspections. He noted there needed to be a rule that if we didn't meet the builders schedule then to proceed on with the job. Mr. Harold Knight noted from the audience that if the permit cannot be completed in a 24 hour period then to proceed with the job. Mr. McCall agreed.

Mr. Moulder addressed the current status of the Building Codes Department. He noted there was an immediate change in the management and operation and reduced the size of the staff to help manage the department. He also noted it would be very difficult to manage the number of inspections a day with two people when the average number of daily inspections is approximately sixty.

Regarding the future of the department, Mr. Moulder stated, one possibility was third-party inspection services, and this was discussed with County Council. Council requested this town hall meeting before a final decision was made with regard to how the Building Code Department would be moving forward. At this point, there are two inspectors and third party to help ease some of the overburden and workload.

Mr. Moulder asked that five of the builders present at the meeting would volunteer to work with him to look at the system and the process of construction from start to finish and these individuals could communicate concerns or issues with him.

Mr. Harold Knight addressed Council asking if there would be another vote on the Building Codes Department.

Mr. Bradley LeCroy with Integrity Builders addressed Council asking if they would get a vote to see who would like to keep the Building Codes Department versus independent inspections. Mr. LeCroy asked all of those that would be in favor of keeping the Building Codes Department to stand. Most everyone in the room stood up at this moment.

Mr. Allen White with South State Bank addressed Council indicating he has completed mortgage loans and construction loans for 24 years. He noted he talks with builders from Greenville and Pickens County and they have a system in place that makes the process simple.

Mr. Talmadge Rholetter addressed Council regarding mobile homes which is a part of building codes and specifically regarding power. He noted that a permit has to be pulled in order to have power to the mobile home.

Mr. Tucker Harding with Zorn Construction addressed Council and asked if staff is overloaded with work, is there someone you can call and handle the inspections to keep in the 24 hour time frame as opposed to subcontracting the whole department.

Mr. Charles Dolly with Dolly's Roofing addressed Council regarding permits. He noted he builds in GA and SC and the inspection departments vary with some being accommodating and others tyrannical. He noted leadership is important and he has concerns of an outside company getting paid.

Mr. Moulder noted a number of different options:

- Full third- party contract
- No contract and hire additional people to manage everything in-house
- Keep the two people on staff at this present time and request two people a week from the third-party contractor
- Use third-party inspectors only in severely increased workload times

Mr. Moulder additionally thanked RCI as well as Mr. Blackwell and Mr. Collins for assisting Oconee County and being at the meeting for any questions that may arise.

Further, Mr. Moulder noted Council would take all of this into consideration and make the best decision that is best for the operation of Oconee County. However, regardless of what decision is made, there is a lot of work that needs to be completed based on a number of the comments made.

Ms. Margaret Head with Mid-South Trust Company in Royston GA addressed Council regarding delayed inspections. She noted she has been supplying roofing products to most of the builders in the meeting for over 35 years.

Mr. Dennis Roach, owner of DWR Plumbing, addressed Council regarding Pickens and Anderson Counties' processes.

Mr. Brad Kisker, owner of Kisker Construction addressed Council thanking them for the meeting and listening to everyone's concerns.

Ms. Cammick thanked everyone for coming to the meeting.

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Adjourn

Mr. Davis made a motion, seconded by Mr. Hart, approved 5 – 0 to adjourn at 5:24 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Katie D. Smith
Clerk to Council