

OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL RETREAT
February 7, 2012
OCONEE COUNTY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WALHALLA, SC 29691

Background

Oconee County Council met on Tuesday, February 7, 2012 in council chambers to develop, review and revise short-term and long-term goals for the county that were established during the first council retreat in January 2011. Short-term goals were identified as those issues which need to be addressed in the next 12 to 24 months. Long-term goals were identified as those issues which need to be addressed in the next three to five years. The purpose of short-term goals is to provide staff direction in recommending a budget for Fiscal Year 2013. The purpose of long-term goals is to establish the priority issues that council has determined are necessary to meet the future needs of the citizens of Oconee County. All council members were present and participated in the long term goals discussion. However, because of a prior commitment, one member of council was unable to fully participate in the discussion of short-term goals.

Process

The County Administrator reviewed the progress made on the goals established in 2011 and in other county government activities. He then reviewed the vision, mission and values statements that were developed during the 2011 retreat.

VISION

Oconee County – A diverse, growing, safe, vibrant community guided by rural traditions and shaped by natural beauty; where employment, education and recreation offer a rich quality of life for all generations, both today and tomorrow.

MISSION

Oconee County's current mission statement is:

It is the mission of Oconee County to provide our current and future citizens and visitors quality services and to protect our neighborhoods, heritage and environment by managing growth and change through smart, inclusive planning.

VALUES

- Elected by the people
- Proactive in addressing issues important to the county
- Congeniality
- Diversity in population, workforce, and ideas
- Citizen input in open, unbiased, civil, and respectful discourse
- Concerned about the entire county as well as individual district
- After decisions made council speaks with one voice
- Ethical behavior
- Set example for staff
- Make fact-based decisions
- Balance today's needs with future needs

SWOT ANALYSIS

Facilitators from the University of South Carolina's Institute for Public Service and Policy Research led the council through a brief review and update of the SWOT analysis from 2011. Following is the revised list:

Strengths

- Strong financial base of county
- Geographic location
- Climate
- Water supply
- Organizational size – small enough to do great things in a timely fashion (if the will is there)
- Dependable, hard-working workforce
- Low taxes
- Low cost of living
- Natural resources
- Forestry
- Sound, productive farm community
- First rate school system – K-12, Tri-County Tech, Clemson University
- First rate medical center
- Access to electricity
- Potential for water and sewer expansion
- On main rail line – CSX and Norfolk Southern
- Diverse talents in community
- Strong sense of volunteerism
- Great volunteer fire system and rescue system
- Strong industrial base – Duke Energy
- Availability of product for economic development
- Cultural infrastructure available throughout surrounding communities

Weaknesses

- Generational poverty
- Education is not valued
- Ability to get high school diploma or GED for those who want
- Impact of special interest groups
- Form of government not always recognized
- Sewer services not always where needed
- High unemployment
- Drug abuse is a local and national issue
- Failure to communicate plans (strategic, comprehensive, etc.) and successes
- Need to do a better job of communication
- Negative impact of both internal and external change

Opportunities

- View landfill as a resource
- Attract new business and industry
- Help existing industries grow in county
- Attract 'sister companies' of existing industries to county
- Tourism growth
- Convention Center as a new attraction and to build on strengths of the county
- More active participant in regional efforts
- Be more competitive for grant opportunities
- Work with existing providers to expand sewer infrastructure that plans for future needs
- Continue to develop and strengthen intergovernmental relationships within the county
- Privatization of services
- Expand recycling
- Improve efficiencies in government operations
- Production of bio-fuels
- Consolidation of services while maintaining quality

Threats

- Unfunded mandates, both Federal and State
- Uncertainty about the impact of Federal and State government decisions on county government
- Ability to fill vacant jobs/willingness of individuals to take available jobs
- Financial stability of hospital resulting in sale of hospital or the need to begin government subsidy of services
- Need to increase tax revenue
- County government is not 'user friendly'
- Not utilizing existing buildings to attract business and industry
- Unfunded or under-funded local liabilities (health benefits, retirement, etc.)
- County ordinances can hinder economic development

- Lack of diverse revenue sources for funding county government
- Upgrading and maintaining roads throughout county
- Timing and duration of recovery from recession

The facilitators then led the council through a process of updating and prioritizing the short and long term goals. The results are as follows:

SHORT TERM GOALS

1. Jobs and Job Retention
2. Sewer Infrastructure
3. Completing a New Jail
4. Developing a Communications Plan
5. Administrative Review
6. Zoning
7. Continue the EMS Plan
8. Addressing the Old Courthouse
9. County Transportation
10. Reassessment

After identifying and prioritizing short-term issues and goals, council identified strategies and goals within each issue area. Council reinforced its reliance on and confidence in the County Administrator and staff to keep council informed of action taken and action needed. Council also reinforced its desire to provide the County Administrator the resources, both human and capital, needed to facilitate accomplishment of the goals that they have identified.

Jobs and Job Retention

- Ensure ongoing review of available economic development incentives available to both existing and prospective industries and businesses
- Maximize use of economic development incentives available to existing industries
- Continue to work with the legislative delegation to emphasize the growth issues and employment needs of Oconee County
- Continue implementation of the Economic Development Strategic Plan to include ongoing review and updates as appropriate
- Make a decision on sewer services to the Golden Corner Commerce Park
- Work with organizations and agencies in the county to identify existing job vacancies and develop training program to provided the county workforce the skills needed to fill those jobs
- Work with the Upstate Alliance to increase the number of referrals to Oconee County
- Develop a public/private partnership for Echo Hills
- Continue relationship with MLBDC for small business development incubator
- Increase agri-business in county

(It should be noted that several of the goals identified in the area of jobs and job retention could also be included within sewer infrastructure. They were placed within Jobs and Job Retention to reinforce their important to retaining current employment and planning for future economic development and the jobs that need to be created to meet the growing needs of Oconee County.)

Sewer Infrastructure

- Use both public and private resources to provide services to meet county-wide current and future needs
- Consider multiple 208 authorities
- Revisit 1976 referendum
- Resolve long-term sewer issues and relationships
- Update sewer master plan with future growth in mind - link with comprehensive plan
- Update sewer basin plan

New Jail

- Make a decision on jail construction issues
- Expedite contracting process to begin construction as soon as realistically possible
- Provide council with an implementation schedule/timeline for construction of the new jail from current status through completion.

Communications Plan

- Fully develop and implement a county communications plan with the goal of keeping the public informed on the activities of county government to include items such as a quarterly progress report emphasizing accomplishments and costs as well as an annual report on actions taken.
- Schedule regular press releases to keep the public informed
- Emphasize the accomplishments that have been made
- Tie activities of county government to the comprehensive plan
- Council will develop goals to be used as part of an annual action plan
- Schedule ongoing town hall question and answer sessions – work with the Chamber of Commerce as appropriate to facilitate these sessions
- Administrator continue to do public presentations, using staff as appropriate to keep the public informed

Administrative Review

- Council will work with the County Administrator to provide additional short-term and long-term resources as needed to fully implement ongoing review of county administration to ensure that the citizens of Oconee County are provided quality, cost effective services.
- Continue process improvement project
- Develop and use performance management information

Zoning

- Provide training/workshops for Council, Planning Commission, Staff, and Citizens on the county's implementation policy for community zoning.
- Support Planning Commission 2012 goals
- Work with communities that desire zoning to ensure timely implementation of appropriate zoning

Public Safety

- Complete the phased implementation schedule for the EMS Plan
- Implement Fire and Rescue Service Plan
- Develop and plan for capital and operational expenses associated with implementation
- Monitor impact of mandated training on encouraging and attracting volunteers

Old Courthouse

- Issue is being sent to the Real Estate/Facilities/Land Management Committee for review and recommendation. Results of committee discussion are due to Council on March 15th, 2012.
- Develop and recommend a policy for addressing vacant county property.

County Transportation

- Continue the development and implementation of a county road master plan
- Complete CAT bus study for expansion of mass transit in county

Reassessment

- Finalize appeals process
- Begin planning for 2016 reassessment

LONG-TERM GOALS

Council next moved to reviewing and prioritizing long terms issues and goals established last year. The following goals were prioritized and revised by council:

1. Economic Development
2. Revenue Alternatives
3. Address Branch Library
4. Expand Tourism
5. Solid Waste
6. Recreation
7. 2-4 Year Campus
8. Resolve Road Issues

Within each of these priority issues, specific goals or strategies were identified.

Economic Development

- This is an ongoing priority issue and council needs to continue to do what is can to facilitate economic development throughout the county.
- Work with Tri-County Technical College to better prepare the workforce for future jobs
- Develop public/private economic development program
- Implement development plan for GCCP and Echo Hills

Revenue Alternatives – Funding Local Government

- Begin a public education process on how government is funded and alternative funding sources that are available to help pay for government services
- Create a citizen committee to provide recommendations on funding alternatives to council
- Invest in the expansion of the Rock Quarry
- Ensure broadband capabilities become a revenue source
- Further develop recycling program

Address Branch Libraries

- Replace Seneca branch
- Support Library Board's capital plan

Expand Tourism

- Grow tourism and create jobs in that sector
- Support the plans for a convention center
- Coordinate activities with SC PRT

Recreation

- Define and implement a long-term recreation plan

Solid Waste

- Keep ongoing review of usage and costs
- Continue to look for alternatives
- Educate public about the need for recycling
- Identify "sort and sell" recycling opportunities (electronics)

2-4 Year Campus

- Continue discussions with Tri-County Technical College
- Identify funding sources
- Identify incentives that may be available or could be offered
- Decide where campus should be located

Resolve Road Issues

- Develop long-term funding strategy
- Develop continuous maintenance program