

Agricultural Advisory Board Agenda

July 14

1. Call to order
2. Moment of silence
3. Invocation
4. Pledge of allegiance
5. Approval of minutes
June 9
6. **Public Comment Session** [3 minutes per person]
If you are not able to attend in person and you have a comment, you may submit it by contacting the Planning Department at planninginfo@oconeesc.com or 864-638-4218, so that we may receive your comment and read it into the record.
7. **Discussions** [to include Vote and/or Action on matters brought up in discussion if required]
 - Conservation Bank
 - District Reports and Comments
8. Adjourn



Oconee County Agricultural Advisory Board

When & Where

July 14, 2025

6:00 PM

Council Chambers

415 S Pine St

Walhalla SC 29691

Staff contact

846-638-4218

planninginfo@oconeesc.com

BOARD MEMBERS

Kim Alexander, District I
Rex Blanton, District III
Charlie Whiten, District V
Tessa Moxley, At-Large

Nathaniel Duncan, District II
Gary Wilson, District IV
David McMahan, At-Large
Chris Talley, Ex-Officio

Minutes

6:00 PM, Monday, June 9, 2025

Council Chambers

415 S Pine St Walhalla SC 29691

Members Present

Rex Blanton

Tessa Moxley

Kim Alexander

Nate Duncan

Chris Talley

Staff Present

James Coley

Elise Dunaway

Media Present

None

Call to order – Mr. Blanton called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM

Moment of silence

Invocation – led by Mr. Blanton

Pledge of allegiance – led by Mr. Duncan

Minutes approval – Approved motion made by Ms. Alexander, second by Mr. Blanton.
Approved Unanimously.

Public Comments –

None

Discussion –

Ag signage – “Agribusiness annual input: *the dollar figure*” short and sweet may be the best option because it is quick to read because you are driving by.

This includes just product sold, including agritourism will be a difficult number to find because of how broad it spans.

40-character limit is a challenging amount of room. More research is needed

Rep Biggs at the farm center, multiple members present. Rep Biggs seemed to be very supportive. Whole premise was more of an express your concern and we will follow up, which is good because she is following up person to person.

District reports

District 1 and District 2 on the north side need a timber supportive business. We are very rich in trees but there is nowhere to utilize them.

The county council had a meeting and mentioned what the money from the conservation bank will do. Duke cannot give the money to the conservation bank because of the nature of the rules. The money that they provide should stay in the county.

Motion made by Mr. Blanton to draft a letter to be read at the county council meeting on July 15, in support of the conservation bank fund being used for the preservation of agricultural land in Oconee County second by Ms. Moxley. Approved unanimously.

Conservation of farmland, conservation easement is still the best option to saving land.

Motion made by Ms. Moxley to adjourn. Approved unanimously.

Letter to: Oconee County Council
From: Oconee County Agricultural Advisory Board
To be read on at the County Council Public Hearing, July 15, 2025
Members of the Board,

The Agricultural Advisory Board has conducted public meetings in every district of the county, twice in each district, over a period of two years. In these meetings we heard the concerns of our farmers, and one of the concerns that we heard over and over again was critical loss of agricultural land to development.

According to the 2022 USDA census, Agribusiness contributed \$192,869,000 to Oconee County in agricultural products sold, making it a significant industry for Oconee. The original purpose of the Conservation Bank was clear about funds being used for conservation of ecologically significant land in perpetuity, farmland included.

And let's be clear: putting land into conservation does not eliminate a farmers' ability to use the land. In-fact, many farmers who have put their farms into conservation would argue that it has helped their operation; they are often paid for the elimination of the commercial development rights to the land, which gives them cash to expand current operations on the farm, running their operation just as they would had they not put their land into conservation.

Furthermore, property tax is slower to rise without the commercial development potential on the land, meaning that a farmer has less financial stress from year to year; all while still running the agricultural operation as they would have had they not put their land into conservation. Land owners can tailor their conservation easement to their future dreams as well, for example, cutting out parcels of land for their kids to build houses in the future, should they choose to.

An easement is not a one size fits all deal; the primary purpose of a conservation easement is to keep commercial developers from using ecologically significant land to make a quick buck.

The Agricultural Task Force of 2022 made the following recommendations:

1) Revisit the 2020 Comprehensive Plan, which addresses land protection; and 2) Fund Land Protection. The mission statement on the County's web page says: "It is the mission of Oconee County to provide our current and future citizens and visitors quality

Letter to: Oconee County Council
From: Oconee County Agricultural Advisory Board
To be read on at the County Council Public Hearing, July 15, 2025

services while protecting our communities, heritage, environment and natural resources....”.

The vision statement includes the wording: “guided by rural traditions and shaped by natural beauty.” We need to live up to our promises.

The proposed amendments to the use of Bank funds are broad; many of which are non-permanent projects that explicitly do not follow the criteria for the funds allocated by Duke Energy. Future funding opportunities from Duke will not come directly to Oconee should these amendments pass. To have such an establishment as Duke in our County, and to actively choose to pass on the level of funding they could provide, is utterly nonsensical. The Agricultural Advisory Board is unanimously in favor of farmland conservation, and the original stated purpose of the Conservation Bank Board. We strongly advise that the County Council reconsider these destructive amendments, as changes to the original purpose of the Bank will cause over a million dollars of loss to the funds in the immediate future, and millions more down the road. Funds that could be used to protect our invaluable land for future generations to come.



November 1, 2016

Oconee County Bank Board Fund
c/o Beth Hulse, Clerk to Council
415 S Pine St.
Walhalla, SC 29691

Subject: Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for Funding to the Oconee Conservation Bank

Dear Mrs. Hulse:

In accordance with the executed Relicensing Agreement (Relicensing Agreement) for the Keowee-Toxaway Hydro Project (KT Project), Duke Energy Carolinas LLC (Duke Energy) will provide \$618,000 to the Oconee Conservation Bank (OCB, Grantee) to support conservation activities funded by the OCB. This \$618,000 has been calculated in accordance with the escalation requirements in Section 26 of the Relicensing Agreement. The funding is subject to the Grantee's acceptance and full compliance with the terms and conditions set forth in this MOA. Duke Energy will provide this \$618,000 grant to the Grantee after not later than December 10, 2016, provided Grantee signs and returns this MOA by November 9, 2016.

The following terms and conditions are attached to Duke Energy's provision of funding:

1. Duke Energy agrees to provide a grant of \$618,000 to Grantee to support conservation initiatives approved by the OCB Board.
2. Duke Energy will provide the grant so long as all of the terms and conditions set forth in this MOA are agreed upon, accepted, and fully complied with.
3. Grantee acknowledges and agrees that should any portion of this MOA conflict with the Relicensing Agreement, the terms of the Relicensing Agreement shall prevail.
4. In accordance with Section 10.2 of the Relicensing Agreement, Grantee shall provide documentation to Duke Energy within two years of receipt of such funding; including any installment funding that occurs over multiple years, specifying how the funding was used and how the funding recipient met any of the designated restrictions for the use of such funding. The funding recipient will also provide the Licensee copies of final research reports, project summaries, or other summaries of work.

5. Except as otherwise provided herein, each Party shall bear its own costs of participating in this MOA.

Acknowledgment of Grantee's agreement to the terms and conditions set forth in this letter must be made by a duly authorized officer of Grantee who should execute both copies of this letter and return one such executed copy to Duke Energy within ten (10) calendar days from the date of this letter. Accompanying this signed letter should be written documentation indicating the officer that signed the letter is in fact duly authorized to sign such documents and is authorized to bind the Grantee to such agreements.

Sincerely,



Steven D. Jester
Vice President
Water Strategy, Hydro Licensing, and Lake Services
Duke Energy

^{CHAIRMAN}
As ~~Clerk to Council~~ of the Oconee Conservation Bank Board Fund, I certify that I am duly authorized to bind the Oconee Conservation Bank Board Fund to the terms of this MOA, and do hereby agree to, and accept the terms set forth above, this 3rd day of November, 2016.

Oconee Conservation Bank Board Fund

By: Shea Airey, OCCB Chairman

~~Beth Hulse, Clerk to Council~~
SHEA AIREY, OCCB CHAIRMAN