

Site guru: Oconee potential great; more needed to lure industry

May 2, 2012 – 1:00 am

By MIKE EADS, The Journal

WALHALLA — Oconee County apparently has good industrial potential, but that's about it for right now.

“I think you live in the Switzerland of South Carolina, but don't try to make (quality of life) your only selling point,” said Ed McCallum, a site consultant with a long list of international clients, including Nissan, Boeing and Mitsubishi.

“Just having dirt isn't good enough. You need to have infrastructure; you need to have the due diligence done,” he said.

McCallum, a partner in McCallum Sweeney Consulting of Greenville, spent Tuesday touring potential development sites with Upstate SC Alliance and Oconee County officials.

“I think you have identified some good properties, but from my prospective they're raw land,” McCallum said.

Preparedness was the main thrust of McCallum's advice for the council. For sites to be ready for major manufacturers, they must:

- Have infrastructure (water, sewer, etc.) ready;
- Due diligence complete, i.e. environmental clearance, wetlands review and a full archaeological/historical vetting;
- A clean title ready or easily within reach.

“The idea is that within 60 days, I can start turning dirt,” he said.

He likes the large shell building in Oconee County Industrial Park on SC 11 and believes the county could attract automotive industry suppliers and other manufacturers.

“That shell building is going to get you looks other people aren't getting,” he assured the council. He called the 50,000-square-foot site “one of the best in the Southeast.”

McCallum also urged the Oconee councilmen to think regionally and include the assets of surrounding communities — Clemson University, for example — in bids to attract new businesses to the area.

“Any sense you have of county boundaries or city boundaries, throw them out,” he advised.

Richard Blackwell, executive director of the Oconee County Economic Development Commission, accompanied McCallum and echoed his sentiments about the building, as well as a few other sites.

“We’re getting interest in Golden Corner Industrial Park from large users because there is ability to have a one-million-square-foot facility,” said Blackwell. “That’s what’s getting the looks.”

Golden Corner, located along a four-mile stretch of Interstate 85 at the south end of the county, is also slated to get sewer service in the county’s 2013 budget.

Blackwell also touted the city of Seneca’s partnership with the county to develop the former Propex site. In addition to the building, there is 100 acres out back served by a Norfolk Southern rail line and room for a 200,000-square-foot facility.

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Top site consultant to tour Oconee

May 1, 2012 – 12:09 am

By CARLOS GALARZA, The Journal

WALHALLA — One of the top site consultants in the country will visit Oconee today to see first hand what the county has to offer companies looking to start, relocate or expand their business.

Ed McCallum of Greenville, S.C.-based McCallum Sweeney Consulting is scheduled to view three “products” Oconee is marketing — the \$1.5 million shell building at the Highway 11 Commerce Center, the Echo Hills industrial park site on Highway 11 and the Golden Corner Commerce Park on Highway 59 in Fair Play.

Hal Johnson, the president and chief operating officer of Upstate Alliance, which promotes and markets the region for economic development opportunities, will accompany McCallum. New Economic Development Director Richard Blackwell will lead the tour.

The visit will culminate with a special County Council meeting at 4:30 p.m. to hear back from McCallum.

“He’ll be able to paint the picture of what it takes to be successful,” Blackwell said of McCallum’s presentation to council. “(Council) will get answers to all the questions they may have,”

Councilman Paul Corbeil is looking forward to the exchange with McCallum, who he called an “industry specialist.”

“He’s a great person to have on your side,” Corbeil said.

Corbeil said the special meeting takes greater significance because it comes as Blackwell is transitioning into the role of economic development director.

For council members, it is their first opportunity ask Blackwell questions in a public meeting since he joined county staff in early April. Blackwell was a top officer with the Upstate Alliance prior to taking the job in Oconee.

McCallum has 25 years of experience in the site selection industry, and major clients during that time include Boeing, Mitsubishi, Atlantic Marine, Caterpillar, BP, Mercedes-Benz and New Jersey Power & Light.

Also on the special meeting agenda is an update from Upstate Alliance Vice President Jennifer Miller.

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