

Minutes

6:00 PM, Monday, September 11, 2023

MOUNTAIN REST

Members Present

Joshua Owens

Charlie Whiten

Rex Blanton

Tessa Moxley

Kim Alexander

Trent Smith

Staff Present

James Coley

Media Present

None

1. **Call to order-** Ms. Alexander called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.
2. **Moment of silence**
3. **Invocation**
4. **Pledge of allegiance-skipped, due to lack of flag**
5. **Approval of minutes-** August 14, 2023. Mr. Owens made a motion to approve the minutes seconded by Mr. Smith and approved 6/0.
6. **Presentations**
 - **Mission goals and vision**
 - **Members of the board and contact information**
 - **Partner organizations**
 - **Citizen initiated zoning**
7. **Public discussion 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*
8. **Discussion** regarding establishment of an "Agricultural 2" zoning district and other matters related there to.
 - Sumter National Forest Service:
 - i. Roughly 1/3 of oconee is Sumter national forest, which relies heavily on the wood industry to help manage forest, maintain healthy habitats, etc.
 - ii. 65% of wood material that went to the canton mill came from upstate SC
 - iii. Grant opportunities through USDA
 1. Community wood grant:1-1.5 million in funding. Pays up to

- 35% of capital start up costs. Can be used to expand or start.
 - 2. Wood innovation grant: 1:1 match.
 - iv. Staff available through the forest service to help folks write competitive grants.
 - v. Marvin Prater-timber sales administrator
 - 1. Timber industry was very robust in the 90s and early 2000s. Has been in decline since.
 - 2. We need to prioritize bringing in more diverse wood industry
 - vi. Matthew Durham recommends that we get in touch with Jamie Gilbert
 - 1. AAB has tried to reach out and invite Mr. Gilbert to a meeting. So far he has not attended any meetings or reached back out.
 - vii. Mr. Blanton: a lot of counties have an Agricultural component on the board for economic development. Right now, Oconee County does not.
 - Discussion ensued regarding the state of forestry and the forestry industry in Oconee County
 - Mr Land: Oconee County seems to have lost all of its agricultural infrastructure. Farmers need a larger scale way to market their products. Agriculture needs to be at the forefront. The County Council is not doing enough. Production is not the issue.
 - i. Discussion ensued regarding the feasibility of having more local processing facilities, as well as the attempts that have been made to do so.
 - Mr. Land: wants to see the AAB write a letter to the County Council asking for something specific.
 - i. Discussion ensued regarding which agricultural need is top priority. Finding a partner is crucial. Blue Ridge Electric, for example, could benefit off of pulp wood/chips for clean energy. The industrial park is still sitting vacant.
 - Discussion/vote
- 9. Adjourn:** Ms. Moxley made a motion to adjourn at 7:45pm, seconded by Mr. Whiten and approved 6/0.