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Buffers may protect some Upstate lakes

Oconee OKs rules to control development near shoreline

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WALHALLA — Planting a lawn next to Oconee County's three largest

lakes won't be as simple as laying sod, applying fertilizer and then spending the rest of the summer on a laymower.

Regulations passed Monday by Oconee County Council require 25 feet of undeveloped land when land owners build near lakes Keowee, Hartwell and Jocassee.

The "buffer" will help filter storm water and other pollutants that flow to the lakes, including one that supplies water to most of Greenville County.

The new ordinance also requires developers to do traffic impact studies on projects involving more than 10 homes. Developers foot the bill for road im-

provements if the county engineer and planning director decide they're needed for safety's sake.

The regulations will guide land use in a county where lakefront property is quickly filling with upscale subdivisions. In the absence of zoning laws, landowners

have had few restrictions on what they can build, but neighbors have difficulty keeping out developments they deem undesirable.

Grant Cunningham, a Clemson University associate professor of planning

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and landscape architecture, called the new ordinance a "step forward" and said the county should now consider broader land regulations.

"We need a long-term, comprehensive set of standards that can be enacted before the next controversy comes," he said.

The council began considering lakeshore regulations after homeowners packed chambers to oppose a \$250 million Keowee

condo project by Greenville's Marick Home Builders & Developers.

Rick Thompson II, a partner in Marick, said the new regulations will have no effect on plans to build the 270-unit project he calls Monte Lago. He has said Marick will try to follow the new law voluntarily but isn't required to do so.

"Monte Lago and Marick were vested a long time ago," Marick attorney Wally Fayssoix said after the meeting.

Passed in a 4-1 vote, the new regulations require new lakeshore homes and businesses to leave a 25-foot zone filled with

"natural" plants and grasses. Mowing and cutting mature trees is banned along with the use of herbicides, pesticides and fungicides.

The law can affect homes and businesses as far as 1,000 feet from the shoreline at full pool if the property touches a stream or wetland.

The regulations evolved out of a proposed six-month moratorium on lakeshore development the council passed earlier this year, only to find out it wasn't legally binding. The new ordinance is intended to be permanent.

Jack Leggett, who said he's

building a home on Keowee, urged the council in a public hearing to protect the water.

"This is one of the most beautiful places I've seen, and I've seen a lot of places in the world," he said. "I keep coming back."

Greenville Water System can pull as much as 150 million gallons out of Keowee a day and send it to about 300,000 homes and businesses it serves.

Homeowners, who haven't been shy in past meetings, quietly watched with green ribbons tied to their arms and draped around their necks. Councilman Marlon Lyles, who cast the dissenting vote, said he disagreed

with some of the ordinance's language but didn't elaborate.

In a public hearing after the council for passing the regulations and made it clear they weren't backing off their opposition to Monte Lago.

Ron Leppig, a Beacon Shores resident, said the project might fit in communities like Myrtle Beach or Destin, Fla., but not on Lake Keowee without changes.

"If they bring it down to five or six stories, it's going to fit in with the neighborhood," he said. "If they go with what they're planning, it's not going to fit in, and there's going to be some prob-

lems."

The tallest building in the 270-unit project would be nine stories, not including the 50-foot roof, and would sit next to the one- and two-story homes of Beacon Shores on a peninsula north of Seneca. Marick's proposal once called for 330 units with a building as tall as 13 stories.

Fayssoix said the developer had no plan drop the height more. "A few individual citizens will never be pleased no matter what we do or what council does," he said.

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