



The Oconee Enterprise



Citizens want more greenways

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OCHS graduate goes to Harvard

Alex Benoit gets esteemed scholarship. Business, **B4**



Track and field teams win big

County squads shine at state meets. Sports, **B1**

Coming next week

We'll report on renovations at Animal Services.

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Senior living coming to downtown Watkinsville

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

An age-restricted, inexpensive senior living facility called Waters Walk has entered into a development agreement with the city of Watkinsville. The council last week approved a rezone and variance request for the 60-unit building at the intersection of Water and Durham street. The mostly three-story complex (it's four stories in the back) will house residents ages 55 and older.

The organization behind the development is the Beverly J. Searles Foundation, which will apply for tax credits to keep the rent in the range of \$800 to \$1,100 per month, including utilities. The Beverly J. Searles Foundation will hear back in about six months on the status of the tax credits and will come back with an update for the council tentatively in November. It will be early 2022 when the foundation applies for building permits, said City Manager Sharyn Dickerson.

Acting Mayor Brian Brodrick

said after the meeting that the apartments are not government or subsidized housing and that the average tenant is a 72 year old female. During discussion and the vote, Brodrick recused himself because he has a relative who owns adjacent property.

The variances granted reduce the number of parking spaces and allow the buildings to be taller than code when measured from the back, Brodrick explained. There are less parking spaces than the number of units.

"The Beverly J Searles Foundation . . . have found that statically, there isn't a need for a parking space per unit," Councilman Brett Thomas said in a public statement.

"Also, per their covenants, no unit can have more than one car even in a 2 bedroom," Thomas said.

The developer has also agreed to deed a 6.15-acre parcel for passive recreational use. The Beverly J Searles Foundation has also committed to paving Durham

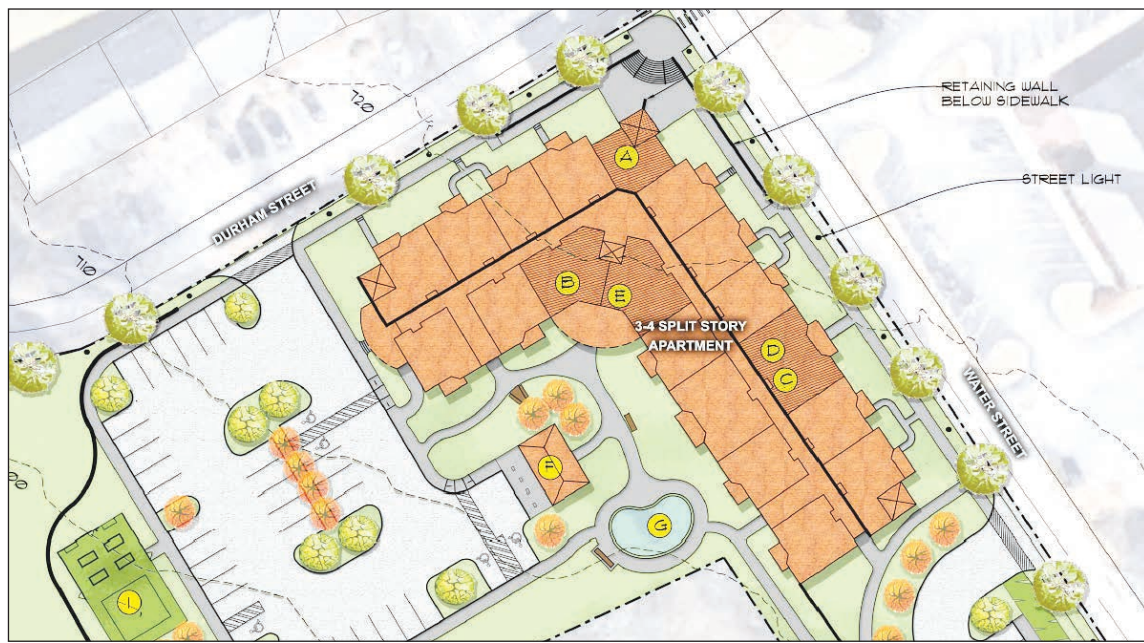
Street along frontage of building and ensure access by code for emergency vehicles. The developer will also install curb and gutter and a five-foot wide sidewalk on Durham Street along the project frontage and along Water Street to Nancy Drive.

The rezone the council approved was from Mixed Use Office to Attached Residential. The original zoning would have allowed commercial businesses to operate on the property.

Waters Walk will have a covered pavilion or gazebo, a koi pond and a community garden with raised beds for the residents to grow their own vegetables and flowers.

Amenities include a community meeting room, TV theater room, library with computer work stations, billiards room, beauty salon and home health office.

Dave Russell, representative of the Beverly J. Searles Foundation, said the project will start off with five staff members and will later be reduced to two to three employees.



Waters Walk senior living development will have 60 units and will be constructed in the next several years once building permits are approved. [Submitted rendering]

City to roll back taxes, approves 10 new classrooms for school

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

The city of Watkinsville has tentatively adopted a rolled back millage rate that will allow property taxes to stay the same. The rate will go from 2.368 mills to 2.081 mills, a decrease of 0.287 mills. Without this millage rate rollback, the city's net taxes would have increased by \$40,136.

The city council last Wednesday approved a single-building addition to Colham Ferry Elementary that will contain 10 classrooms. Construction on the 14,500 square foot building will start later this summer. Over the next several years, CFES will see an increase in enrollment due to several forth-

coming residential developments in Watkinsville. Those include Trove off Colham Ferry Road, Wire Park off Barnett Shoals Road and Wisteria Ridge off North Main Street.

CFES was built to replace the Watkinsville Rosenwald School, which was demolished in 1956. At the time, it was named the E.D. Stroud School, named after Rosenwald School Principal Edwin David Stroud. In 1969, as part of a countywide plan for desegregation, E.D. Stroud School became the integrated Oconee County Intermediate School. It was renamed Colham Ferry Elementary School in 1996. A historical marker with the aforementioned information

is located in front of the school.

In other Watkinsville news, the council approved a 1,300 square foot building addition for Taylor's Iron Co. Inc., which is located at 1081 Industrial Drive.

■ Wire Park developer Duke Gibbs told the council that his project will have commercial shops in operation this year, followed by condos, townhomes and single-family residential units in 2022 and 2023.

■ The council approved a street-light at the intersection of Thrasher Drive and Third Street.

■ The council appointed Kevin McFarland as solicitor after having previously advertised for the position.



Colham Ferry Elementary School Principal Tony McCullers congratulates Miriam Thomas on graduating from kindergarten last week. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]



Negotiations are ongoing to entice Costco Wholesale to Epps Bridge Centre II near Hobby Lobby. [Photo from Costco Wholesale LinkedIn]

Costco looks at Oconee County

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

Epps Bridge Centre developer Frank Bishop of The Bishop Company has been negotiating this spring with Costco to locate a store in Oconee County.

Oconee Chamber of Commerce President and Director of Economic Development Courtney Bernardi said negotiations are ongoing. Bishop could not be reached for comment as of press time.

At the request of county officials, The Oconee Enterprise had not previously reported on those talks due to the delicate nature of economic development deals.

However, when a social media post stating that Costco would open here in 2022 went viral on Sunday, The Oconee Enterprise published an online story explaining that Costco is considering a store in Oconee but that negotiations are ongoing.

The citizen post that went viral was a screenshot of the website "storeopeninghours.com," which is not affiliated with Costco. The official website of Costco does not

have Athens/Oconee listed under its New Locations tab.

Bishop has had a long-term goal of attracting Costco to Epps Bridge Centre II/III. The mostly undeveloped commercial space is accessed by Parkway Boulevard Extension, which runs from the Oconee Connector to Kohl's Department Store. Right now, Hobby Lobby is the sole tenant for the area.

According to site plans on The Bishop Company website, the anchor tenant would occupy a 146,290-square-foot building to the left of Hobby Lobby. Plans also call for additional retail adjacent to Hobby Lobby and a grocery store and ancillary shops to the right of Hobby Lobby facing the Oconee Connector.

Costco is a wholesale warehouse club. According to the company's website, Costco opened its first store in 1976 out of a retrofitted airplane hanger.

Oconee County does not currently have a wholesale grocery club, although Sam's Club is located off Atlanta Highway in Athens-Clarke County.



Chuck Garrett and Carolyn Maultsby are vying for Post 1 on the Watkinsville City Council. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

City candidates field questions from citizens

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

Watkinsville City Council Post 1 contenders Chuck Garrett and Carolyn Maultsby were asked at a candidate forum Monday night whether they'd be in favor of eliminating or reducing the duties of the city manager.

Garrett said succinctly that he would keep the position as it is.

Maultsby said the charter's description of job duties for the manager and council need to be revisited but that the city manager "is absolutely necessary."

The forum, held at Bethel Baptist Church and hosted jointly by the church and the Oconee County Republican Party, was moderated by radio journalist Tim Bryant of WGAU.

Post 1 candidates were the first to answer questions, followed by mayor-elect Brian Brodrick, who will still be on the ballot alongside Peter Steckel.

Although Steckel has publicly dropped out of the race, he has yet to file official documents with the Elections Office, according to Elections Assistant Director

Jennifer Stone.

At the forum Monday, Oconee County GOP Chair Kathy Hurley said Steckel had a death in his family and plans on submitting the paperwork soon.

One of the questions directed at Garrett and Maultsby was, "Should the mayor's position be full time?"

Both candidates said the job of mayor doesn't need to be full time, given that the city now has a manager.

When asked how to keep up with expanding growth while maintaining a small-town feel, Maultsby said she'd prefer the city catch its breath and solve the traffic and parking issues that will arise with new residential developments like Wire Park, Trove and Wisteria Ridge.

This issue was mailed Wednesday, May 26 from Watkinsville and Athens, GA. Please inform your post office if it arrives late.

