



The Oconee Enterprise

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Bogart resident deployed in 2005. News, A6



Trail pays tribute to 9/11 victims

Man built memorial in the woods. Lifestyles, A6



Warriors take down Gladiators

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We'll report on the TSPLOST referendum.

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BOC approves senior living, shopping center

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

The Oconee Board of Commissioners on Tuesday unanimously approved rezoning modifications to allow for a new shopping center called The Market at Meadowlands and a continuing care retirement community that will be named The Village at Meadowlands. The developments will be located off U.S. 78 across from Prince Avenue Christian School.

Of the retail component, planned is 179,000 square feet of commercial space, which will be anchored by a 65,000-square-foot grocery store.

The senior living component will consist of 517 residential

units.

There will be a total of 101 independent living units comprised of cottages, quadplex buildings, mansion flats buildings, and Meriweather flat buildings. Although one three-story building is proposed, no building may exceed the 40-foot maximum height.

The Village at Meadowlands will include several amenities for residents. These include a pool, whirlpool, pavilion, lake, as well as a walking and nature trail network.

There will be an entrance to the assisted living facility from Dials Mill Road. The main access will be from U.S. 441.

The developer will be responsible for a traffic signal at a main entrance.

There will be no connection to Ruby Way in the Belfair subdivision. On Tuesday, a representative of Belfair spoke in opposition to the rezoning request.

"We will do everything we can to mitigate their concerns," Bob Smith, principal of Smith Planning Group, said at the Planning Commission meeting last month. "We do think we are improving the current plan that was approved in 2009."

The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission's Development of Regional Impact report was generally favorable

toward the development.

The project is anticipated to generate an additional 12,392 daily trips at full buildout.

The residential and commercial development is slated to be complete by 2027. The estimated value of the entire project is \$136 million.

In other news, the BOC granted a \$110,638 contract with Crowder Construction for consulting and engineering of design to double the capacity of the Calls Creek Water Reclamation Facility.

"The benefit allows the county to have contractor perspective early in the process," said Water Resources Director Tim Durham "to provide cost estimates, con-

structability reviews, life cycle cost analysis and value engineering, which will identify opportunities for savings and help reduce overall costs."

Crowder Construction was selected by a review committee after the BOC advertised pre-construction services and several firms responded.

The BOC approved a budget amendment for the expense to come from the enterprise fund with reimbursement from SPLOST 2015.

The BOC has scheduled its next Town Hall meeting for Sept. 14 at the Oconee County Civic Center at 6 p.m. There will be a special focus on TSPLOST.

GDOT to study a 15/441 bypass

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

A regional transportation committee on Wednesday approved a scoping study for a potential Watkinsville bypass that could connect Greensboro Highway (Ga. 15) to U.S. 441.

At the behest of the Georgia Department of Transportation, members of the Madison Athens-Clarke Oconee Regional Transportation Study added the project to a regional transportation plan that utilizes federal funding.

There will be a public hearing Sept. 30 from 5-7 p.m. at Oconee Veterans Park.

Watkinsville Mayor Brian Brodrick said he could not speak to how the project got on MACORTS' radar but that the "city council is behind it 100 percent."

"Mayor Brodrick and council have expressed location-agnostic support for this project and their appreciation to GDOT for advancing it, as traffic from the coastal ports and elsewhere continues to grow and disproportionately impact downtown Watkinsville," according to a recent newsletter from the city. Brodrick said he and county leaders have advocated for a Watkinsville bypass for a long time. Although the city does have a U.S. 441 bypass, truck traffic on Greensboro Highway has caused significant congestion in downtown. Brodrick said that's only going to get worse as the ports of Savannah expand in the coming years.

The bypass could use Astondale Road to connect the two highways. Several years ago, a bypass connecting two proposed roundabouts at the U.S. 441 intersections of Astondale and High Shoals roads was met with resistance from now retired UGA Athletic Director Greg McGarity due to potential negative impact on the UGA Equestrian Complex.

A Bishop bypass has never come to fruition due to pushback from UGA, local farmers and archeological findings.



Ten years ago, an honor guard was present at a ceremony when Oconee received a steel beam salvaged from the World Trade Center. From left, Jason Mauldin, Tim Haller, Mike Pauley, Joe Palmer and Will Horton. [File photo]

Oconee will never forget

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

"Freedom is not free," William Horton, a local police officer and U.S. Army veteran, said while reflecting on the 20 years that have passed since Sept. 11, 2001.

Horton, who was a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne in Fort Bragg and served as a combat engineer and in military intelligence, participated in an honor guard during the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11 when Oconee received a steel beam salvaged from the World Trade Center. Today, the artifact and memorial stands just inside the entrance of Oconee Veterans Park Community Center underneath a flag with the names of the nearly 3,000 lives lost that day.

"Touching the beam, knowing the tragedy and heartbreak," said Horton, "made me want justice for the cowardly act that happened that day."

The tattoo on Horton's left arm depicts prayer hands with the United States flag going through it. The meaning behind it: "Some gave all; all gave some."

Col. Seth Hathaway, who served over 20 years active duty with the Marine Corps and is now the head of school at Prince Avenue Christian, was in Albany, New York, the day of the attack. One of the first people he called was a col-



The steel beam from the Twin Towers weighs about 1,000 pounds and is six feet in length. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

league who worked at the Pentagon to make sure he was safe. Eventually, Hathaway was deployed to Iraq, where he served as an aviation maintenance officer.

Bogart resident and U.S. Army veteran Jenny Bridges was in New York City the day of the attack and was looking for her father, who she later discovered was safe in a subway that morning. She was deployed to Kuwait in 2005.

Several years ago, Oconee

Sheriff James Hale, who also served in the U.S. Army, spent several months in New York with the FBI National Academy and shared a room with a New York City police officer. This man, who immigrated to the United States from Albania, lost his brother and first cousin in the terrorist attacks.

Hale said it was extremely poignant to put faces to the names of the deceased when he visited the Ground Zero memorial.

Aboard Flight 77 that crashed into the Pentagon was an entire family who had familial ties to Oconee. Charles Falkenberg and Leslie Wittington and their daughters, Zoe and Dana, ages 8 and 3, died that day.

Another fallen civilian was Bart Ruggiere, nephew of Watkinsville residents Tom and Teresa Ruggiere.

After the first anniversary, retired University of Georgia IT director Bob Hart built a 9/11 memorial walking trail because he didn't want those who lost their lives to be forgotten.

"I didn't want these people thought of as numbers," he said. "I just wanted them to be remembered."

SEE SEPTEMBER 11 PAGE A2

Board of Education fills seats

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

The Board of Education last week appointed Kim Argo to the recently vacated Post 1 chair seat. To fill Argo's seat, the BOE unanimously

appointed former BOE member Wayne Bagley to Post 3, in accordance with a 1964 local law. Amy Parrish was named board vice chair.

During the meeting, Argo resigned from her Post 3 position prior to being nominated for the chairperson role, which has a term ending Dec. 31, 2024. Bagley's term will end Dec. 31, 2022.

Bagley, who is the vice president for development for Lassiter Properties, previously served on the BOE from 2010 until last year when he chose not to seek re-election.

BOE member Tim Burgess nominated Bagley due to his background in construction and long tenure on the school board.

Burgess told The Oconee Enterprise that the Board needs a "seasoned, experienced person who could step right in on the first day and start participating in the serious conversations with the board and school system that we face."

Those issues include response to the COVID-19 pandemic and capital projects necessitated by enrollment growth.

Argo has been on the board since 2009 and had served as vice chair since 2013. A retired educator, her lengthy career included service as a teacher in Madison, Oglethorpe and Oconee counties and as an administrator in Walton County.

"I look forward to continuing the trajectory of our school system as one of the top systems in both the state and nation," said Argo. "I am humbled to serve the citizens of Oconee County in this capacity."

The BOE has a precedent for both appointing someone to fill a vacancy and choosing someone already on the board to fill the chair role when the previous chair has resigned or died.

In 2001, BOE member Christine Franklin was voted in as chair following the death of Tommy Warren. In that circumstance, however, the BOE allowed citizens to apply for Franklin's former seat.



Argo



Bagley

Woman remembers relatives lost on 9/11

BY MORGAN PHILLIPS

Toni Davis was a sixth grader when her life was permanently changed by the events of 9/11.

"I remember praying that everybody was going to be okay," she said. "I just remember wanting this to not be as bad as it looked."

Just before dinner, her mother called her into the house. In a delicate tone, she said, "Remember your Aunt Leslie and your Uncle Charles and Zoe and Dana were on a plane?"

"Yeah, they're going to

Australia," responded Davis. "They leave soon right?"

Davis' mother replied, "Baby, they were on the plane that hit the Pentagon today. They didn't make it."

Zoe was 8-years-old and Dana was 3-years-old. Davis let out a scream and ran toward the door, but she just crumpled.

"[Zoe] was my best friend. She was my cousin," said Davis. "She was my favorite person in the world at that point."

It was hard for 11-year-old

Davis to process such a loss.

"I just kept thinking that she'd walk through those doors, that they'd made it to Australia, and we just hadn't heard from them," Davis said.

Losing Zoe was like losing a part of herself.

"She was the one who did musicals and plays and loved to be the center of attention," Davis said. "And no doubt, that would have continued for her."

That pain has not waned as the years have ticked away. At every

anniversary of 9/11, a mournful Davis thinks about the future Zoe could have had.

"My heart just hurts," she said. "I want to think of the memories of her and those happy times, like jumping on the bed wearing matching clothes and all the things that we loved. She was more like a sister."

Davis, who is now a third grade teacher at Statham Elementary school, makes sure that the memory of Zoe lives on.

SEE TONI DAVIS PAGE A3

This issue was mailed Wednesday, Sept. 8, from Watkinsville and Athens, GA. Please inform your post office if it arrives late.

