Beacon of hope for Westminster

City wants to buy, rehabilitate mill property into industrial site

BY CARLOS GALARZA-VEVE
THE JOURNAL

WESTMINSTER — A plan to clean up and rehabilitate the dilapidated Beacon Mill textile site near the heart of Westminster into an industrial site with the potential to bring in investments and new jobs to the city is now out in the open.


Lord

City administrator Jeff Lord offered details Monday of the ambitious plans to The Journal after public property records recently filed showed Westminster has signed an agreement to acquire the Beacon Mill property through two options with a combined price tag of $600,000.

The agreement filed in the county's Register of Deeds on Jan. 6 between the city and the sellers — Jack Coker of Coker Textiles LLC, and Pacific International Overseas Inc. — establishes certain conditions by which the parties can close on the deal.

"The City cannot and will not purchase the property if it does not receive what it feels are appropriate grants, and any purchase must be approved and authorized

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Westminster officials are working on a deal to purchase the former Beacon Mill property and transform it into an industrial site.

BEACON: City council expected to discuss potential purchase during planning retreat

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by City Council and an appropriate ordinance," states the agreement.

"Additionally, a Phase I and II environmental review must be conducted to determine the totality of the environmental impact," the document states. "The City will not and cannot purchase the property if the results of these reviews determine the cleanup cost is too great."

Lord said that unless the city can reach a voluntary cleanup contract with the Department of Health and Environmental Control, it would be allowed to walk away from the purchase agreement.

Westminster had a site development study done that was underwritten by a $10,000 grant offered through the Santee Cooper Rural Economic Development program, according to Lord.

The site development study by Thomas & Hutton concluded that the Beacon Mill site could be cleaned up at an estimated cost of $1.25 million, which includes $600,000 for purchasing the property.

If everything falls into place and a deal gets done, Lord sees the transformation of Beacon Mill into an industrial site as a big game-changer for Westminster.

"When that plant closed, you know, it was a big hit to the economy over here," Lord said. "Anything that we can do to bring those jobs back is going to have an impact."

The Thomas & Hutton study outlined several layouts for the Beacon Mill site ranging from having two to five buildings at the 27-acre site, including some as large as 150,000 square feet or as small as 25,000 square feet, according to Lord.

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Jeff Lord
Westminster city administrator

The strategy to rehabilitate the dilapidated property and turn the eyesore into a magnet to attract industrial investment fits well with the Oconee Economic Alliance's goal of having "more product" to offer companies looking to establish in the area.

Lord said the Appalachian Council of Governments and the OEA have been helping the city get the grants it needs.

The first option of the agreement with the sellers calls on Westminster to purchase about 27.47 acres, excluding the Dye House, for $350,000. Westminster has until Nov. 30 of this year to execute option one.

The second option gives the city until Nov. 30, 2017, to purchase the Dye House on the Beacon Mill property for $250,000.

Since the option documents were signed Nov. 20, city residents elected a new mayor in Brian Ramey and replaced three city council incumbents with Ronald Dodson, Charles Miller and Susan Ramey. The option agreement addresses the change in city leadership.

"Furthermore, because there is no way to determine future council or their actions, there is no guarantee the City will purchase the property," the document states.

Lord expects the matter to be discussed in depth during a planning retreat.

"We have a new council, so we have to sit down and make sure we see what the priorities are and see what adjustments have to be made" Lord said.

However, the potential future rewards for the city are such that Lord is hopeful council will at least agree to explore what grants are available for acquiring the Beacon Mill property and cleaning up the site.

"Initially, the benefit is going to be the removal of an old industrial site that's been partially demolished, and so cleaning that up is going to be an immediate benefit for everybody that lives in that neighborhood," Lord said. "Additionally, it will provide a product that can be used to do economic recruitment, which means jobs and investment in the city. It's a piece of the puzzle for the revitalization of the city as a whole."

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