City moves forward with hotel plans

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SENECA — The City of Seneca is moving forward with efforts to land a new hotel near the intersection of S.C. 130 and the U.S. 76/S.C. 123 Bypass.

Mayor Dan Alexander told the council in a special session Tuesday that Seneca would form an economic partnership with Oconee County as part of the development plan, which calls for an upscale 100-plus room hotel. The hotel would be part of a larger, mixed-use retail development. The hotel developer is yet-to-be-named by city officials, but KTC Associates LLC has been linked to the proposed retail spaces likely to fill the rest of the site.

The council voted 9-0 to instruct City Attorney Mike Smith to craft an agreement with County Attorney Tom Martin formalizing the county partnership. The Oconee County Council voted 4-0 Monday to spend $1 million in support of the project, with the money to be repaid in time through property tax collections.

A couple of Seneca residents who would be affected by the hotel project voiced their concerns to the council prior to the vote.

Polly Fehler, a homeowner in the Northwoods neighborhood that butts up to the proposed site, wants to make certain residents' interests are accounted for in any development plan.

"What kinds of buffers will be put up between the businesses and our backyards?" Fehler asked, in reference to the increased traffic the site will attract. "Our neighborhood is very small, but it is not to be ignored."

Nitesh Naik, owner/operator of the Best Western Seneca, was irritated that his tax dollars will go to support fresh competition for his business.

"I didn't get any incentives when I bought my business (in 2010)," Naik said.

Naik questioned the long-term viability of a 100-room hotel charging more than $100 per night. He said his hotel has just 57 units and averages 56 percent occupancy at $70 per night, so he wondered how the city and county would recoup their investments.

The Seneca businessman also said he wanted to "see if there is an opportunity to do something like that."

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