METRO

Clemson project sparks concerns

Dukes Center awaiting final approval

By Amy Clarke Burns
Staff Writer
aburns@greenvilleonline.com

The city of Clemson is one step away from giving the green light to a proposed downtown development that has some residents up in arms over the building's size, traffic and other concerns.

The mixed-use development, Dukes Center, would occupy about 3 acres on College Avenue, in a mostly vacant area near the Keith Street intersection.

Developer Tom Winkopp said the building will include 305 bedrooms and 17,000 square feet of commercial space, as well as parking for both areas.

"The economics in Clemson have just changed over the past 10 years, and these types of buildings are becoming more prevalent now," Winkopp said. "People will pay a certain price to have a business in downtown, and they'll pay a price to walk to campus."

Those opposed to the project, including nearly 1,200 who have signed an online petition, say it's too big for the area and will introduce more traffic onto the already congested downtown street.

"It isn't unattractive; it's just too big for the scale of our small town," said Linda Gahan, who lives in the neighborhood behind the proposed location for Dukes Center.

"I know something has to be built there, but this is just out of scale with the two properties on either side ... and the historic buildings of downtown," she said.

The building is to be 65 feet tall on the front side, 75-feet tall on the back.

Todd Steadman, zoning and codes administrator for Clemson, said similarly sized buildings are within two blocks of the proposed Dukes Center, including a 50-foot-tall building with a larger footprint across the street.

"It would fit into the pattern of downtown Clemson," he said.



Artist drawing of proposed Dukes Center in downtown Clemson. /

The approval process for Dukes Center first went through the city's Planning Commission and then to City Council for rezoning of the land in December. The final approval decision now lies in the hands of the Board of Architectural Review.

The seven-member board will evaluate the development's plans to ensure they fall in line with the standards of the overlay district that governs the area.

"The idea is to create some sort of architectural cohesiveness within a certain area, so you end up with buildings that look like they belong together," Steadman said.

A February vote on Dukes Center was postponed until the scheduled April 1 meeting to allow board members to review plans for a buffer between the development and the adjacent neighborhood, Steadman and Winkopp said.

Meanwhile, those opposed to the plan hope to halt progress, at least until their concerns are addressed.

"Do we know anything about the capacity for traffic on College Avenue?" said Eleanor Hare, a downtown Clemson resident who said traffic is among her biggest concerns and wants the city to conduct a study to determine impact.

"Can College Avenue absorb another 450 vehicles?" she said.

Winkopp said he believed the impact on area traffic would be minimal because the apartment residents, largely Clemson University students, would primarily travel on foot to campus and downtown destinations.

"How this project may impact traffic was discussed and considered as part of the decision-making process undertaken by the Planning Commission and City Council. To my knowledge, no formal traffic study has been requested," Steadman said.

Construction for Dukes Center is expected to get underway in spring or summer of this year, with scheduled completion in fall 2015, Winkopp said.