DOT offers clarification on 123/93 project

Traffic engineer: 'It is a pretty massive project'

BY STEVEN BRADLEY
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — A S.C. Department of Transportation traffic engineer has offered insight into proposed changes at the intersection of U.S. Highway 123 and S.C. 93 in Seneca and shed light on the timeline for the project.

Oconee County Council is slated to take second reading at tonight's 6 p.m. meeting of Ordinance 2015-06, which would provide an infrastructure improvement credit to Casto Southeast related improvements to the public roadways and sewer system upgrades.

The Journal erroneously reported in Saturday's edition that electronic signs warning of lane closures this week at U.S. 123 headed into Clemson are related to the start of construction for the proposed commercial development at the former Milliken site.

The closures have instead been announced for the USA Triathlon Collegiate National Championships, which is set for Friday and Saturday at the old Y Beach site. A start date for the Casto Southeast project is still pending.

SCDOT district traffic engineer Eric Dillon said the department has been involved in concept work for a permitting project with Casto that would include the closing of the "fly-off" right exit lane from U.S. 123 to S.C. 93.

Dillon said the problem with keeping that lane would be the addition of another red light at the intersection of Seneca Creek Road for the proposed development and "continual queues" that would be waiting there with cars coming off at high speeds.

"That would've been a problem every day," he said.

Dillon said DOT is functioning in an advisory role with Casto and its engineers to provide criteria for the infrastructure and suggestions on how to mitigate the development's impact to the roadways of 93 and 123.

"Imagine if you left (the fly-off lane) there with a traffic signal being down there at the intersection with a queue being there," Dillon said. "Then you'd really have a mess. So we feel like we're making it safer.

"We're building capacity into the intersection; they're proposing making it a dual right turn to accommodate those large queue-ups."

Dillon said there is no timetable for the start of the project because an official permit has not yet been obtained, and beyond that, it would still depend on the developers' construction scheduling.

"We think we came up with a viable solution; it's just them coming back to the table and getting the official permit," Dillon said. "This has all been concept."

Dillon said there would also need to be widening work on 123 past the intersection of S.C. 93 to accommodate turn lanes at a new proposed signal there. He said there would likely be only minor adjustments at the Seneca Creek Road intersection except for the proposed signal.

"It is a pretty massive project and a pretty massive development with (NewSpring) church going in and then all the commercial up front," he said.

In late 2013, NewSpring Church bought the roughly 60-acre tract from the DeFore Milliken plant for about $5 million to Pacolet Milliken and then flipped roughly 42 acres of the property to Casto Southeast for more than $6 million.

Casto's plans are to develop 300,000 to 350,000 square feet of space for a movie theater, retail stores and restaurants, resulting in a total capital investment of between $35 million and $45 million and creating about 300 jobs in the process once full build-out has occurred.

The company must enter into a fee-in-lieu-of-tax agreement in order to receive the IIC and must promise at least $2.5 million in order to qualify for a FILOT agreement.

The deal is not the same as a typical industrial FILOT deal, which would include a reduction of the company's tax assessment rate, since commercial property is already assessed at 6 percent. Rather, this agreement would give Casto a tax abatement of 50 percent across a 15-year period as, essentially, a "rebate" of the $2.4 million it spent on infrastructure improvements. The infrastructure breaks down as $1.8 million for road improvements to the public roads and rights of way and $600,000 for sewer system upgrades.

"They are asking the county to be a partner in putting in this development — that is the truth — and they're asking the county to help offset the costs of infrastructure improvements to help the growth of that corridor," Oconee Economic Alliance executive director Richard Blackwell said.

sbradley@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6685

FOR MORE

To see a proposed layout of the planned retail and restaurant development at the intersection of highways 123 and 93, turn to page **A6** or click on this story on upstatetoday.com.

to its proposed 300,000-to-350,000-square-foot retail and restaurant development in east Seneca.

The credit would give the developer 50-percent tax abatement over a 15-year span to reimburse it for $2.4 million in im-

SEE **PROJECT,** PAGE **A6**

Developers hope to get OK on deal from county

tonight



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

A proposed development on the shores of Lake Hartwell near the intersection of highways 123 and 93 will have room for restaurants, retail stores and a movie theater.