LOCAL NEWS

Easley OKs money for Center

Council unanimously votes to approve development agreement

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Easley gave the final OK Monday night to allot $1.7 million for public infrastructure work in connection with the Easley Town Center project that is planned for the former Saco Lowell site along U.S. 123.

Easley City Council voted 6-0, with Councilwoman Kim Valentin absent, to approve a development agreement that appropriates the $1.7 million to be used on public improvements in the area, including replacing the Prince Perry Road Bridge.

"The project is a true public-private partnership," City Administrator Fox Simons has said. "It's a big, big economic development for our community."

City Council also approved on first reading an ordinance that provides for the issuance and sale of a general obligation bond not to exceed $1.83 million that would be used to pay for the $1.7 million.

The $130,000 difference in the bond amount and appropriation for infrastructure work is from expenses including attorney fees and closing costs, according to Simons.

David Scarnati, director of development for Cedarwood Development Inc., the group creating Easley Town Center, has said the shopping center is expected to bring about 900 permanent jobs to Easley and mean an estimated 250 construction jobs.

He said developers expect Easley Town Center to open in late fall 2010 and said they hope to have a lot of increased activity on the site by late summer.

"Today was a major step forward for the project," Scarnati said, adding that they can move into the next phases of approval with the state.

The whole project is about $100 million – with $13.5 million public infrastructure contributions, including about $6 million in federal stimulus, and about $86.5 million private funds, according to Simons.

Council approved a resolution Monday night that divvies up public infrastructure work associated with the project between the state Department of Transportation and the city.

"Because of the stimulus funding we've had to divide the project into two pieces – the DOT portion and the city portion," Simons said.

He said DOT will do the portion with the federal stimulus money, raising U.S. 123, doing signal work and closing an existing at-grade crossing at the railroad.

Simons said the city's work includes the Prince Perry Road Bridge and other infrastructure work on the north side of the railroad tracks.