Hartwell Village all-in on 'rustic elegance'

Casto agrees standards would include outparcels

BY STEVEN BRADLEY
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SENECA — The developer of a planned retail and restaurant center near Oconee's border with Clemson has agreed the county's "rustic elegance" standards would apply to the entirety of Hartwell Village, including outparcels.

County administrator Scott Moulder told The Journal on Thursday attorneys for Casto Southeast Realty Services said they would review the ordinance document to make sure the language satisfies those requirements.

County council chairman Wayne McCall raised the question during second reading of an ordinance this week to approve a fee-in-lieu-of-tax agreement for Casto.

Council previously tabled the reading to clarify the "rustic elegance" guidelines, but McCall said the information provided did not make it clear whether outparcels sold to a third party would also be required to comply.

The FILOT agreement states the standards for all facades for single-story buildings and the first floor of multi-story buildings with facades facing a public street must be comprised of not less than 20 percent of building materials that fit the theme, which includes stacked stone and exposed wood beams.

As a commercial development, Casto is already taxed at a 6 percent assessment rate, thus its FILOT is different than more common agreements for industrial properties that include assessment reductions from 10.5 percent.

In Casto's case, the company will make a $2.4 million investment in infrastructure — roughly $1.8 million on road construction and $600,000 to match funds provided by the county and City of Seneca, half by each, for a regional lift sewer station.

"We are beefing up the infrastructure in that corridor to allow more growth around the Food Lion, around Greenfield Industries — to help that whole corridor as it changes over the next five to 20 years," county economic development director Richard Blackwell told The Journal this week.

In return, the company would be reimbursed the money for those upgrades by 50-percent tax abatement over the next 15 years.

The county will also refund its own coffers for the $300,000 investment into sewer upgrades over an eight-year period out of tax revenue generated by the company.

There are clawback provisions included in the

RUSTIC: 'We are beefing up the

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would ask for certification of the development and ensure it complies with the agreement.

All plans would be submitted to the county's Community Development Department, which would confirm they meet the "rustic elegance" guidelines, Blackwell said.

"The county is going to be an active partner in seeing the plan come to fruition," he said. "Throughout the timeline of development, we the county have an opportunity to certify the project, voice our concerns, see architectural renderings ... and there are clawbacks — if they don't make the road improvements, if they don't make the sewer improvements — they are not going to get a tax rebate over the 15-year period."

Blackwell admitted Casto's deal with the county is "a little complicated" because it does not involve a decreased assessment and the $2.5 million statutory minimum to offer a FILOT agreement is far less than the company has stated it plans to invest.

"This is something a little unique," Blackwell said. "We don't do these very often, so there's a lot of moving parts to this."

The ordinance, which passed second reading unanimously Tuesday, would approve an Infrastructure Improvement Credit as a FILOT, designate the development as a multi-county industrial business development park and approve the signing of an intergovernmental agreement with the City of Seneca related to its infrastructure.

"There are rustic elegance requirements associated for clawback purposes within the document," Moulder said at the meeting. "It requires 20 percent of non-glazed (glass) surface area of the facades that face public roadways to be incorporated in the rustic elegance design."

McCall said the agreement would ensure the development is "not going to look like a big-box store."

Council member Edda

infrastructure in that corridor'

Cammick said although language has been added to ensure council got the desired look, she also wanted to send Casto "a message" that the county was serious.

"I just want to know that we've got the spine to take this back if it's not quite what we want," she said, "and Casto can build it on their own dime rather than ours."

Councilman Paul Cain said his understanding was the agreement "does just that."

"What they are asking for the credits to use this for is infrastructure that will change the intersections down there and increase sewer capacity," he said. "It's going to benefit more than just the developer, and they've agreed to change their designs to meet what we're asking for."

In late 2013, NewSpring Church bought the roughly 60-acre tract at the intersection of U.S. Highway 123 and S.C. 93 from the DeFore Milliken plant for about $5 million and flipped roughly 42 acres of the property to Casto for more than $6 million.

Casto plans to develop 275,000 to 350,000 square feet of space for a movie theater, retail stores and restaurants, resulting in a total capital investment of $35-$45 million and creating 300 to 400 jobs.

Anticipated timing includes the opening of NewSpring's Clemson campus to be completed by fall 2016, with the mixed-use development to occur in 2016-17.

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