

Hartwell project still alive

Company provided more time to develop financing

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SENECA — Considered a dead proposition just four months ago, plans to develop a recreational facility on more than 300 acres on Lake Hartwell in Oconee County that would include a hotel and golf course are still alive and kicking.

The chances looked bleak in October that a privately funded recreational facility behind the South Carolina Welcome Center on Interstate 85 would ever make it out of the talking stage when the state

gave a thumbs down on the only plan that responded to its request for proposals (RFP).

State officials concluded then that Seneca-based Sanctuary Pointe LLC had failed to convince them they had the financing to make the Hartwell project a reality. Sanctuary Pointe appealed the state's decision.

An agreement signed by the parties ended a stalemate last month.

Under the terms of the agreement, state officials have given Sanctuary Pointe until June 30 to show it has the financial wherewithal to not just make the project happen but also to operate it for the duration of up to a 50-year lease.

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Gregory Amsden, with Keowee Pines Real Estate Inc., is listed as the agent of record for Sanctuary Pointe LLC. Elmon H. Henry, whose name appears on the agreement signed with the state, also is a principal with Sanctuary Pointe.

Some have said the Hartwell project, at a cost of at least \$100 million, would be a dynamic economic stimulus to the local economy that would help create a slew of jobs.

Under the terms of the agreement, signed by South Carolina's Chief Procurement Officer Voight Shealey on Jan. 9, in exchange for the time extension to come up with a viable financial package, Sanctuary Pointe agreed to withdraw its protest.

Furthermore, Sanctuary Pointe agreed to abide with any subsequent ruling by the State Procurement Office and not protest or appeal that determination.

For their part, state officials agreed that until an "Intent to Award" or "Statement of No Award" is issued by them, they would not issue another RFP on the project, "or have discussion, invitations or contractual arrangements with other parties" that could interfere or

conflict with Sanctuary Pointe's proposal.

The state Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (PRT), which leases the project property from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), has for decades dreamed of providing public recreational facilities in the area at reasonable user fees. Both the state PRT and USACE would have to sign off on Sanctuary Pointe's plans, which must meet the Corps' stringent standards.

The first phase improvements include a hotel, golf course, conference center and main infrastructure. Subsequent phases would integrate a restaurant, cabins and other amenities.

In a letter of encouragement from PRT to Sanctuary Pointe, State Park Service Director Phil Gaines commended the company's design concept for the Lake Hartwell property.

"Your concept for the property is innovative and creative, while also being respectful to the environment and the integrity of the property," Gaines said in the letter. "In addition, the way your concepts support heritage, cultural and natural resources of South Carolina should be applauded."