Keowee River unveiled

Outdoor tourism, homes, shops, hotel in plan

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SENECA — A group of local investors unveiled plans Thursday night for a $200 million planned community to be developed over the next 18-20 years, on 774 acres just north of Seneca.

Keowee River will be built in phases and will include a blend of residential, retail, restaurants, commercial office space and entertainment venues, all involving the use of extensive green spaces, with a particular focus on eco-adventure tourism.

Infrastructure work is expected to begin this fall with a grand opening in spring 2010. The first construction is expected to center on a new YMCA. (See related story below.)

"We want this to be inclusive," said Seneca builder/developer Scott Vick, speaking on behalf of the group. "It will be open to anyone who wants to be a part of it and there is no better organization to associate with, to be inclusive, than the Y."

"We're going to build a Y," he said later, "but the community has to get involved. They have to have some

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Jessica Nelms/Staff

Anna Connelly, executive director of the Foothills Area Family YMCA, leads her staff and some 300 exuberant citizens in a "Y" cheer minutes after it was announced that a new YMCA facility will be the first construction in a $200 million development north of Seneca. Above right is Scott Vick, spokesman for the group that unveiled the development plan on Thursday night.

skin in this."

He said the development group will provide the land and has guarantee operational funds for a period of time. He would not elaborate.

Vick told several hundred people gathered on the property that the new community will be completely public and ungated. It will focus on active adult lifestyles, adventure tourism and the environment.

The development plan includes affordable housing in a variety of options from single family to townhouses and villas to cottages. He outlined plans for a retirement community, complete with independent, assisted and memory care living options.

The Keowee River Center, as conceived, will include an outdoor amphitheater, waterfront park and pavilion, canoe and kayak center, restaurant row and the Center Falls Park, which will contain a fountain, Frisbee field, disc golf course, bocce, horseshoe and croquet areas and a butterfly park.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of the development will be the Adventure and Tourism Center. A portion of the acreage will be set aside to house a hotel and conference center, around which the developers plan to construct an adventure center with zip lines and canopy tour, geocaching, a ropes course, an extreme mountain bike trail and rock climbing wall and bouldering area. A tree house camping village is also planned, as are suspension bridges at each end of the development, connecting its trail system with the 17,500-acre Issaqueena Forest across the river.

Asked about the timing of the venture given the current recession, Vick said developers believe that a cultural change is underway in which residents will accept less space in their own property in return for parks, squares and walking and cycling paths.

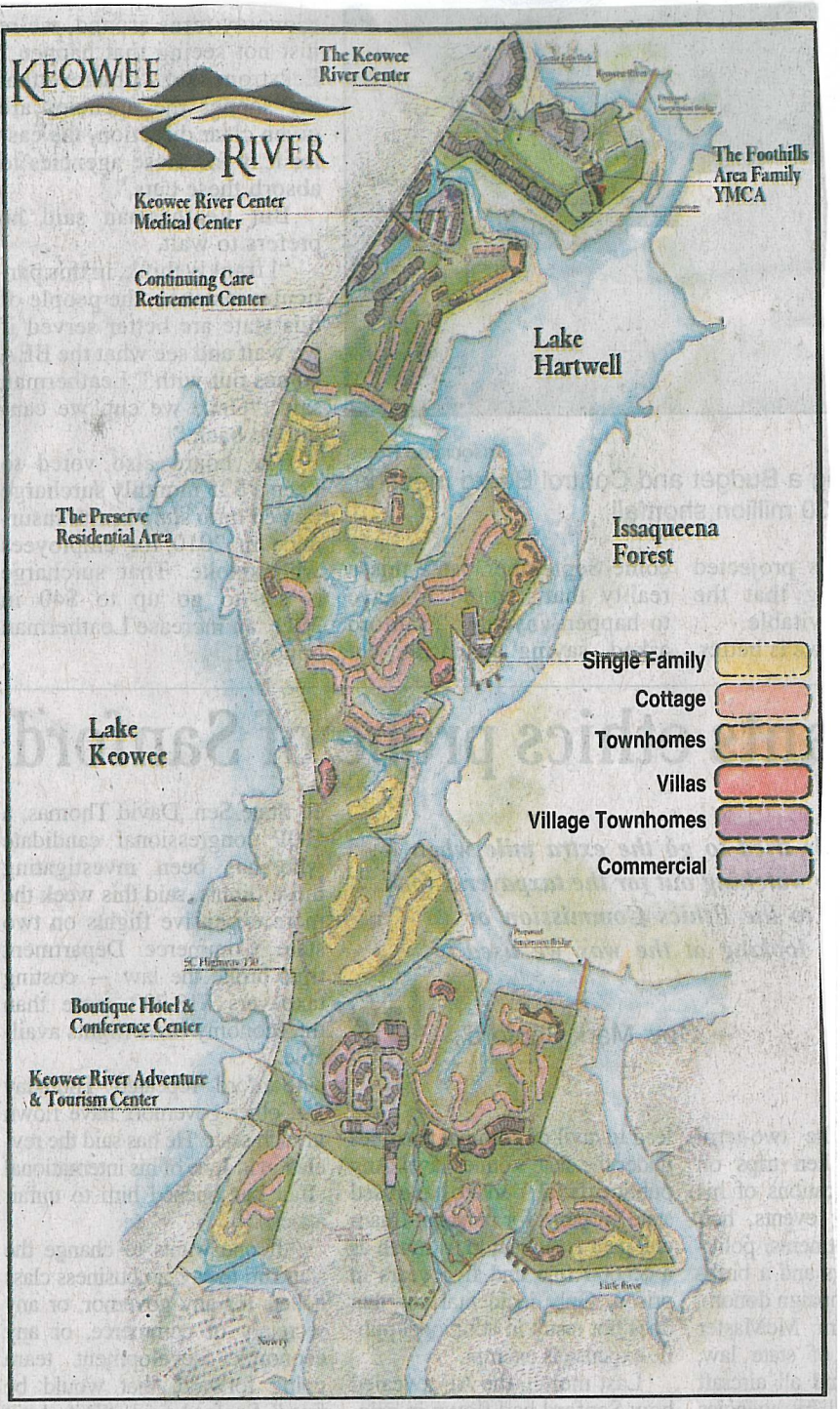
"Data would suggest our lifestyle is moving away from the exclusive country club living and moving towards sustainable, cross-generational lifestyle amenities," he said. "Keowee River is about creating a lifestyle that is inclusive of all generations and encourages them to play together in the great outdoors."

He added that Oconee is in need of jobs and that Keowee River is expected to create 2,000 jobs over the development span.

"Keowee River will strengthen the tax base, create good jobs and affordable housing while protecting this wonderful quality of life we love," he said.

Vick would not identify members of The Keowee River Preservation Group, LLC, other than to say it is a large group composed entirely of local business people. The group purchased

he acreage from Crescent Resources in 2008 for $10 million.



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