Lake Hartwell project clears major hurdle

Agency says Seneca group's proposal to develop tourist attraction in Oconee County financially viable

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — The much-talked-about plans to build a public recreation attraction on more than 300 acres of state-controlled Lake Hartwell property in Oconee County is one step closer to becoming reality.

A spokesman for the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism said Tuesday that a state budget office recently declared a proposal by a Seneca group to develop the property as being "responsive."

Marion Edmonds, director of communications for the state PRT, said the "responsive" designation means that the Materials Management Office of the South Carolina Budget and Control Board considers the bid presented by Sanctuary Pointe LLC of Seneca to be financially viable after making a complete review of the group's proposal.

The general framework for the project, as described by the state's Request for Proposal (RFP) issued in the fall of 2008, calls for the building of a golf course, hotel/conference center, water activity facilities, restaurant and rental cabins.

Sanctuary Pointe was the only firm to respond to the state's RFP last fall.

Edmonds characterized the latest development as putting "the ball in our court and their court" to begin setting up a schedule of meetings between the principals of Sanctuary Pointe and state PRT officials.

Edmonds said PRT Director Chad Prosser and State Park Service Director Phil Gaines would primarily lead the talks with Sanctuary Pointe officials.

Sanctuary Pointe spokesman Robert Daffin could not be reached for comment late Tuesday.

Edmonds said state officials would be contacting the Seneca group to set up a schedule of meetings. He said the process would allow opportunities for public comment on what's being proposed and being worked on.

"We're setting up a schedule of the initial process and move from there to getting the project under way," Edmonds said.

According to Edmonds, Gaines said a timeline for the project would come out of the initial schedule of meetings.

Sanctuary Pointe was the only firm to respond to the state's RFP in 2008, but state officials concluded the group failed to convince them that it had the financing to make the Hartwell project a reality.

The Seneca group appealed the state's decision not to award a bid and was given until June 30, 2009 to show it had the financial clout to make the project happen.

By now declaring the bid responsive, state officials have cleared the way for the project to move forward.

County officials are hopeful the Lake Hartwell project will set in motion the wheels of economic development along the Interstate 85 corridor, along with County Council's recent decision to finance sewer in the area.

carlos@dailyjrn.com | (864) 882-2375