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Lake Hartwell recreation center talks heat up

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FAIR PLAY — State officials said this week that negotiations are moving forward with a Seneca-based group on a potential sublease of pristine Lake Hartwell property they hope to convert into a destination where tourists could stay and play.

The Seneca group, Sanctuary Pointe LLC, had a deadline of June 30 to demonstrate to the state that it has the financing in place to sustain the Hartwell development for the duration of a long-term lease agreement.

Asked whether Sanctuary Pointe had met the state's financial requirements by Tuesday's deadline, a spokesman for the South Carolina Budget and Control Board would only say that talks are continuing and progressing.

Michael Sponhour said Sanctuary Pointe, the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (PRT) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) will be discussing the potential sublease of the Hartwell property for development.

A source familiar with the negotiations said the state PRT and USACE would not engage in talking about a lease unless state officials were satisfied that Sanctuary Pointe had the financial wherewithal to make the destination tourism complex a reality.

The Hartwell project, which would be build in stages on more than 300 acres and include a hotel, golf course, restaurant, cabins and other amenities, could cost at least $100 million, according to some observers. The property is on the border between South Carolina and Georgia behind the Interstate 85 Welcome Center.

Robert Daffin, a spokesman for Sanctuary Pointe, said the group would not make any announcements or give details of designs and plans until an agreement is finalized.

Daffin was involved several years ago with an effort to fund a development at a 32-acre public-boating access on Lake Keowee in northern Oconee County. Plans for the project at Keowee Town Landing, which would have showcased American Indian history and heritage, fizzled when Duke Energy officials put off development of the land indefinitely.