Keowee marina plans docked

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SALEM — The developers of a controversial Lake Keowee commercial marina have apparently pulled the plug on their project.

State regulators confirmed Friday that the principals behind the Palmetto Pointe Marina have withdrawn their application for a permit.

Adam Myrick, a spokesman for the Department of Health and Environmental Control, said developers faxed a letter to the agency Thursday to withdraw their marina permit application. The project's principals, Raymond Fretwell and Jess McDougald, signed the letter.

Plans for the Palmetto Pointe Marina surfaced late in 2009 and immediately met strong resistance from Friends of Lake Keowee Society and Advocates for Quality Development. Both groups cited environmental and safety concerns.

Specifically, FOLKS and AQD worried about increased stormwater run-off and boat-generated bank erosion that would add pollutants to the lake.

Furthermore, they argued that an increase of boat traffic in a waterway situated in an area of future growth would pose safety risks.

FOLKS Executive Director Ben Turetzky said Friday that the group's attorney has received a note from DHEC indicating the investors' decision to withdraw their permit application.

In response, Turetzky said FOLKS is ending its legal action in South Carolina Administrative Court contesting a permit DHEC initially issued for the project.



FILE PHOTO

Developers of the proposed Palmetto Pointe commercial marina on Lake Keowee have abruptly withdrawn their application for a state permit that effectively aborts the project.

Turetzky thinks the investors withdrew their permit application because of a "lack of public support" and the "legitimate concerns" raised during a DHEC public hearing on the project held at Tamassee Salem High School.

Scores of residents attended the DHEC public hearing in January to speak out about the proposed commercial marina.

"I think the investors took a long hard look and asked, 'Is this ever going to work?'" Turetzky said.

Fretwell declined to comment this week on the turn of events and said he would issue a statement at a later date.

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MARINA:

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Fretwell's associate, a co-owner of McDougald Funeral Home in Anderson, could not be reached Friday.

The developers still have the option to proceed with their original plans to sell lots on a subdivision at the 13-acre Palmetto Pointe property on SC Highway 130.

Art Holbrooks, Oconee County Planning Department director, said there are about 14 lots on Palmetto Pointe Drive that have been platted and approved for residential use.

Holbrooks said his department would not have to take any further action on the residential project, unless the developers change the plans from what's already been approved.

Turetzky said FOLKS would not have anything negative to say about the residential project because it fits in with existing uses.

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Plans surfaced in 2009

Lake Keowee marina plans scuttled

Residents who raised safety concerns pleased by decision

By Anna Simon
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SENECA — A developer has pulled the plug on plans for a controversial commercial marina at the Palmetto Pointe development on Lake Keowee, a marina that had state approval until residents objected.

The state Department of Health and Environmental Control has received a fax signed by Palmetto Pointe's developers withdrawing their application for the navigable waters permit for the marina boat slips and an application for 401 certification for the boat ramp, said Adam Myrick, a DHEC spokesman.

Developer Ray Fretwell told GreenvilleOnline.com that he will issue a statement soon.

Bob Swank, president of the Friends of Lake Keowee Society, said this is a good decision for all involved. FOLKS wants more defined standards regulating commercial development on the lake.

"I thank the investment group, on behalf of FOLKS and the many local shoreline residents who were very concerned about the safety of this project, for making the right decision," Swank said. "We're not against development, we just don't want to see people killed."

Plans for the nearly 13-acre site off State 130 across an arm of the lake from the gated Keowee Key community included a marina, about 50 permanent boat slips, about 250 dry-storage spaces, a ship store and restaurant and a 20-room lodge.

The state Department of Health and Environmental Control had given preliminary approval for a marina permit and then pulled it and scheduled a public hearing after numerous residents objected, saying there'd been no opportunity for public input.

Hundreds of people packed the Tamassee-Salem High auditorium at the January hearing.

Supporters said the project is needed to give people without lake homes a place to keep boats on Keowee, which is surrounded mainly by private property, including many upscale gated communities.

Opponents said this isn't a safe location and there are other public access points. Fast boats already are a danger, and the marina would bring more boats to the twisting waterways with blind curves in the area of Lake Keowee where the Palmetto Pointe is planned, away from the more open water, opponents said.

FOLKS is continuing to push Oconee and Pickens counties for enactment of more extensive development standards around the lake and is involved in discussions as Duke Energy goes through the relicensing process for its Keowee Toxaway project, said Ben Turetzky, executive director.

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Lake Keowee marina project taken off drawing board

By Ray Chandler

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SALEM — The developers of a proposed commercial marina on Lake Keowee that raised the ire of many lake residents have put a stop to their project.

Jess McDougald and Ray Fretwell, principals of an investment group, withdrew their permit applications to the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control for marina boat slips and a boat ramp on the lake, according to Thom Berry, spokesman for the state agency.

Berry said the withdrawal request came to DHEC by fax late Thursday.

The move comes two days after the Friends of Lake Keowee Society, an advocacy group promoting quality of life issues involving the lake, issued a statement citing third party statements indicating the marina developers had changed their plans, reverting to single-family residential development of the site.

Fretwell has indicated that a statement from the investment group is forthcoming.

Art Holbrooks, Oconee County planning director, said the site had been approved and recorded for residential development by county officials about four years ago and the designation had never been changed.

The marina plans, Holbrooks said, had come later.

Bob Swank, president of Friends Of Lake Keowee Society (FOLKS), on Friday praised the developers' decision.

"This could potentially save lives," Swank said. "We wish Mr. Fretwell every success, but we do feel this decision is in everyone's best interest."

The developers initially sought a permit in January 2010 allowing construction of a 56-slip marina as part of a larger plan for a restaurant, a marina store, a 20-room lodge, a 100-by-20-foot beach, a fueling station, a septic pump-out station, and a 250-boat dry storage area on about 13.5 acres of Palmetto Point. The site is off S.C. 130 near the Keowee Key gated community.

The permit for a boat ramp at the same site was made in a separate application.

DHEC initially approved the permit for the marina but rescinded it in November after residents near the site complained that members of the public had not been given an opportunity to have their say.

More than 200 people turned out for a public hearing held in January by DHEC at the Tamassee-Salem High School.

Proponents of the project cited the increased public access to the lake the marina would bring.

Opponents argued that the resulting increase in boating traffic through the narrow channels of the area would increase the chances of boating accidents. They also cited environmental concerns from pollutants such as spilled fuel washing into the lake from storm water runoff from the site's paved areas.

Ben Turetzky, executive director of FOLKS, said his group will continue discussions on boating and lake recreation safety components of Duke Energy's new Shoreline Management Plan Guidelines and the Recreation Study Plan, as part of the ongoing relicensing process for the Keowee Toxaway hydroelectric project, in which FOLKS has stakeholder status.



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