Lakefront commercial development targeting mid-year construction

BY STEVEN BRADLEY
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SENECA — Oconee's chief economic developer says the county expects a planned retail and restaurant development on Lake Hartwell near Clemson that has seen more than its share of delays "to go vertical" by the middle of the year.

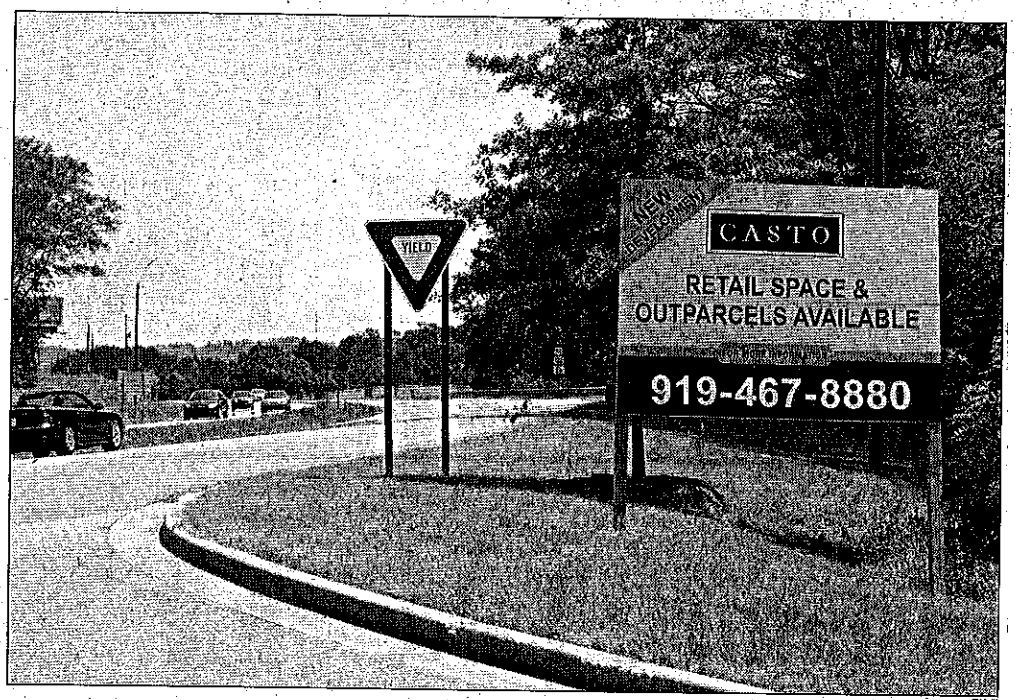
Hartwell Village, a 350,000-square-foot development at the intersection of U.S. Highway 123 and S.C. 93 adjacent to NewSpring Church's Clemson campus in Seneca, had been slated to open early this year before developer Casto Southeast Realty opted to delay construction.

Casto executive vice president Shannon Dixon told The Journal in December the company hoped to begin construction in early 2017, but was not ready to release specific tenants.

But Oconee Economic Alliance executive director Richard Blackwell told The Journal Friday that the company was targeting "mid-2017" to begin construction.

In late 2013, NewSpring Church bought a roughly 60-acre tract at the location from the DeFore Milliken plant for about $5 million and flipped roughly 42 acres of the property to Casto for more than $6 million.

The site plan for Hartwell Village includes a theater, grocer, future hotel and at least one restaurant, along with a number of other retail parcels.



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Although the company had hoped to begin construction early this year, Casto Southeast Realty officials are now targeting "mid-2017" to begin construction on the Hartwell Village retail development near Clemson, according to Oconee Economic Alliance executive director Richard Blackwell.

In other economic developments, Blackwell said he expects to see several projects announced in the coming months, such as Project Hawk, Project Raven and Project Goggles, and also expects "another solid year for Oconee County on the economic development front in 2017."

Oconee ushered in about $90 million in new capital investment — the largest single-year total for the county — and 113 new jobs spread over four economic development announcements in 2016.

For South Carolina as a whole, the state recruited more than $3.4 billion in capital investment, creating approximately 13,100 new jobs, while its exporters posted a seventh consecutive record year with export sales of $31.3 billion — a $400 million increase over last year.

Those figures were revealed as the S.C. Department of Commerce released its 2016 industry recruitment and international trade results this week.

"Team South Carolina continues to elevate itself on the global economic stage," Secretary of Commerce Bobby Hitt said. "Not only do we produce world-class products in our state, we transport and distribute those things to customers efficiently and effectively all over the world."

For 2016, the Upstate region was responsible for 51 percent of projects announced in the state (68 of 132), 56 percent of the investment ($1.8 billion of $3.4 billion) and 41 percent of the new jobs created (5,364 of 13,100) for the entire state.

"Bright things are happening around us," Blackwell said.

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