Marriott-brand hotel coming to Seneca

Spec building future uncertain

BY ERIC SPROTT
THE JOURNAL

WESTMINSTER — Roughly a week after rumors began circulating, Richard Blackwell confirmed Friday what has been making the rounds in Seneca — a new hotel is coming to town.

During a board meeting of the Oconee Economic Alliance at the offices of Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative in Westminster, its executive director confirmed a Marriott-brand hotel will be coming to U.S. Highway 123 near Elegant and Distinctive Interiors along the shores of Lake Keowee.

"I think city of Seneca officials let the cat out of the bag a little bit," he said. "'Project Pedal' is a Marriott-brand hotel, and we're excited about that new opportunity."

The commercial project had its franchise agreement approved, and it got the necessary zoning change it needed after appearing before the Seneca board of zoning appeals last week.

The announcement of the hotel means two new Seneca hotels are on the way, as one yet-to-be-revealed chain will have a presence at the anticipated Hartwell Village project near Clemson.

Adjacent to the planned commercial development, NewSpring Church is set to open next week, with the commercial aspect set to begin construction early next year — contrary to rumors Blackwell addressed Friday.

"All these rumors you hear about how Hartwell Village isn't coming, please tell those people to be quiet, because that's so far from the truth," he said. "350,000 square feet of new retail doesn't happen overnight."

Another major talking point Friday was the future of a spec building that now has an uncertain future after being approved for construction at the Oconee Industrial and Technology Park by Oconee County Council earlier this year.

Project manager Russell Johnson said during his report the loss of the lucrative Michelin project to Spartanburg has changed plans, as council has now questioned what the best location for the spec building is.

"It was a time to reassess and reallocate our plan, and during the course of the fall, we've had some suggestions from council to look at possibly building in the Golden Corner Commerce Park," he said. "We've had some misdirection with council's approval of building at the OITP earlier this year and now suggesting we look at Golden Corner. We just want to get some clear direction from them on which one it is, because we can't really build both."

County administrator Scott Moulder, who was in attendance Friday, said that with Baxter Enterprises and Hi-Tech Mold — which as the site's first tenant has made a $20.7 million investment, with more to come — continuing work on its massive facility at the OITP, it was council's view a spec building was no longer needed at the property to attract business with a major operation already on site.

"We won't need a spec building up there at this point to generate activity," he said. "Originally, when we were looking at a public-private partnership with the development at Golden Corner where Pattillo (Industrial Real Estate) was involved, we had identified their spec building to go in Golden Corner, so we were going to put another one up at OITP and have a spec building in each park.

"When we decided to vacate the partnership with Patillo and go on our own ... we decided to go ahead and put it down in GCCP."

Johnson said more discussion will be held with council in the coming months to "seek more clear direction" on the matter.

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