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Oconee County development to bring YMCA, business and residential projects

By Ray Chandler
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SENECA — In the coming months, Oconee County can expect to see a three-level YMCA recreation center rise on the shore of Hartwell Lake off S.C. 130 north of Seneca.

The YMCA center will be part of a 744-acre Keowee River residential and adventure tourism development project that was announced Thursday at an Oconee Chamber of Commerce function hosted by real estate agent John Hamrick. Hamrick's firm will be handling sales at the project, planned by local developer Scott Vick.

The announcement included no details about how much the project was expected to cost or when work would start.

Vick said the idea for the YMCA was natural to his plans, which call for making the development an all-inclusive attraction, not one just for those who will eventually live there.

"We're about village," Vick said. project. "We're not about the "Myrtle Beach-izing" of Oconee County, we're about the Lake Tahoeing of it. We want everybody to feel included and what could be more inclusive than a YMCA?"

Vick said he was willing to support the YMCA with both land and money, so that the county could have a recreation center comparable to a proposed center that has been debated by the Oconee County Council over the past five years.

Charles Baker, chairman of the board of the Foothills Area Family YMCA, said the organization had long looked for the right collaborator to help bring a YMCA to Oconee County.

"The Keowee River Preservation Group is the right collaborator," he said.

The planned YMCA will offer a full aquatic center, a gym, soccer fields, lakefront and trails, Baker said.

Oconee County Parks and Recreation Director Phil Shirley said the basic plan of the YMCA was similar to a draft plan the county considered when a recreation center was proposed as a project to be funded with a local option sales tax. The tax proposal was rejected in a referendum.

Joel Thrift, vice chairman of the Oconee County Council, said the council looked forward to working with Vick to make the YMCA a reality, along with the full project, which Thrift said should provide local economic stimulus.

"It's great for the future of Oconee County," he said.

The development will include townhouses, villas, flats and other residential areas. It will also have a boutique hotel and conference center as well business areas. A medical office development will occupy one section.

A Keowee River Adventure and Tourism Center occupies a prominent spot in the plans because, according to Vick, it sets one of the major themes of the project – adventure sports and tourism.

The core of the project, Vick said, will be geared toward attracting adventure sports and adventure tourism.

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