Prospects high for Sanctuary Pointe resort

BY NORMAN CANNADA
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OAKWAY — While the beginning of any construction is more than a year away, prospects for the planned Sanctuary Pointe resort are high, with one official saying its first year of operation will likely bring Oconee County $1 million in sales and accommodations taxes alone.

El Henry, an Oconee County resident and Sanctuary Pointe developer, presented the plan for the development to nearly 250 people at South Union Baptist Church on Tuesday night in a meeting sponsored by the S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism and the Voice of South Oconee.

The development on Lake Hartwell along 325 acres in the county off Exit 1 on Interstate 85 is expected to bring $3 million a year to Oconee County through sales and accommodations taxes after five years of operation, Henry said. He added he anticipates at least 450 construction jobs and then 550 to 650 permanent jobs once Sanctuary Pointe is fully operational.

The project was approved by the State Budget and Control Board in January, and a 50-year sublease was completed this week.

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Among the features of the projected $110 million to $120 million first-phase investment is a 250-room four-star resort hotel — which could eventually go to 400 rooms — with a 20,000-square-foot conference center. Henry said there will also be a 125-room limited-service hotel and an 18-hole golf course with 14 of the holes near water. There will also be a resort harbor, open space for hiking and other lodging, retail and recreational amenities.

Henry said the resort will be open to the public, and there will be no entrance fee. Boaters will even be able to dock near the shoreline to take advantage of the amenities.

"You can bring your golf clubs on your boat and enjoy the golf course," Henry said.

He described the development as "rustic elegance" and said efforts will be made to maximize green space and protect the environment.

Henry said he and the other officials will spend the next five to six months selecting the developer for the resort hotel.

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After that, there will be about eight to nine months of design before construction begins on the hotel, which would not happen before May or June 2014.

The first phase could be completed sometime in 2016.

South Carolina park director Phil Gaines said officials have maintained during the development of plans leading to the approval that any development "has to be sustainable financially and environmentally."

"We want this to be a point of pride," Gaines said. "We are excited about the journey and this first step. It is the difference-maker we have been waiting for."

During the question and answer session, some residents expressed concerns about problems with lake levels at Hartwell, as well as other environmental issues.

Gaines said Sanctuary Pointe will give the state more leverage with the Army Corps of Engineers in terms of lake levels because of the development's anticipated economic impact for the state.

Henry said he and the other developers are committed to minimizing environmental impact of the project.

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