Seneca bids for new 'tool' to battle downtown blight

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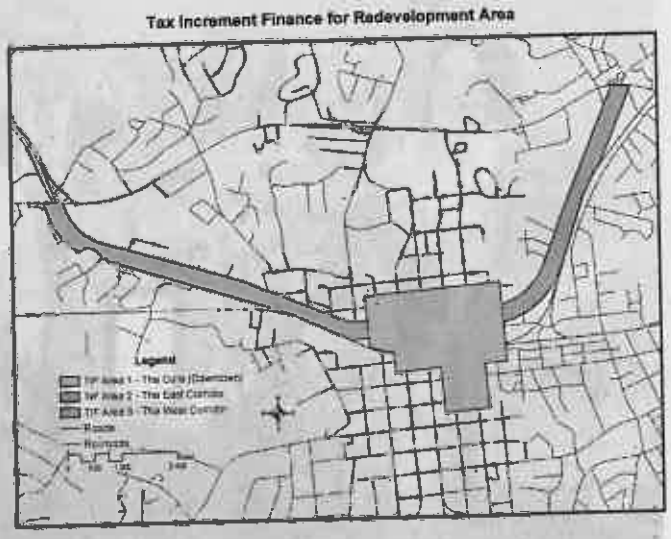
SENECA — In the midst of an economic recovery seemingly without end, Seneca is tired of waiting for developers to descend on the city with money in hand.

At the direction of City Council, the Seneca Planning Department introduced a Tax Increment Financing ordinance for redevelopment to city planners this week and asked them to move on a recommendation as soon as possible.

City Planner Tamy Sanford said it is hoped the Planning Commission will recommend an ordinance when it meets Aug. 15 and suggested City Council will hold a first reading on the ordinance shortly after.

If approved, the establishment of an ordinance for redevelopment utilizing TIF measures would enable the city to invest its own dollars or grants in what were described as "blighted" commercial areas. Hopefully, resulting in improvements that would jumpstart additional private development.

Sanford outlined three proposed TIF districts for the Planning Commission's consideration this week. The first would take in most of the core downtown business district, between Oak and Cherry streets, from Poplar to Second Street, with a leg carved out to include the Seneca branch library property.



This diagram shows the three Tax Increment Financing Districts that would be established as part of a proposed redevelopment ordinance presented to the Seneca Planning Commission this week.

The second district would be 200 feet either side of E.N. 1st Street, from Cherry to the SC 123 By-Pass.

The third district would be 200 feet either side of W.N. 1st Street, from Oak to the SC 123 By-Pass.

Tax Increment Finance districts enable the city to capture the added tax value created by development within the district, from the time the district is established for up to 30 years.

That money can then be used to finance additional improvements in the district.

Sanford said that plans are already under way to improve the appearance of the two 1st Street corridors with landscaping, lighting and other infrastructure additions. She said the city also would, under the redevelopment ordinance, have the ability to build commercial spec buildings.

Creating a TIF ordinance would allow the City Council to develop financial incentives for private development.

She used a three-year tax abatement as an example, but said council would ultimately be responsible for creating the incentives.

"This would just give us another tool in our toolbox," Councilman Dana Moore told planners, who questioned him about current city efforts to deal with abandoned and distressed properties in the core business district.

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