

Seneca group closes in on

Sanctuary Pointe principal expects to finalize a sublease agreement within 8 weeks

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Plans for an ambitious tourism project that would prominently showcase Oconee County as the gateway to South Carolina on Interstate 85 are being fine tuned for an eventual vote before the South Carolina Budget and Control Board.

A principal for the Sanctuary Pointe recreational development on the border with Georgia said Tuesday he is hopeful a sublease agreement with South Carolina officials could be hammered out

in the next six to eight weeks.

"There is a light at the end of the tunnel," said Elmon Henry of Seneca-based Sanctuary Pointe LLC. "We're going to be meeting in the next week or so, and we hope to finalize the language in a sublease agreement."

Henry and a group of Seneca businessmen began the journey to make their project a reality more than two years ago after they submitted the only proposal in response to a state request for bids to develop a tourism hub at Exit 1 on I-85.

Sanctuary Pointe needs a long-term sublease contract from the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism to move forward with its plans to build a golf course, hotels, cabins and restaurant on 325 acres nestled near the South Carolina Welcome Center on Hartwell Lake.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which manages Lake Hartwell, leased the 325 acres to SCPRT for 50 years in 2007.

A spokesman for the Corps of Engineers recently told The Journal the Corps had signed off

on Sanctuary Pointe's conceptual plans except for those calling for a full service commercial marina.

Corps spokesman Billy Birdwell said that a Sanctuary Pointe marina was not authorized at this time because of the presence of a nearby commercial marina on the Georgia side of Hartwell Lake.

Henry said his group would address the issue of the marina once the main components of the master plan have been finalized with state officials.

Birdwell referred further questions about

Hartwell project

the future of Sanctuary Pointe to SCPRT.

"That organization is our lessee, so they should be answering questions about its future," Birdwell said.

State tourism officials remain guarded about the process.

SCPRT spokesman Marion Edmonds said Tuesday that "negotiations are underway between the parties involved."

Edmonds said that at some point the Budget and Control Board would have to review and either approve or disapprove any subleases.

The five-member B&CB is adding two new members in January when Gov.

elect Nikki Haley replaces departing Gov. Mark Sanford and new state Treasurer Curtis Loftis is sworn into office. No date has been set for B&CB's meeting in January.

Henry said Haley has not been broached about Sanctuary Pointe's plans because she has been too busy with her campaign and now with her transition to power.

"We look forward to having her informed," Henry said.

Henry said he is confident that state officials would support the project.

"We do see a positive conclusion," he said.