State 11 project gets financial push

Thanks to hospitality funds, welcome center could be ready this summer

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TRAVELERS REST — A welcome center on State 11 could be completed this summer, thanks to $80,000 in hospitality funds from the county.

The Greenville County Council decided put that money, a portion of $800,000 in restaurant tax revenue, toward the renovation of the historic Blythe-Hagood-Goodwin house and a store.

The Greenville County Chapter of the Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Byway Association is transforming the house into a museum. The store fronting the property is becoming a welcome center.

Paul Ramsey, spokesman for the association, said prior to opening, the welcome center needs a paved parking area, particularly for handicap access, and signage.

The building that will house the welcome center was one of the earliest post offices in the region before it became a general store for the community.

Soon, the building will welcome tourists along Scenic State 11 as well as travelers to Greenville "because you get an awful lot of people coming down (U.S.) 25 who don't know where to eat, where to stay, or things to do," Ramsey he said.

According to the state Department of Transportation, an average of 2,400 vehicles travel on Scenic State 11 and 13,300 vehicles travel on U.S. 25 near their intersection each day.

The house behind the center was originally built in the 1700s. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and has been referred to as one of the finest surviving examples of early Upcountry architecture in Greenville County.

The house once served as a residence, as well as a place where travelers along the Old Asheville Highway could stop overnight and feed their stock, Ramsey said.

The association used state transportation enhancement funds and a match from the Greenville County Council to buy the house and its properties on 11 acres in 2005.

Ramsey said the $80,000 from the county will be used to match a $320,000 grant from the Federal Highway Administration, allowing the group to complete the welcome center and continue restoration on the house.

The association has also applied for state transportation enhancement funds to open a rest area with a picnic shelter and restrooms on State 11.

Gene Smith, executive director of the Greenville County Recreation District, said the district has agreed to staff the welcome center when it has a "sustainable source of income" to do so.

He said the district would budget whatever they'll need to spend there in November or December.

Ramsey credits Greenville County Councilman Joe Dill for obtaining the restaurant tax funds for the project.

"He worked hard to get it," Ramsey said. "We're excited."