State approves Sanctuary Pointe

BY NORMAN CANNADA
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COLUMBIA — The wait is over.

After five years of planning and waiting for approval, the $100 million-plus Sanctuary Pointe resort is closer to becoming a reality with the potential of bringing 550 to 650 permanent jobs to Oconee County.

The S.C. Budget and Control Board gave the green light on the proposal to build the 325-acre hotel and golf resort on Lake Hartwell in Oconee County, about halfway between Atlanta and Charlotte. The board, chaired by Gov. Nikki Haley, voted 4-1 to approve the plan, which allows the state to sublet the land to developers Elmon Henry and Bob Daffin, who oversee Sanctuary Pointe LLC.

"We're pleased and ready to move forward," said Henry, who lives in Salem.

Henry said he and Daffin will likely spend the next four to five months making decisions about partners in the development, with construction likely to begin in 2014. The first phase of the project will likely be completed in 2016.

"We've got a lot of moving parts right now," he said. "We would like to get it done quic than that, but that is probabl the best case scenario for us."

The land, owned by the U.S Army Corps of Engineers, would be free from property taxes except for vertical struc tures such as hotels and cabir There are 46 years left on the lease, but Henry said the state was given the ability to get the lease back to 50 years before the sublease begins. Henry sai

Pointe

he expects that to be completed within the next seven to 10 days.

The vote by the budget and control board was the final hurdle for the development, which has already been approved by the S.C. Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department and the Army Corps of Engineers' Savannah River Basin office.

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Development plans for Sanctuary Pointe include a resort hotel and a second hotel, 18-hole championship golf course, marina, walking trails and restaurants.

Henry said the estimated 550 to 650 permanent jobs do not include the 450 or so construction jobs that will be created during the expected 18 to 21 months of construction.

"This is great news for Oconee County and really great news for the entire Upstate," said Richard Blackwell, executive director of the Oconee County Economic Development Commission. "In terms of tourism and economic development, it really is a game changer. It will transform southern Oconee County."

Blackwell said the resort will bring a different type of job to the county.

"It helps diversify our tax base and creates jobs people want," he said. "We know it is going to have a ripple effect all across the county."

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