Vick quizzed on Keowee River project

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SENECA — Scott Vick had to know there wouldn't be a lot of soft questions when he outlined plans for his Keowee River development to members of the Mountain Lakes Community Association (MLCA) Monday night.

There weren't.

Vick, who, with a group of local business developers, plans to convert 775 acres along S.C. 130 into a planned, cross-generational community and eco-adventure tourism site, fielded a limited number of questions after his presentation, but they were all hardballs.

Did the developers plan to offer "interval" housing, specifically, timeshares? No.

How much traffic is this development expected to create? That is under study, but traffic is expected, in part, to come from areas where it exists now.

How many people does the development expect to house in 10 years? A firm number can't be set but there is an 18-20 year build-out planned that will eventually involve 900 to 1,200 homes.

Will you pay for your own infrastructure or expect the county to pay for it? A sewer line already exists. The developers will pay for additional infrastructure, but there are grant expectations given the environmental measures the development plans to implement.

Vick outlined the planned development in general terms, explaining that a new YMCA will be the starting point, followed by housing for senior citizens and extended care facilities. There are plans for small retail outlets — "no big box stores" — as well as a boutique hotel and adventure tourism attractions that could draw up to 15,000 visitors annually. The entire development, Vick said, will be ungated.

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> — Oconee Planning Director Art Holbrooks

Following the MLCA meeting the developer was fully engaged in individual talks with some of the 80-90 people in attendance.

Planning involvement urged

Oconee County Planning Director Art Holbrooks also offered a historical look at how Oconee County has changed, particularly as a result of rapid population growth since the 1970s. Holbrooks used the information as background to encourage MLCA members to become involved in the county's Comprehensive Plan update.

"Change — it happens," Holbrooks said. "We need to plan in order to deal with both the positives and the negatives that come with change."

He noted that, while the Oconee population was soaring, the lakes were being built, the national forests were being expanded and the remaining property was being subdivided. That combination, he said, concentrated the population, "increasing the chances for incompatibility."

"This is why we have needed a comprehensive plan," he said, referring to the 2004 document that is currently being updated.

"We've come a long ways," he said referring to what he called the "1996 Courthouse riot" when anti-zoning forces protested while carrying guns, "but we've got a ways to go to get truly wedded to comprehensive planning."