

Pickens County moves ahead with cabins on Lake Keowee

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SENECA — Pickens County is moving forward on a project to build new cabins on Lake Keowee in Six Mile in an effort to create recreation opportunities for residents and bring more tourism to the county.

Councilman Trey Whitehurst told The Journal county council reviewed designs for the 10 cabins at Mile Creek County Park at a Committee of the Whole meeting recently. Whitehurst, who represents Central and Six Mile in District 2, said the county plans to finish the project by spring.

"We needed to see what (the cabins) would look like, and they looked nice," he said. "They're really nice cabins. It'll be a great place for someone to rent cabins."

Duke Energy secured money from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to help fund the project, which has a total cost of \$350,000, according to Whitehurst. The county is also using accommodations taxes to pay for the cabins.

Whitehurst said funding for the cabins is part of an agreement for relicensing fees between Duke Energy and the county. Duke Energy's 30-year license for running the Keowee-Toxaway Hydroelectric Project took effect on Sept. 1, 2016, according to Duke spokeswoman Kim Crawford. The cabins have been in the making for two to three years.

As a member of the previous council, Whitehurst has watched the project develop.

"Duke Energy goes out into the community to see what they can do to help the community through outreach programs," Whitehurst said. "Part of what Duke does is put some of its profits back into the community."

Crawford told The Journal improvements at Mile Creek County Park are part of recreational resource enhancements under Duke's new 30-year federal operating license for the Keowee-Toxaway Hydroelectric Project.

Duke owns the park property and leases the site to the county for public recreation on Lake Keowee, according to Crawford.

"Our partnership with the county provides a great benefit to the community for decades to come," Crawford said in an email.

The one-bedroom cabins on Lake Keowee will be made out of "solid wood" rather than built like small trailers, according to Whitehurst.

"This is how we are bringing recreation to that area," Whitehurst said.

And although working out the engineering aspects of the project and making sure the cabins have what they need, such as a septic tank, have taken a while, the county is moving forward.

"It's not as simple as just dropping something down there," Whitehurst said. "It's a long process."

Councilman Carl Hudson, who was elected to council in November, told The Journal the cabins will be a good addition to the park. After taking office in January, about three years into the project, Hudson believes the cabins will also be good for the entire county.

Hudson expects the cabins to bring revenue into the county and hopes people from out of town will stay at the cabins for Clemson University football games.

"The cabins are just another piece of the puzzle in making Pickens County an even better venue for people on vacation who want to spend time in the county," Hudson said.

When considering designs, according to Hudson, council wanted "nice-looking" cabins that would also be functional and have longevity. Hudson, who represents the Dacusville area in District 6, said the project is just one of the improvements council wants to make in the county.

"We're making life better for the residents, but also making Pickens County a place people want to come to, whether it's for a Clemson University football game or enjoying the lakes," Hudson said. "I think we have a beautiful county ... and I think the northwestern end of South Carolina where Pickens and Oconee counties are located is a great place to live."

Chairman Roy Costner told The Journal the new council reviewed their predecessors' ideas for the park and decided to "think a little bit bigger." Costner, who represents the Liberty area in District 4, said council doesn't just want to put 10 cabins on the property.

"We want to use accommodations taxes on hand to make them better and nicer, add infrastructure and move the cabins closer to the water," Costner said. "We want to enhance Mile Creek County Park and give more to enjoy to people who live here and want to visit here."

Costner sees Pickens County as a gateway to the Appalachian Mountains and is excited about the opportunities he and council expect the cabins to bring.

"The cabins are part of a bigger economic tourism plan," Costner said. "This is just one of those small steps to put us in that direction."