

Only the beginning?

Potential Clemson annexation could set stage for future moves

BY GREG OLIVER
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CLEMSON — A request for the city of Clemson to annex property in Oconee County approved by the city's planning commission Monday night and sent to city council for a public hearing Feb. 19 may

be only the beginning of the city's plans to grow into Oconee County.

Planning and codes director Todd Steadman said in his report to the commission Monday night the proposed annexation of the Lakeside Lodge

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Clemson property near the under-construction Hartwell Village shopping center is consistent with the city's Comprehensive Plan 2024. Steve Mudge, one of the developers of the \$40-million-plus lodge, requested annexation for the property that would include tax incentives for the development, which is expected to have about 118 condominium units.

The city's Economic Development Element's Objective VI.4.2.2 "calls for the development of options for annexation of lands suitable for planned developments and/or mixed-use projects."

In addition, the Land Use Element includes a map delineating the various "potential annexation areas" situated adjacent to city boundaries that offer the greatest opportunity for expansion — including Lakeside Lodge Clemson — in the "West" area.

That area includes the former Milliken Corporation property on which NewSpring Church and the Hartwell Village development are located and "prioritizes the city working with property owners of land located adjacent to the city on the south side of U.S. Highway 123 to promote annexation" including "lands in Oconee County across Lake Hartwell."

Planning officials said that while no section of the comprehensive plan was found to indicate a specific point of opposition to the proposed annexation, "it did emphasize that consideration of any annexations into Oconee County should include an examination of potential barriers to the city's ability to provide utility

service on the western side of Lake Hartwell." Since the parcel under consideration for annexation can be served by existing infrastructure owned by utility providers in Oconee County, sewer and water access have been provided for.

According to the planning staff's opinion, the proposed annexation conformed to the comprehensive plan. Staff also reported that annexation "is an important tool to use in acquiring the land needed for expansion of the city's potential commercial acreage." Clemson, Steadman told the commission, is virtually landlocked by the location of the towns of Central and Pendleton and Clemson University, meaning there are significant limits on opportunities to grow to the north, east and south.

As a result, staff reported that in spite of the apparent barrier presented by Lake Hartwell, "the proposed annexation may be seen as a first step toward arguably the 'best' commercial growth corridor

available to the city." Staff also said the process of annexation "is governed by state law, which says that lakes and streams are no barrier to annexing a property." That means it is legally adjacent and that the Hartwell Village development is currently provided service by water and sewer providers located in Oconee County so that an extension of city of Clemson utility lines will not be required.

But officials also say the parcel proposed for annexation is part of the Hartwell Village commercial development and located on U.S. Highway 76/123, meaning it has "the potential to become a very visible landmark for the city and

surrounding area." If properly designed and situated, with its location on the shores of Lake Hartwell, "it can leverage its ties to the lake as no other commercial project in the area has."

Shannon Dixon, vice president of Casto, which is developing Hartwell Village, said recently her company has no plans to seek annexation into Clemson.

Clemson Mayor J.C. Cook could not be reached for comment about potential future annexation plans by the city.

The annexation will next go before Clemson City Council for a public hearing and two readings, with the public hearing and first reading set for next Monday night.

Mudge and co-developer Leighton Cabbage, a fellow former Clemson football player, requested the annexation of a 7.667-acre tract on the southern side of U.S. Highway 123. That piece of property is designated as Lot 8 of Hartwell Village in Oconee County.

Mudge said the majority of the condos will have a "direct lakefront view," and the price will range from about \$200,000 to \$800,000-plus.

When asked Monday night why he was seeking annexation into Clemson, Mudge replied the fact the property is on the lake between Clemson and Oconee County and with fire and police services more readily accessible from Clemson "just makes sense to us."

The public hearing will begin at 6:15 p.m. Monday, prior to city council's regularly scheduled meeting at 6:30 p.m.