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This drawing shows the location of a proposed dock on Lake Hartwell, adjacent to Lakeside Lodge.

SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Asking for access

Lakeside Lodge battling Corps of Engineers for dock

BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Seated on Lake Hartwell, Lakeside Lodge satisfies a lot of needs its tenants and guests want, although one it hasn't met — and might not be able to for the foreseeable future — is securing a courtesy dock strip for the public adjacent to its property.

In mid-November, a petition surfaced calling for the approval of a public dock and

walkway from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), which operates Lake Hartwell and 16 other lakes across seven states.



Mudge

Lodge lead developer Steve Mudge said area USACE officials refuse to hear the

case for public access near the complex.

Mudge said it's been a "long, twisted tale with the Corps."

"The Corps refuses to allow a dock on that property. It goes back, in their view, to when there was a textile plant there that was designated as an industrial property and not allowed to have a dock," he recently told The Journal. "The bottom line is they

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DOCK: 'Would be a benefit to all visitors'

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refuse — period — they don't try to be helpful, don't try to understand the public demand, which is very frustrating for us and these 1,000 people. ... It's not just us — this benefits Hartwell Village.

"Why would you not work with the public — Oconee County — when it benefits the public and it's one of their charges?"

As to the petition's signatures, Mudge said they came from Lakeside Lodge tenants, past visitors and Clemson and Oconee County residents.

Mudge said the courtesy dock is not a marina and that it would be privately maintained by Lakeside Lodge. He did welcome any additional financial help from others in Hartwell Village. The ideal dock would be able to hold 10-12 boats and would not be a permanent facility, he said.

"If we had to do it ourselves, we would do it ourselves," he said.

USACE natural resource program manager Sandy Price said it could be six or seven years until any changes are considered to altering shoreline zoning.

CORPS: 'TRANSPARENT AND CONSISTENT' SINCE JUNE 2017

Mudge also cited support from Oconee County government officials.

"The county remains supportive for a true public dock, which this is," he said. "There's nothing on this whole stretch of property for this whole access."

In August 2019, Oconee County Council unanimously agreed to discuss a possible lease agreement with the USACE for a lake access area on Hartwell at the land adjacent to Lakeside Lodge.

In a letter from operations project manager Aaron Wahus sent to council on July 29, the request was denied. The request was to reclas-



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Steve Mudge said developers have noticed people beaching their boats in an unsafe way near Lakeside Lodge, underscoring the need for a public dock.

sify the shoreline from "protected" to "public recreation" to create a potential lease.

"A lease for a public recreation area on public land adjacent to Lakeside Lodge Clemson would only serve or benefit guests/owners of the condo/hotel development," Wahus said. "A recreation lease to the County must provide facilities for the general public, therefore, we cannot offer a lease for this site."

Wahus added his department had been "transparent and consistent on this issue" with Lakeside Lodge owners and developers since June 2017.

Price told The Journal zoning variances aren't issued exclusively to a single site on Hartwell, and any zoning change would be done in conjunction with a shoreline plan revision.

The most recent shoreline management plan did not include funding for a comprehensive review of shoreline allocation. The plan is conducted once every 10 years, and it was just recently completed. Price said the study took three years.

"A comprehensive review of shoreline allocation was not funded as part of the recent Shoreline

Management Plan review that concluded in November 2020," USACE Savannah District senior public affairs specialist Billy Birdwell said in an email to the newspaper. "We review our Shoreline Management Plans periodically. We consider making changes to shoreline allocations if sufficient demand exists."

This week, Oconee County administrator Amanda Brock said county officials were still supportive of Lakeside Lodge's efforts.

"We were not part of the petition, and we do support the efforts in having a public dock located at Hartwell Village, because it would be a benefit to all visitors there," she said.

Outside of the development's struggle to receive approval for lake access, Mudge said business has been "growing" since opening back in May.

"We're getting our share of the reduced business in the market," he said. "In October, our bookings were over 300,000. ... We're really pleased with how it's progressing, and the restaurant has been extremely well received."