

First Uptown input session held

BY GREG OLIVER
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CLEMSON — More than 70 people turned out for a noon meeting Tuesday at Clemson's Nettles Park to begin gathering public input for the future of the Uptown area including Tiger Boulevard and the upper portion of College Avenue, including Keowee Trail.

"We're going to need a lot of participation from you all throughout this process in order to get things right," Development Strategies principal Matt Wetli said. "This is really about us listening to you all."

While Development Strategies led the development of the city's strategic plan, unveiled nearly a year ago, that process took place remotely due to COVID-19. While the virus remains a reality, representatives of the St. Louis-based firm are in Clemson this time around.

Wetli said the fact that College Avenue — which functions as the city's "main street" — and Lake Hartwell are only 800 feet apart presents a short walking distance and a great opportunity for the area.

"There's some opportunity here to look at this, reevaluate this and look at what this place could be moving forward as a new center for a community



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Clemson businessman Neil Monaghan and Development Strategies urban planner and policy strategist Miriam Keller examine the catalyst areas of the city, which includes Uptown, at a meeting Tuesday at Nettles Park.

that everyone could use and enjoy," he said. "With the lakes so close to downtown, there's very few cities in the country that have a main street and a lake so close to each other. There is an opportunity for something special."

He explained many cities are looking at ways to incorporate walkability into the center of their downtowns and have an environment that is active and activated by people. Wetli said "there is a lot of great potential" for the Uptown area.

But while that potential exists, Wetli adds there are some challenges to be met. He said the city doesn't own all of the area, with a large portion owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, some roads owned by the state Department of Transportation and the post office

owned by the federal government, as well as other property owners who own tracts of land.

Wetli told those in attendance the efforts in the area must involve cooperation.

"If we can get together and think really hard about the needs of these different constituents, we can come up with something much better than what this area is now," Wetli said. "What will not get community goals achieved is everybody developing every piece of property on their own, not trying to do it in a uniform land conjunction with everyone else. What is going to lead to something much better and more community benefit for you all and property owners is trying to do something more holistic and do something aesthetically that func-

tions well and addresses concerns the community has, and do it in a much more coherent way."

Clemson City Council members are also attending the meetings, but in an observatory capacity only. Mayor Robert Halfacre said he was very pleased with the public turnout for the kickoff.

"It was a great turnout today," Halfacre said.

"That's the most important thing from a planning perspective — to get the input of having people engaged in the process, to look at the holistic approach of what's in the best interest for the whole community, for property owners, residents and business owners."

Boards were stationed throughout the Nettles Park picnic shelter, each one asking attendees for input in a particular area. Those areas included describing what the Uptown area is like today and what they would like to see it become in the future, ideas for mobility and connectivity, character and identity and how best to use the land and potential destination opportunities.

A second meeting took place from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Tuesday, also at Nettles Park, while the date and location for a third meeting has yet to be finalized.