

Seneca awarded \$500K grant for amphitheater

BY NORM CANNADA
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SENECA — The city of Seneca has been awarded a \$500,000 grant to build an amphitheater near the downtown business district.

The federal grant was approved by the Appalachian Regional Commission, according to a news

release from the city on Thursday afternoon. In addition to the grant, the \$1.34 million project will include \$840,000 in local funds, according to the release. Preliminary plans call for a stage, restrooms, landscaping and parking.

Once completed, the release said the amphi-

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theater is expected to host about 35 events annually, bringing an estimated 100,000 people to the area and increasing the city's revenue by an anticipated \$825,199 each year.

Mayor Dan Alexander told The Journal on Thursday afternoon the amphitheater is planned to be on the former Gignilliat school property owned by the city. City administrator Scott Moulder said initial plans have the new facility located on the "lower field, dirt area below the stadium," known as Gignilliat Field.

"To have an outdoor venue coming here is exciting," Alexander said. "Lots of great things are happening in Seneca. This venue will bring a lot of opportunities for this area to have different events."

"The city has been putting a renewed emphasis on downtown for the past four years, with incentive programs that have encouraged businesses to invest in the downtown area, an enhanced Christmas lights show, getting ownership of two large, vacant downtown properties and beginning renovation efforts and several other activities in that area.

"For us to see what we're seeing right now, we've wanted this for so long," Alexander said. "People are investing in

our community and people are moving here. We wouldn't be able to do this without the community's support."

Moulder said no timetable has been announced for the amphitheater project's completion.

"We have to comply with quite a few federal procedural requirements," he said. "These are federal funds coming through the South Carolina Department of Commerce, so there will be a number of procedural items we'll have to complete over the next few months, so it'll be a little while before we even start to bid it or price or anything like that. At this point, I think we're so early in the grant procedures that it's hard to forecast how long it will be to complete the project."

The amphitheater grant comes just a few months after the S.C. General Assembly approved \$10 million in funding for a fine arts center to be located at the former Kimbrell's property.

"We'll be able to provide entertainment and events like we never have before," Moulder said. "It will bring a whole different cultural and artistic exposure to our community, as well as bring in tourism. When you talk about an amphitheater that can seat a few thousand people, that will bring in a lot of people from the outside, because you could have a lot of big

shows that you wouldn't be able to have in, say, a 700-seat fine arts center.

"All of these projects are going to make Seneca more viable and more enticing for continued investment," Moulder added. "Development likes development. So as you're successful with providing quality-of-life initiatives, such as these projects, it will bring more people to live here, and also more development recruitment. As we continue to be more successful with developing our community and developing assets that increase the quality of life, we'll see continued success through commercial and residential development."

Seneca events coordinator Riley Johnson said the facility will bring more events to Seneca.

"I'm unbelievably happy to have this venue," he said. "It's all about bringing the community together. With this venue, I think it will be an added attraction to bring more people to the area for a destination. I think it's going to open up just a plethora of events that, in the past, I couldn't even imagine going out to attract."

"This is a covered facility, outdoor seating. It's just going to give us endless opportunities to bring even more great events to our city."