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Projects creating new town in Oconee County

By David Williams (Contact)
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Photo by David Williams

Former state Senator Marshall Parker, 86, of Oconee County, right talks with Tom Winkopp, 41, about Winkopp's development at the former WestPoint Stevens Clemson Complex on Hartwell Lake. Winkopp projected when the project is completed it could be home to more than 4,000 students, families and residents needing continuing care.

SENECA — It's being called the biggest thing to hit Oconee County since the nuclear station and Keowee Key and it's going up on the site of what was the biggest thing in Oconee County.

Developer Tom Winkopp and Neal Workman, founder of Trehel Corporation, the Clemson-based design-build firm, updated more than 60 members and guests of the Oconee Alliance Thursday about the HighPointe and adjacent PointeWest projects.

When completed the two projects are projected to be home to more than 4,000 students, families plus citizens needing continuing care and the projects are being built on nearly 325 acres that was once the home to the WestPoint Stevens Clemson Complex on Hartwell Lake.

Workman, who helped organize the Oconee Alliance as a public-private partnership to promote Oconee County's quality of life, said he and Winkopp were like a lot of developers when the textile giant closed the plant.

"It's 1.2 million square feet," Workman said. "First, we were thinking what to do with the building. No one needs a building that size any more in the United States, particularly in Oconee County. It has water and it has sewer."

Workman said the two firms took more than a year to do their due diligence and discovered there are seven landfills on the site. And they decided to tear down the building.

Winkopp said the whole project is being addressed from a "green" prospective, the new approach to the way everyone is living today.

"Eighty percent of the plant is being recycled," Winkopp said. "The concrete and asphalt are being ground up and re-used and the landfills are being cleaned up or converted into green space."

Winkopp said there will be one seven-acre site that will serve as a public green.

"Clemson has its Bowman Field. It will be our Bowman Field," Winkopp said. "We hired a demolition company out of North Carolina that was the lead cleanup crew for 9-11. They've been featured on the History Channel."

Winkopp said he has been amazed at the progress in creating what will eventually be a new city in Oconee

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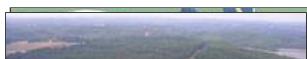
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It's being called the biggest thing to hit Oconee County since the nuclear station and Keowee Key and it's going up on the site of what was the biggest thing in Oconee County. Gone is the Clemson Plant or Clemson Complex of the former J.P. Stevens Company, later known as WestPoint Stevens. The giant complex, like most of America's textile manufacturing, fell victim to the declining textile market in the United States and cheaper labor outside the country.

"We closed on the property Dec. 18 last year and there is now \$25 million of taxable development on the north side," Winkopp said. "There are 108 finished units that are ready for students to move into Saturday. Neal has truly pulled the rabbit of the hat."

HighPoint is on the north side Cherry Road directly across the railroad tracks and the former WestPoint Stevens plant. The 110 acre site will have 750 units when all phases are completed.

HighPoint is a luxury student community that features four-bedroom, four bath units and such amenities as walking and biking trails, beach volleyball court, swimming pool and a lazy river pool.

The student housing complex includes a gated entrance and 24-hour a day security, something Winkopp said many parents appreciate. The units cost approximately \$200,000. Clemson Area Transit bus service will also be available with the university's Walker Golf Course and campus just two miles away.

Winkopp noted that the development's target market includes 50,492 Clemson University alumni over the age of 40 and that there are 26,407 alumni over 50 years old.

"Many people, not just alumni, are moving to communities around colleges and universities," Winkopp said. "Particularly universities in rural settings."

Phase I of PointeWest across from HighPoint and on the WestPoint Stevens mill site is expected to open in late

spring or summer.

PointeWest will have waterfront homes, townhouses, condominiums and along with HighPoint, more than three miles of shoreline on Hartwell Lake.

PointeWest will be built around a 10-12 acre lake that is the former textile plant site and an additional 10 acres will be devoted to a retirement center with continuing care.

Winkopp said entry level housing or lots would be about \$300,000.

There are approximately 80 waterfront lots and 230 interior lots.

PointeWest also includes a restaurant and seven parks, some as large as three acres.

PointeWest will be open to the public that can dine at the restaurant or walk along the trails and enjoy the parks.

There will also be a Towne Center, a shopping area along Cherry Road between the HighPoint and PointeWest.

"It's like many small towns in South Carolina that grew up around the railroad," Winkopp said.

When completed the projects will have a \$350 million tax base for Oconee County including \$60 million by the end of next year.

Although he supports zoning regulations, Winkopp said he was pleased to be in Oconee County because there is no zoning and the development is like a blank canvas that will grow and change over time.

The complex also operates its own sewer facility that once served the textile mill and Winkopp said the sewer treatment facility is overkill for the new development's needs. "It's a big plant," Winkopp said. "It's three times what we need."

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