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Clemson project could bring home growth to east side

Pedestrian-friendly community with shops, residences, greenery proposed

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CLEMSON -- A mix of shops and homes could transform an undeveloped 179-acre tract on the east side of Clemson where a Florida developer with Tiger Town ties plans to build.

The setting will change the appearance of the entrance to the college town for tens of thousands of visitors who come from Greenville and points east on football Saturdays.



They'll see a neighborhood reminiscent of the 1950s or '60s, with a town center where they might stop into a coffee shop or visit a bookstore.

Work could start in as little as nine months, said developer Mike Cheezem.

The project still faces review by planners and council.

Residents will range from young professionals and families to empty nesters and retirees, Cheezem said. Along with about 415 residences including single-family homes, duplexes and condos – an assisted living retirement home is planned.

"There was a need for a well-planned community that provided for a mix of uses," Cheezem said. "Over the years, I've been coming up there and visiting with my dad and others and discussing different development needs and trends."

Cheezem's "Digital Tract" -- the temporary name for the property once owned by Digital Equipment Corp. -- is on Chapman Hill Road just off Issaqueena Trail and U.S. 123. It is on the eastern edge of Clemson, in the semi-landlocked city's main growth corridor.

Cheezem is the son of Clemson developer Charlie Cheezem, the force behind Berkeley Place and Country Walk, as well as other projects.

"It may be the most spectacular set of plans I've seen come across the city's desk in my career," Mayor Larry Abernathy said.

The setting is "one of few areas we have left for development," said Butch Trent, a city council member.

The city is surrounded by Pendleton, Central, Lake Hartwell and Clemson University. The only potential growth corridors are to the east, where this development is planned, and toward Six Mile.

It will be a pedestrian-friendly community, with homes closer together than in typical subdivisions. Houses will have front porches, and a lot of the greenery and trees on the property will be preserved, creating "beautiful streetscapes that people want to be out in," Cheezem said.

The lower 48 acres will preserve a wetland area and streams. There will be a man-made lake and walking and bike trails that will connect to Clemson's Nettles Park.

The college town is experiencing a surge of growth, and has been noted as a great place to retire in several national publications in recent years.

Baby boomers begin to retire and migrate back to where they went to school, and this type of "mixed use" development "is the hottest thing in the world" for the boomer generation, Abernathy said.

In addition, hundreds of current Clemson University faculty are expected to retire and hundreds of new faculty will be hired in a five-year window that began this year. Many retiring university faculty are choosing to stay in Clemson, and newly hired faculty are moving in.

As a result, there's a high demand for homes, said Clemson developer Eric Newton, who is embarking on two projects of his own, one in Clemson and the other in nearby Pendleton.

In Clemson, Newton plans to build 18 luxury townhomes on 3.66 acres on Berkeley Drive. His Pendleton project, already underway, includes plans for more than 300 single-family homes.

"The faculty turnover has really helped the market here," Newton said.

Clemson's Planning Commission will hold a public session to discuss Cheezem's plans and get citizen input Monday at 7:30 p.m. at the Morrison Annex at 214 Butler Street. The session follows a 5:30 p.m. planning commission review of the plans to consider consistency with the city's comprehensive plan.

The Planning Commission will hear a rezoning request on Newton's Village at Berkeley townhome project at 6 p.m. on March 29 in the council chamber at City Hall.

