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Oakwood seeking annexation of roads to Lake Lanier

Hall commissioners could weigh in on issue at Jan. 23 work session

Oakwood is asking Hall County to allow it to annex roads that would connect the South Hall city to Lake Lanier.

Lake access is part of the city's long-range plan, known as Oakwood 2030, which also envisions reshaping the largely vacant or aging downtown area into common areas, shopping and housing.

"To facilitate the realization of this vision, we have determined the best option would be for Hall County to consent, by resolution, to the annexation of various county roads within the Oakwood community," City Manager Stan Brown says in a Dec. 22 letter to County Administrator Randy Knighton.

The annexation would "empower the city to provide enhanced recreational opportunities in the Oakwood area," Brown also writes.

Oakwood wants to annex Flat Creek Road from McEver Road to Nags Head Circle, near Sunset Cove Marina, and Mountain View Road from McEver Road to Balus Creek Park. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is in charge of Lake Lanier, operates Balus Creek Park, a popular boat launching spot.

Also being proposed in that area is annexation of Stephens Road from Flat Creek Road to McEver Road.

Oakwood held two public hearings in November on lake access possibilities, and roads annexation "is one of the scenarios we talked about," Brown said in a recent interview.

"We believe it is the least intrusive approach. We are in discussion with some folks ... about their interest in being part of Oakwood, so for us, this accomplishes lots of things," he said.

"It sets the stage for properties in the area that might want city services to be a part (of the city). This (resolution) helps create a framework where that can occur."

Brown added, "We're not trying to go out and annex all those properties, but those are areas that we would be open to annexation requests (from property owners)."

In addition, the city is seeking to annex portions of roads that flow in and out of the city limits, from smaller stretches, such as Candlestick Lane, to more heavily traveled roads, such as the four-lane Thurmon Tanner Parkway between Mundy Mill Road and Ga. 13/Atlanta Highway.

In the letter to Knighton, Brown said the city would assume maintenance and repair of the newly annexed roads.

The annexation of the roads also would "simplify and enhance public safety and public works response to service requests, thereby eliminating confusion when some roads have segments in both incorporated and unincorporated areas," Brown said.

The city's request is different than the usual "land-use annexation, in which we would do an analysis and evaluation of the potential implications and determine a response," Knighton said.

"We plan to take this to the Board of Commissioners ... and request their direction on the matter."

That could occur at the commission's next work session on Jan. 23, Knighton said.

Commission Chairman Tom Oliver said offhand that he opposes Oakwood's request.

"It gives them a chance to run more radar," he said. "... I don't think that creates a strong community."

Oliver said he also is concerned about setting a bad precedent.

"If you allow Oakwood to do it, (other cities in Hall) would want to do it," he said. "Braselton could ... ask that we allow them to annex all of (Ga.) 53 or (Ga.) 211. Once you create this monster, there's no way to control it."

Commissioner Billy Powell, who represents the Oakwood area, said he believes the annexation could create more confusion for residents, in terms of service, particularly police protection and codes enforcement.

"And (Oakwood) says that they won't force anybody to annex unless they request it, and that's fine and I appreciate that," Powell said. "But future councils can always change their mind."

Brown said that what the city "is really trying to do is look at a growth area ... and, as it states in our letter to the county, we're committed to not trying to force any kind of island annexation or anything like that.

"It would be strictly (a case of) property owners wanting to come (into) the city. That's written in the resolution that we've proposed to (the county)."

Brown also said, "It's not, in any way, our intent to do this just for the sake of running radar. That always comes up when cities annex areas, but that's not the motivation or intent here.

"Obviously, once (property) is in (city limits), you have jurisdictional responsibilities for (the annexed area)."