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NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on January 22, 2012

Hall commissioners to consider Oakwood road plan

Annexation proposal would link city to Lake Lanier

Annexation proposal

What: Hall County Board of Commissioners considers roads annexation proposal from Oakwood.

When: 9 a.m. Monday

Where: Courthouse Annex, 116 Spring St., Gainesville

Contact: Hall County, 770-535-8288;
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The Hall County Board of Commissioners will consider Oakwood's proposal this week to annex roads that would connect the South Hall city to Lake Lanier.

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

The commission first will tackle the request at its work session, set for 9 a.m. Monday at the Courthouse Annex, 116 Spring St., Gainesville. The next board meeting is set for 6 p.m. Thursday at the Georgia Mountains Center, 301 Main St.

City officials are touting the plan as part of an initiative to reach Lake Lanier.

A mass of subdivisions and neighborhoods now separate the city and the popular lake. Balus Creek, a park and boat launching spot operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, sits at the end of Mountain View Road.

The roads annexation would "empower the city to provide enhanced recreational opportunities in the Oakwood area," City Manager Stan Brown wrote in a Dec. 22 letter to County Administrator Randy Knighton.

"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 in a recent interview.

"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 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."

The proposal has drawn opposition from residents in the affected areas, including the homeowners association at Hidden Harbor subdivision on Flat Creek Road.

"We have issues with the safety and coordination of policing our roads and neighborhoods (and we feel there may be confusion with the county services to our neighborhood, therefore creating a possible serious situation in responding to issues and/or crimes," wrote the group's president, Verra Coppedge, in a letter to Commissioner Billy Powell.

Powell, whose West Hall district includes Oakwood, has 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 the resolution explicitly bans the city from forced annexations.

"If the (commission) adopts it, they are really giving a conditional consent," he said. "They are consenting as long as we don't do that."

Commission Chairman Tom Oliver also has expressed opposition, saying he is worried about Oakwood police stepping up efforts to use radar to stop speeders.

"I don't think that creates a strong community," he said.

Brown, who plans to attend Monday's meeting, along with Oakwood Mayor Lamar Scroggs, has said the city's lake initiative links with the city's 2030 plans, which involve a reshaping of the downtown area into housing, shops and parks.

"By no means are we trying to end up in an adversarial situation with neighborhoods," he said. "That's not what this is about at all."