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NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on September 7, 2011

Oakwood looks to move forward on 2030 plans

Council to approve 2012 budget in November

Council retreat

What: Oakwood City Council annual meeting to review accomplishments and consider goals and objectives

When: 11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday

Where: Lanier Charter Career Academy, 2719 Tumbling Creek Road

Contact: 770-534-2365

With the foundation of its Oakwood 2030 plan "pretty well set," the South Hall city is looking now at how it can move ahead with fulfilling the ambitious initiative.

"It's good that we've acquired land. It's good that we've got development standards in place," City Manager Stan Brown said.

"We've got some initial planning done. Over the next couple of years, we really will be in need of a partner we can work with to make some things happen."

City Council plans to discuss the matter at its annual retreat, set for 11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday at the Lanier Charter Career Academy, 2719 Tumbling Creek Road.

The city rolled out the plan in October 2008, with an eye toward developing and sprucing up about 250 acres around the old downtown area.

The area is largely undeveloped now, marked by older homes, a railroad line, City Park and several government buildings. Also, Oakwood Elementary School sits just off the downtown area.

Highlights of the 2030 plan include an amphitheater, a multistory City Hall and a commuter rail station that would sit along the railroad tracks running through the heart of the town. It also features connecting trails, parks and green spaces.

The plan puts names on certain areas throughout town: Government Town Center, Town Commons, Main Street Village, Historic Neighborhood, Neighborhood Village and Commercial Center.

Earlier this summer, the City Council approved development standards for the area, placing requirements on such matters as landscaping, setbacks, signs and lighting.

Thurmon Tanner Parkway, a four-lane road connecting Plainview and Mundy Mill roads and slicing through the downtown area, could be one of the first areas that sees the effects of the new development standards.

The road is all but finished, lacking mainly traffic lights and intersection work.

"I think that with that project finishing up, along with acquiring some land for our downtown area and the downtown (standards), we've got the framework in place," Brown said.

"I think we need to do some pretty serious marketing over the next year to see if we can get some partnership."

Brown said several groups have approached the city about projects, such as ones related to a hotel and the automotive industry.

"It's not like it was three or four years ago, but we're getting a little bit of increase in activity," Brown said. "So, hopefully we'll see some things happen here."

Other items on the retreat agenda include:

- Discussion of the 2012 budget, which takes effect Jan. 1. Budget approval could come in November, Brown said.
- Talk about citywide wireless, or Wi-Fi, coverage.
- Staffing issues. The city lost two veteran administrators this year, City Planner Larry Sparks and Assistant City Manager Patti Doss-Luna, to retirement.
- Potential replacement of police cars, a topic that came up at a May council meeting. Generally speaking, "I'd like to think that we're pretty much on course with what we're trying to do as a community," Brown said.