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Oakwood moving along with 2030 plans

One year later, economy hasn't deterred progress



The right of way has been cleared at Plainview Road where Thurmon Tanner Parkway will connect with Mundy Mill Road.



Oakwood City Manager Stan Brown walks along the right of way of the extension of Thurmon Tanner Parkway between Oakwood Road and Mundy Mill Road. miles of connecting trails, parks and green spaces.

OAKWOOD — Oakwood didn't just announce its 2030 plans at this time last year then wait for the economy to clear up before making headway.

The city has moved on securing some land, worked with the Georgia Department of Transportation on the emerging Thurmon Tanner Parkway and crafted a revenue-producing tax allocation district agreement with Hall County.

"We've been marching ahead," Oakwood City Manager Stan Brown said during an interview at his office Monday. "Some of it has been in the planning stages, but some of it is in the area of implementation."

The plan affects 253 acres around the city center, including the planned Thurmon Tanner's final leg, and foresees construction of multiuse and commercial buildings on large chunks of now-vacant land throughout the city, as well as redevelopment of other, older parts of town.

Highlights of the 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 three

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

Getting voter approval this year for renewing the 1-cent sales tax program for six years was critical, Brown said.

"That provided (\$800,000) for downtown sewer and about \$1.5 million for our phase one of the downtown project," which involves Government Town Center, 23 acres anchored by a new City Hall.

Also, the tax district will provide future revenue as property develops in certain areas.

"We feel it is a good program that ... puts some capital into development that will later pay great dividends," Brown said. "That, along with SPLOST, will give us some revenue to get this thing going."

Construction has begun on the final leg of Thurmon Tanner Parkway, a four-lane road that will connect Plainview Road to Mundy Mill Road.

"That's a major piece of the commercial center part of (2030 plans)," Brown said.

The final segment is projected to be finished in December 2010, said Teri Pope, spokeswoman for the DOT's Gainesville district. When completed, Thurmon Tanner will run from Atlanta Highway at Interstate 985's Exit 17 to Phil Niekro Boulevard in Flowery Branch.

Flowery Branch City Manager Bill Andrew said Tuesday that the city plans to talk to Oakwood officials about the parkway's flow through both South Hall cities.

"We want to make sure our design criteria for landscaping and all that is similar," he said.

Also, in September, City Council voted to approve a \$127,400 contract with Johnson Landscaping Inc. to complete a long-awaited downtown improvements project that involves new sidewalks and other fixes.

The work will run along Railroad Street between Main and Allen streets. The city's police station and park, which features a swimming pool and community room, is along that stretch.

"That will be our first demonstration of ... the kind of landscaping we're trying to do, the look that we're after," Brown said.

Also, in moving forward with 2030 plans, including improving future access to Thurmon Tanner, the city has acquired about 36 acres, primarily in the Town Commons and Allen Street areas.

The city's master plan has been recognized statewide by the Georgia Planning Association with a first-place award for "Outstanding Planning Document."

The award was announced Friday at the organization's fall conference in Athens.

Laura Keyes, chairwoman of the GPA awards committee, said the judges were impressed with Oakwood's work.

"The city used a lot of tools and technology to develop the plan and communicate with the public. The master plan also was well thought out and easy to understand, making implementation very feasible, particularly with the timing of the recent successful SPLOST referendum."

Brown said next year's work will involve a "lot of design ... and getting Thurmon Tanner done. I think those will be the two main things."