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NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on November 7, 2011

Oakwood looks to residents for input on lake access

Public meetings set for Nov. 15, 17

Oakwood to Lake Lanier

What: Public hearings on possible future link to Lake Lanier

When: 6 p.m. Nov. 15 and 17

Where: City Hall, 4035 Walnut Circle

Contacts: 770-534-2365 or

www.Oakwood2030.com

Oakwood spreads out from McEver Road to Martin Road and other places in between, but it doesn't have much contact with Lake Lanier.

And that is something it wants to consider as part of Oakwood 2030, the city's comprehensive blueprint for the future.

Developing areas for outdoor activities and fostering healthy lifestyles are key parts of the plan, City Manager Stan Brown said.

So, therefore, public access to Lake Lanier is a natural fit for Oakwood 2030.

"We're not looking at annexing all the way to the lake, but we do know there are properties out there that are good potentials for working with the city as far as having lake access and to develop with city services," Brown said.

The city rolled out the 2030 plan in October 2008, with an eye toward mainly 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.

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.

There are a few Oakwood arteries that lead to the lake, such as Flat Creek and Mountain View roads.

However, unlike Hall County neighbors Gainesville and Flowery Branch, Oakwood has no parks on Lanier and otherwise limited access to the recreational resource.

In City Council retreats over the past couple of years, government leaders have identified lake access "as a desirable thing for the city," Brown said.

To that end, the city has notified residents west of McEver Road and Oakwood's borders about the public hearings.

"What we're wanting to do is basically have a conversation, talk about what we're trying to do with our city and that we're trying to plan for the future," Brown said. "And with this goal (of lake access), there might be some ways we can make that happen."

Joanna Cloud, executive director of the Lake Lanier Association, an advocacy group for homeowners around the lake, said she would need to know specific plan details on a move toward the lake before "we could weigh in with a position."

Cloud said she wouldn't particularly support a park drawing thousands of people leaving litter on the weekends.

But she said she believed the group could support a "responsible development that would help keep the lake full and clean."

"I'm a big supporter of green space," she said.