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**NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on November 16, 2011**

## **Oakwood discusses possible ways to reach Lanier**

Residents, officials mull options to tap into the lake's resources

OAKWOOD — By annexing key roads and certain pieces of property, Oakwood might finally be able to touch Lake Lanier, City Manager Stan Brown said Tuesday night.

He spoke to a small group at City Hall about ways the South Hall city, mostly confined by McEver Road to the west and Atlanta Highway to the east, could reach the lake as part of its long-range 2030 comprehensive plan.

Such a move would benefit the city in terms of recreation and possibly economics, he said.

"To be able to market ourselves as a lakeside community is important," Brown said. "It helps you when you're out trying to recruit industry and businesses ... and we think there needs to be a logical growth area (at the lake)."

He showed a map depicting Oakwood's city limits and an area shaded in pink featuring neighborhoods and streets west of McEver and touching the lake. A couple of key arteries in the pink area are Flat Creek and Mountain View roads.

"We're not out here trying to annex everything to the lake," Brown told the 20 or so people, largely government officials, at the event.

However, he added, "there are properties out there that we've had inquiries about how (to) become part of Oakwood, how (to) get those municipal services."

He said one approach would be to annex major county roads in the area, by county resolution and allowable by state law.

There are "a lot of spots" in Hall County where roads go in and out of city limits.

Referring to the pink map, Brown said, "In the long term, Gainesville doesn't have an interest in being there ... and Flowery Branch isn't going to come north.

"And for the county, when you talk with their staff, for them it would be easier on McEver Road that when there's a pothole to know if it's between Oakwood Industrial Park and Mundy Mill Road, that's Oakwood's (territory)," Brown said.

Also, "the city could annex a very specific piece of property even if it's not touching the city (but) if the city has title to it," he said. "In other words, if (the city) owns, it can annex it. "We're not looking to go out and buy property, but if there's a partner to work with in some way to work out a relationship, we're open to that."

A third option is to hold "a lot of community meetings and see if there's a sense of one neighborhood that might want to be in Oakwood and another one that might not."

A few audience members spoke up and asked questions, with one person saying he was particularly interested in the city's plans.

"We have our family farm (in the lake area) and we don't know really what we want to do with it, but we don't want to discredit the hard work that our parents put into it," said Andy Byers, an Oakwood native now living in Jackson County.

"The kind of development that you've done, the kind of vision you have and the fact you do things in a first-class manner is something that is very appealing to us," Byers said.

"And we would like to continue a dialogue as you make your decisions and be a part of whatever you decide to do."

Tom Harris, a resident of the lake area, wasn't quite as supportive as Byers.

Speaking after the meeting, he said he could see why Oakwood officials are looking toward Lake Lanier as it casts a long-term vision for the city.

"But I'm still open to how they go about achieving it," he said.

Oakwood plans to hold another public meeting concerning lake access at 6 p.m. Thursday at City Hall, 4035 Walnut Circle.