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NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on November 22, 2011

Oakwood's industrial growth is increasing

City annexes 31-acre tract Monday

Industrial growth appears on the rise in Oakwood.

King's Hawaiian bakery opened Oct. 5 in a 112,000-square-foot plant in the Oakwood South Industrial Park, two new companies are opening off Rafe Banks Drive, and the city is moving on annexation and rezoning for a new U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs clinic.

And Monday night, the Oakwood Planning Commission recommended annexation of a 31-acre tract at 4020 Enterprise Way in the Tanners Creek Business Park on Thurmon Tanner Parkway.

When a planning board member asked if anything was planned for the site, City Manager Stan Brown said, "There is nothing to announce at this point."

"You've seen two of the Tanners Creek tracts come into (the city)," Brown said. "There are other parcels out there that we're trying to work up an annexation agreement on."

The plan is for all the property in the park "that is not already developed will end up coming into the city," he added.

Oakwood has prided itself in having a heavy industrial/commercial tax base, and the city has been filling up spaces across town.

King's Hawaiian, with plans to eventually employ up to 260 people, has cranked up operations on a 20-acre site in the Oakwood South Industrial Park off McEver Road at H.F. Reed Industrial Parkway

The company has long-term plans to make "other food products," said John Linehan, executive vice president of strategy and business development, in an earlier interview.

Construction of the 24,500-square-foot Veterans Affairs building is set to begin in early 2012 and is expected to be completed within 18 months.

The clinic, replacing a 4,500-square-foot building on Mundy Mill Road, will be built on Tanners Creek Drive north of H.F. Reed, which connects McEver Road to Thurmon Tanner.

The site is south of a new four-lane Thurmon Tanner connection between Plainview Drive and Mundy Mill Road. The 1.3-mile road, costing \$16 million, opened Oct. 21 and has been viewed as Hall County's version of Satellite Boulevard, which runs parallel to Interstate 85 in Gwinnett County.

In its entirety, Thurmon Tanner runs between Phil Niekro Boulevard in Flowery Branch and Atlanta Highway near Interstate 985's Exit 17 in Oakwood.

Hall County has plans to eventually build a new I-985 interchange connecting H.F. Reed to Martin Road at Falcon Parkway.

Also off H.F. Reed is W White Road, which leads to a new city-owned, 32-acre industrial park. The city has moved its public works department to the park from the downtown area, but is open and ready to accept other tenants.

"We do expect good things in the future," said Tim Evans, vice president for economic development with the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce. "We've got some really good product in Oakwood."

"In terms of economic development activity in general, we're seeing a lot of activity in Flowery Branch, Oakwood and Gainesville," he said. "We're seeing just a little piece of the iceberg."

Evans added, "With the Thurmon Tanner Parkway extension opening up, I just expect that (the growth) will continue. That new access makes a world of difference for connecting Flowery Branch to Gainesville."