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South Hall literacy center off the radar for now Oakwood, Lanier Tech project to be reviewed again in fall

Plans for a new adult literacy center in South Hall have been shelved indefinitely.

Oakwood and Lanier Technical College, which had teamed up in the effort, have decided "the timing is not right to pursue" the project, said Linda Barrow, vice president for academic affairs at Lanier Technical College.

She said she and City Manager Stan Brown "have made the commitment to each other to review (the project) again in the fall."

"The need is not going away," Barrow said. "(The delay) has to do with finances and the economy and all that's going on (there)."

The project has been in the works for at least a couple of years, an effort also involving the Hall County government and school system.

The parties were looking at a new center to be built on about 2 acres off Thurmon Tanner Parkway and an 1,100-foot road that would run between Allen Street and Thurmon Tanner.

To pull off the project, officials need to acquire a \$500,000 state Community Development Block Grant.

The application deadline for that program this year is April 2.

A sticky point in the project has been the expense of preparing the site for a new building, costs that alone could hit the \$500,000 mark.

"We've tried this a couple years in a row now and each time we haven't had the partnership (between all the parties) to put together a reasonable application," Brown said, "but maybe it's something we'll look at in the future."

The Georgia Department of Community Affairs oversees the grants, which are designed to benefit mainly low- to moderate-income residents.

Oakwood has served as the lead applicant in the project.

At one point, the Hall County school system was hoping to benefit by using the new road for Oakwood Elementary School buses. Roadways are cramped around the school, particularly at Main and Academy streets.

The college's hope was to offer literacy classes, GED instruction and English for non-native speakers at the center, which would have served as satellite campus for the Hall County Adult Learning Center at 4« B Stallworth St. in Gainesville.

"I'm very sad about (the delay)," said Brenda Thomas, Lanier Tech's associate vice president for adult education.

She cited a dire need for more space at the Gainesville center.

Some space had been added in small ways.

Recently, "we got a mobile unit and that added a classroom," Thomas said. "And then ... we've eliminated a lab (session) in the mornings and in the evenings, and that frees up that lab for classroom space.

Those changes don't "help our parking problem," Thomas said. "However, at the end of last year, the school system worked with us and we were able to get a gravel (10-space) parking lot in a grassy area."