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Long Savannah to pump millions into economy

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Charleston's biggest land annexation since Daniel Island will pump millions into the local economy.

An estimated dollar amount is unknown, but the Long Savannah project in West Ashley will span at least two decades with more than 3,000 homes being built, an expansion of the Glenn McConnell Parkway from Bees Ferry Road and a number of commercial and civic projects as well.

The private investment in infrastructure upgrades alone will total at least \$15 million, but the Lowcountry won't notice any construction for quite some time.

"I don't think realistically we'll get going for three to five years," said Lucas Padgett, a Charleston lawyer representing the landowner development team of SIM Group, its affiliate the Sintra Co., and Associated Developers Inc., which banded together to form Long Savannah LLC.

"It's at least a 20-year project," Padgett said. "The truth is it could be longer than that, depending on market conditions. Right now (the real estate market) is slow."

Charleston City Council also still needs to annex the 1,253-acres called Long Savannah, but it appears to be a done deal. Council members already gave preliminary approval, and city employees, the developers and residents have spent years developing a plan.

Dover, Kohlt and Partners, the Florida design firm the city hired to lead the planning process, will submit its development recommendations to the city in February.

The Long Savannah project, still in the drafting phases, gathered steam this month with a weeklong series of meetings to solicit public input.

During one meeting, nearly 30 residents drew pictures on project maps. Some simply jotted phrases asking developers to preserve the trees, while others gave more specific plans, like a corner pub or an outdoor concert venue.

At another meeting, engineers and consultants debated minute details like the width of streets and sidewalks. Everyone involved in the discussion wanted to ensure the area was pedestrian friendly, while maintaining adequate room for rescue vehicles.

The concept is to create a mixed-use community where people live, buy groceries, have dinner, shop, attend church and possibly even work without traveling far.

With residents having a hand in the blueprints, Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr. expects Long Savannah to become a model of innovative planning.

At this point, the project includes two new parks—one 232-acre city park and a massive 1,568-acre county park adjacent to Long Savannah—and several infrastructure improvements.

To accommodate the development, City Council in November moved its Urban Growth Boundary, the

line where development is to stop. It was a contentious move at the time. Some council members said extending the boundary diminishes its credibility and creates a bad precedent.

But supporters, including Riley and the Coastal Conservation League, said the massive county park abutting Long Savannah will block future development better than the artificial urban growth boundary line.

Now, Dover Kohlt must craft a development plan taking into account input from the public meetings.

Varying characteristics will pepper the 1,253-acre development, said Victor Dover, of Dover, Kohlt and Partners.

Some areas will have large single-family homes with large lots, for example, while others will have small bungalows with on-street parking or larger multi-family complexes, Dover said during one of the public meetings.

Green space will dot the development. Large square parks could hold together downtown-like squares of homes, businesses and civic buildings.

Developers, meanwhile, won't tally any numbers regarding homes, lots, commercial properties and others, Padgett said, until the Dover report that will provide more details on the mix of residential and commercial property.

"I really think the Dover Kohlt report is going to be the land plan with whatever minor adjustments need to be made," Padgett said. "I don't think the developer has much leverage to deviate from that land plan."

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