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# New Lake-Sumter campus plans face land hurdles

### Donation of 20 acres in east Lake tied to approval of broader project

**By Christal Hayes and Bethany Rodgers Staff Writers**

Lake-Sumter State College administrators are celebrating the donation of 20 acres for a new east Lake County campus they think is perfectly positioned to take advantage of growth anticipated because of the new Wekiva Parkway.

College officials are confident a new satellite campus could lure an influx of students from Lake as well as neighboring Orange County. They and nearby property owners also hope the campus will pump dollars into the local economy and attract high-tech businesses into a new innovation district.

“Having a college is a cornerstone to a successful community, and the location for this campus couldn’t be better,” college President Charles Mojock said. But the road to realizing the vision could be bumpy. For one thing, the donors — landowners with development plans in mind — made their gift contingent on the approval of a broader project that could surround the campus with hundreds of apartments and millions of square feet of employment space.

Plans for the new campus could go by the wayside if the larger development proposal fails to pass muster with county and Mount Dora officials. A potential challenge for the college, which has more than 6,000 students enrolled, will be winning approval for zoning changes across the roughly 340 acres that include the new campus site south of State Road 46 and east of Round Lake Road, an area that is now mostly pastureland.

A development-concept plan, which was submitted to the county in March by a Mount Dora-based planning firm, marks off zones for the college campus and for office, warehouse, industrial and other employment space.

But it also designates enough acreage to build more than 1,000 dwellings — even though large tracts of housing aren’t what Mount Dora officials envision for that area.

Mount Dora Planning Director Mark Reggentin said the land is part of the city’s Wolf Branch Innovation District, a highly touted employment area aimed at taking advantage of the parkway, which is under construction and expected to be completed in 2021.

“This is planned to be an employment district for creating jobs in the area,” he said. “A limited amount of housing can only come after a work force like a hospital or school settles in that area, and the amount of housing will be set based on the employees because there’s no point in putting housing there without the jobs.”

The site is in unincorporated Lake and will have to be annexed to the city before development could occur because Mount Dora controls utilities in the area, Reggentin said. But the city could opt against annexation.

“No utility agreement, no annexation agreement, no development,” he said.

Mojock said he wasn’t aware of the rezoning application and what it included. However, in the land-donation



document, he agreed to advocate for rezoning the 20 acres, which are lumped in with the broader rezoning request submitted by developers.

The agreement between the landowners and the college states that if city and county officials reject the development applications, the property will go back to its original owners. The deal is also off if construction on the campus doesn't begin in five years.

"We're hopeful that it's a good time frame to give us and the state to get things rolling ...," Mojock said. "In some degree having this time parameter can help us. It could help sway the state and show them this is a priority because we could lose that valuable property if we don't get funding, so this could work in our favor."

Mojock estimated that the satellite campus could be completed with about \$8million from the state.

State Sen. Alan Hays, RMatilla, said money for financing education construction projects has been in short supply of late. But he said he'll gladly take on the challenge.

"I'll try to do everything I can to help them secure funding for it," said Hays, who helps review state spending as a member of the Senate Committee on Appropriations. He called the land gift "exceptionally good for Lake County."

The college's goal is to land the funds within four years, in time to meet the deadline spelled out in the land-donation agreement.

The new Lake-Sumter campus could also be affected if Valencia College, which has a much larger enrollment of about 70,000 students, expands into Apopka.

Mojock said he'd been tracking Valencia's growth because Apopka sits just miles from the new proposed Lake-Sumter site.

But a Valencia official said the Apopka plan is on the back burner for now as the college focuses on other projects.

"Building a campus to serve west Orange County is part of Valencia's long-term plan, but we are currently focusing our efforts on a new campus in Poinciana," said Allen Bottorff, Valencia College's assistant vice president for facilities and sustainability.

Mojock, meanwhile, is buoyed by the prospects of a fourth campus for Lake-Sumter, joining those in Lees-burg, Clermont and Sumter-ville.

"It will really spur the economic development in the area, which will lead to some great jobs for our graduates," he said. [chayes@tribpub.com](mailto:chayes@tribpub.com)



CHRISTAL HAYES/STAFF Land has been donated for a new Lake-Sumter campus, which is contingent on approval of a larger development project.