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Chiefland gives preliminary zoning approval for Suwannee River Hospital



Franklin Schupp addresses Chiefland City Commissioners concerning a zoning change for the Suwannee River Community Hospital.

By Terry Witt

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CHIEFLAND -- The Suwannee River Community Hospital apparently has new life.

Chiefland City Commissioners Monday approved the first reading of an ordinance rezoning 20-acres behind Wal-Mart to the highest level of commercial zoning available in Chiefland.

Commercial 1 zoning would allow any type of commercial health care development on the property including a hospital, a nursing home or an assisted living facility.

Franklin Schupp, representing property owner Sam J. Lewis, was asked by Commissioner Teresa Barron why he wanted C-1 commercial zoning when the property was already zoned C-2, which would allow a hospital.

Schupp responded that if a future buyer wanted to purchase three acres of the property for a nursing home, for example, but didn't want C-2 zoning, the way would be clear for the sale.

The 20-acre site was identified as the future location for the hospital many years ago but the project faltered after the the local economy went into a slump and later when financing became question mark.

City commissioners were told financing for the hospital won't be a problem this time.

Schupp said 100 percent of the hospital funding has been approved by a "New York conglomerate." He did not reveal the name of the company or companies that would finance the project.

He said the hospital funding is separate from any medical building. When the community hospital project was active earlier this year, an office building was part of the project, but Schupp said the approved funding is for the hospital alone. He said there is no discussion at this time of a medical office building.

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The Florida Agency for Health Care Administration is reviewing a request by Ameris Health for an extension of the hospital's expired Certificate of Need (CON). A Tallahassee attorney is providing information to AHCA. The CON expired earlier this year.

Schupp said Lewis is committed to building the community hospital in Chiefland.

"Sam said you tell them no matter what we're going to keep going," Schupp said after the meeting.

Schupp said Lewis has hired him to speak for the project. He was previously involved with the hospital project along with Lewis. Schupp said Lewis has invested millions in the community hospital.

Schupp said CBC Real Estate will be part of the project. CBC had been part of the most recently proposed project previously.