

Hotel, conference center proposal gets City Council support

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By Billy Hobbs



A conceptual rendering of the proposed Hilton Hotel and conference center, planned to be located in downtown Milledgeville. Officials with the project presented details to City Council Tuesday. Council adopted a resolution in support of the project.

A proposed four-star Hilton hotel is in the planning stages for downtown Milledgeville.

Local businessmen and others have discussed the idea for several years, but in the past several months the proposal has gained traction.

The group is now engaged in getting community support.

Several local and out-of-state businessmen and those affiliated with The Duck Yard, LLC, a Georgia limited liability company that would develop the project, received full support Tuesday night from Milledgeville Mayor Mary Parham-Copelan and members of City Council.

"At this time, we have a presentation about an exciting project being shared with us by Mr. Mike Couch from the Ground Up of Georgia," Parham-Copelan said. "Mr. Couch, if you will, take the podium and bring us some good news."

Couch, a former resident of Milledgeville who served several years as executive director of Central State Hospital Local Redevelopment Authority and now resides in Indiana, shared details about the proposal.

Couch thanked city officials and said it was really a report to city leadership officials about the work that has been ongoing related to the project over the last 18 months.

"What we want to talk with y'all about is the potential Hilton Hotel conference center in downtown Milledgeville," Couch said.

He introduced those who have been involved in the project for the last year and a half.

"Nothing happens without ownership," Couch said. "So, I'll ask the Fowler Flemister Pursley family to stand up. This is the local fire behind this entire project. We are lucky and fortunate to have them. They've been committed from day one."

The proposed Hilton Hotel was designed by Lord Aeck and Sargent. Tony Aeck and Joe Greco joined Couch at the City Council meeting.

Also in attendance was Will Perry of Washington, D.C., who has worked along with Spark Hudson as a hotel consultant on the project.

Dan Brannan, an attorney with James Bates, LLP, also attended, as did Mike Couch's son, Scott, who is also affiliated with development and project management with Ground Up Georgia.

Frank Pendergast, a longtime businessman and restaurant owner in downtown Milledgeville, is supportive of the project and also attended the City Council meeting.

"We have spent the whole day (Tuesday) talking with stakeholders," Mike Couch said. "We've met with [Georgia College & State University President] Cathy Cox and her chief of staff. We've met with our state delegation, both the state senator and two state representatives and the mayor who was at one of those meetings."

Couch said he and the others in the group had also met earlier in the day with Rebekah Snider, executive director of Visit Milledgeville, and Kara Lassiter, president and chief executive officer of the Milledgeville-Baldwin County Chamber of Commerce.

He said the group had received nothing but endorsements in support of the hotel and conference center plan.

"This is a project of about 18 months worth of work," Couch said. "It has absolutely been a labor of love. It's a community project. You've heard me say that a rising tide lifts all boats. This will absolutely be something that is incomparable that's happened in downtown in a long time. Everyone we've met today, whether it be President Cox or our Georgia Military College president or the community leadership to Sen. Rick Williams and Rep. Floyd L. Griffin Jr., everyone has supported us and asked what we need."

Couch said he and the group had come to Milledgeville City Council for two reasons. One of those was for understanding and the other one was for support.

Couch said he and others involved in the project were to meet with potential investors in Palm Beach, Florida, on Friday.

"We want to go down and tell them we have total community support," Couch said. "And I believe we've got that."

He called on Joe Greco to discuss the proposed design process and what the group would like to do over on North Jefferson Street.

Greco, president of Lord Aeck & Sargent Architects of Decatur, said he had worked with various projects in Milledgeville for the past 30 years.

Greco said his firm had been involved in at least 12 local projects.

"We feel pretty connected to the Milledgeville community even though we're in Atlanta," Greco said. "So when Mike called us for this opportunity to look at this potential hotel, we were real excited and we kind of took the approach that we wanted to create a design that was in keeping with Milledgeville and was sort of built on the history of this fine town and was very connected to downtown."

Greco then explained a little about the conceptual design of the project.

"When we started the process, we really wanted to look at some precedence about some successful hotels that were in kind of small town environments, picking up on sort of the historic fabrics or ideas of positive streetscapes and pedestrian friendly — those sorts of things," Greco said.