

BUSINESS

Continued From 1A

projects at the Lake City Medical Center and Parkview Baptist Church, in addition to interests from the Lake City Neurological Clinic, Extreme Trucks Used Car Lot, Tesla Supercharging Station, Walmart Liquor Store addition, Ashley Furniture Showroom and a Discount Tire Store.

The Tesla Supercharging Station is physically one of the smallest new business entries, but will potentially have a huge impact on the environment through the government's push for "green" energy.

200 free stations

The Tesla Supercharging Station that will be located in Lake City is part of the Tesla Company's push to add close to 200 free charging stations in the country for customers who purchase their vehicles.

"It's a docking station for Tesla automobiles, very nice electric cars," said Laura Reissener, City of Lake City planning technician.

Bob Hathcox, City of Lake City director of growth management, said Tesla is putting the charging stations throughout the country and along Interstate 75.

"They're putting them here so the folks that buy the cars can actually stop, charge them up in about 30 minutes. While they are charging them up they can get a cup of coffee or some lunch," he said.

Reissener said Tesla charging stations have been constructed along the East Coast and now the company is stepping out and heading west.

A Tesla representative from Palo Alto, Calif., addressed the city's growth management officials about the concept months ago.

"The company originated in California and they're a very fast growing company," Reissener said.

Medical Center

Construction on the Lake City Medical Center lab addition began a few weeks ago with an approved site plan.

Medical Center officials have decided not to begin the third floor addition but are proceeding with Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project, which consists of a catheterization lab and expansion of the hospital's emergency room. A third-floor addition is not scheduled to begin until the first two phases are complete.

Other progress

■ Extreme Trucks — Permit issued and construction completed.

■ Lake City Neurological Clinic — North West Harvey and Devane Streets. Permit issued and construction nearly completed.

■ Parkview Baptist Church Addition — Lake Jeffery Road. Permit issued and construction is in process.

■ Walmart Liquor Store Addition — Site plan review process.

■ Ashley Furniture Showroom — Southwest Faith Road; site plan review is in process.

■ Discount Tire Store — Conceptual plan meeting for city utilities and annexation. (The property is located on Highway 90 near Publix and is currently not in the city limits.) No site plan has been submitted.



JASON MATTHEW WALKER/Lake City Reporter

The future site of the Tesla Supercharging Station is seen under construction.

Why the sudden spike in interest here?

By TONY BRITT
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A number of businesses and eateries looking to increase their consumer bases are now considering Lake City for new locations.

City Manager Wendell Johnson said he is uncertain why Lake City has suddenly appeared on so many people's radar, but since January the city has experienced a notable spike in interest from companies hoping to locate in the area as well as redevelopment by local companies.

"I can only speculate that it's an indicator that maybe the economy is actually beginning to improve," he said. "Certainly I think land prices have probably become more competitive with the 4-5 year economic downturn that we've had. It's just amazing to me since the first of the year it seems that all the pockets of undeveloped land and some of the older properties are either under construction or improvement."

Johnson said development costs alone for the projects were approaching the \$2 million range.

"This year we only had a small, .16

percent increase in our gross taxable value in Lake City for 2015, just a few million dollars and I looked at Columbia County and they had a similar spike, but a little bit more than ours," he said.

He said jobs will be one of the benefits from the development projects with the Lake City Medical Center expansion looking at bringing in close to 40 new positions, Discount Tire adding 20 jobs and he anticipated at least an additional 100 jobs in the area through the addition of new restaurants and businesses.

Johnson said the Lake City Medical Center expansion project is a holdover project that was started under Jesse Quillen, former Columbia County Economic Development Department director.

"That expansion was Jesse's project," he said. "That's one where he coordinated and negotiated all the activities leading to the expansion. When he left everything was done. It was just a matter of finalizing the agreement."

No specific reason has been given why 2014 was the year so many businesses decided to look into develop-

ing their clientele in Lake City.

"Success breeds success," Johnson said. "With the addition of three major franchise restaurants last year in Lake City (Chick-fil-A, Olive Garden and Longhorn Steak), it just gave that spike of confidence to some of these other developers who were thinking about Lake City to take a chance."

Johnson also noted that over the last three years the city council has continued its suspension of impact fees and that could have also played a role in businesses attempting to locate in the area.

"I anticipate this as the beginning of things to come," Johnson said. "In the last 4-5 years of the economic downturn there has really been a reluctance to take these risks and now we're seeing those indicators, not just physical indicators here in town but also in the news. I hope this is a sign Lake City is beginning to grow. It's a great location with the two interstates... I'm going to be very optimistic and very supportive of good managed growth and good quality businesses and hopefully our tax revenue base will continue to grow instead of declining."



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