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Council mining Kohl's

Decatur poised to consider \$2.7 million in incentives

By Evan Belanger

The Decatur City Council next month will consider a nearly \$2.7 million incentive deal to attract a shopping center to the city, including a 55,000-square-foot anchor store.

Neither city officials nor John Abernathy, director of development and leasing for Birmingham-based development firm Blackwater Resources LLC, would confirm the identity of the anchor store during a meeting Wednesday at Cit Hall, but multiple sources said it will be a Kohl's department store.

Abernathy said the large retailer and a smaller tenant have committed to the estimated \$10 million project, which would bring more than 80,000 square feet of retail space and between five and 15 businesses.

He also said Blackwater has secured an option to purchase the proposed site near the northwest corner of U.S. 31 and Beltline Road. The 10-acre property is currently home to Randy's Home Center, owner-operated by Decatur residents David Gillespie Sr. and David Gillespie Jr.

If all goes to plan, Abernathy said, Blackwater will purchase the land and break ground in November to open the center by October 2012, in time for the holiday shopping season.

"We have been running very aggressively to do that," he said.

Toward that end, Blackwater is seeking approval from the Alabama Department of Transportation to add a traffic signal at the site on U.S. 31.

While it was not clear when ALDOT will rule on the proposed signal, city officials said the council will consider its portion of the deal as soon as possible.

Council President Gary Hammon has set a special meeting for 5 p.m. today to introduce the proposed agreement, allowing its addition to the July 11 agenda without the unanimous consent usually needed for late-breaking ordinances.

The last time Hammon sought that consent, Councilman Billy Jackson blocked it, delaying consideration of a similar incentive for an Olive Garden Italian Restaurant, which he opposed.

Details of the proposed Blackwater deal call for the city to incentivize the development by reimbursing a portion of the sales tax generated at the shopping center for a period of 10 years with a maximum reimbursement of \$2.7 million.

The agreement would only allow reimbursement for qualified infrastructure and site-preparation expenses.



Based on Blackwater's gross sales estimate for the shopping center of \$15 million annually, the developer's total reimbursement would be about \$2.48 million for the life of the agreement.

The city's revenue share during that time would be about \$2.03 million, while the city school system would take in about \$1.5 million.

In addition, Abernathy estimated the shopping center would create about 200 full-time jobs, not including property maintenance and temporary construction jobs.

Mayor Don Stanford and Councilmen Greg Reeves, Roger Anders and Hammon voiced support for the agreement during Wednesday's meeting. Councilmen Ronny Russell and Jackson were absent.

A Kohl's spokeswoman confirmed Wednesday that the Wisconsin-based retailer, which markets designer apparel and accessories, is opening a Huntsville store, but said there were no other store announcements in the area. Kohl's currently has a store on U.S. 72 in Madison.

"At any given time, Kohl's is reviewing sites in communities nationwide," said Erin Kelbe, a Kohl's public relations coordinator.

Abernathy said he suspects the anchor store will officially reveal its identity in October or November if the development moves along as planned.

While Blackwater has its roots in financially troubled AIG Baker Shopping Center Properties, Abernathy said the Birmingham-based company, which he also works for, has no involvement in the Decatur project.

Instead, he said, AIG Baker employees and executives formed Blackwater last year with their own backing. The young company currently manages Birmingham's Vestavia Hills City Center and Hoover's Patton Creek retail center, both former AIG Baker properties.

It also redeveloped Dothan's Northside Mall, anchored by a Publix grocery store, Abernathy said.

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On 6/30/11 at 07:45 AM, **MICHAEL E from** wrote:

Why not add this to the Decatur Mall? The space is already available.

Are we going to give incentives to every major retailer that wants to show up? We're giving away a lot of up front revenue.

So now I have to ask; why not give the mom & pop stores that open an incentive also. Decatur is surely discriminating against them. It wouldn't have to be as large as the big box store; but something is better than nothing.

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On 6/30/11 at 08:33 AM, **CHRISTINE from Decatur** wrote:
another crap store heading our way :-(

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