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Lake City approves participation in TriCity opportunity zone Forest Park, Morrow expected to join soon.

By Curt Yeomans

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LAKE CITY — The proposed TriCity opportunity zone got its first formal show of support Thursday when Lake City's city council voted to be a part of the large-scale economic development project.

Council members voted 3-0 to approve their city's participation in the project, which is expected to also include Forest Park and Morrow.

The cities will share the start-up cost to get the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government to put the project together, said City Manager Joel Lanken. The cities will pay an equal share at \$8,333 each to get the project off the ground, according to Lake City's TriCity resolution and a bill from UGA.

The major piece will be done by the Carl Vinson Institute," said Lanken. "All of the documentation, all of the development of statistics and the various components will be done by them to make it happen. What the cities will do, to participate from a staff level, is pull all of the data needed to help them out with the cause."

The TriCity effort is a major project that will turn all of the land in the three cities into an opportunity zone in northern Clayton County. Businesses that move into the zone after it is created will qualify for \$3,500 tax credits for each person they employ in the zone. Businesses already in the zone can also receive the tax credits for new employees they hire.

"Word will get out and hopefully those businesses that are outside of Clayton County will become excited about the opportunity zone for this whole area and decide to move over here," said Lanken.

Forest Park and Morrow are expected to approve their own TriCity resolutions soon. On Monday, Forest Park City Manager Frank Brandon said he is drafting a resolution for his city's council to approve next month.

It is not clear when Morrow will vote to join in the project, but its next council meeting is Nov. 12. City leaders may want to jump on board before City Manager Jeff Eady, a proponent of the zone, steps down later this year to become Forest Park's new public works director.

"Hopefully we'll be able to get this up and running, certainly within the next 30 days," said Lanken.

Lanken said the project is designed to be "self-executed" once it's started, so he does not expect Eady's move out to impact Morrow's involvement in the project. However, Brandon has said he plans to keep Eady involved in some capacity.

Once all of the city's have signed on to be part of the zone, officials from the Carl Vinson institute will lead training and retreat sessions on economic development and preparation of an urban redevelopment plan. Staff from the institute will also review existing economic development plans developed within the last five years for the county.

After the urban redevelopment plan for the zone is finished, it will be sent to the state Department of Community Affairs for approval. Institute officials wrote in their scope of work presentation to the cities that it is expected to take nine months to complete and submit the plan for approval after the cities officials join the project.

Lanken said the zone should be established quickly after state officials read the plan.

DCA will deal with it real quick," said Lanken.