

## UT mulls hotel, conference center at Cherokee Farm

### Consultant explores feasibility of facility on research campus

By Chloe White Kennedy

Monday, November 30, 2009

The University of Tennessee has hired a consulting firm to determine the feasibility of a state-of-the-art, environmentally friendly hotel and conference center on the Cherokee Farm research campus.

PKF Consulting is interviewing local businesses, hotels, elected officials and "anyone else who would have a stake in it," said UT spokeswoman Elizabeth Davis.

UT is paying the consulting firm \$35,000 to conduct the study, she said.

PKF Consulting sent out a survey via e-mail to local stakeholders to "ascertain the level of market support for a modern, high-quality, environmentally friendly hotel and conference facility, amongst meeting planners and others requiring meeting space at the local, regional and national level," the survey states.

Although the exact location, number of hotel guest rooms and amount of meeting space has not been determined, early estimates call for a 150-room hotel and a conference center with 15,000-20,000 square feet, according to the survey.

Once the survey data is gathered, PKF will submit a report with recommendations to the university. The report is expected after Jan. 1, Davis said.

The university will then decide whether to move forward with the project. The UT board of trustees already has approved the Cherokee Farm Master Plan, which identified a site for a proposed hotel/conference center, Davis said. If UT is going to build and own the facility, then the board would have to approve the project. However, if a private developer is going to build the facility and lease the land from UT, board approval would not be required, she said.

If the university decides to proceed with the hotel/conference center, no state money would be used to build it, she said.

"It could be funded privately or through public/private partnerships like the research buildings on the campus will be built," Davis said. "The feasibility study will make

recommendations about what entities would be most appropriate to build and/or own the facility."

Plans for the 188-acre site, which lies along Fort Loudoun Lake across Alcoa Highway from UT Medical Center, also include 16 buildings, greenways, and possibly restaurants.

"We anticipate Cherokee Farm will draw visiting scientists and researchers from all over the world, and a facility such as a conference center/hotel could provide valuable meeting space and a place for the out-of-town visitors to stay," Davis said. "The study also will determine whether such a facility could be used by UT Medical Center, the University of Tennessee and others in the community."

The state approved \$32 million in 2007 for the infrastructure work on the research campus, including \$250,000 for demolition. Demolition is complete, and the university expects to put out bids for the work on roads and utilities in January. Bids for the first building - the Joint Institute for Advanced Materials - are expected to go out this spring, Davis said.

The rest of the campus will be built out using a combination of private and public funds, according to UT.

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