

# Woodlake Tells County It Plans to Seek Incorporation

- David Sinclair/Managing Editor
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Woodlake Resort and Country Club is moving ahead with efforts to become a municipality so it can control its future.

John Misiaszek told the Moore Board of Commissioners that the Committee to Incorporate Woodlake plans to submit its request and supporting documentation to the "appropriate committee" in N.C. General Assembly before the end of the month.

One of the county's state legislators will have to introduce a local bill in the General Assembly. The last municipality to incorporate in Moore County was Taylortown in 1987. Woodlake would become the 12th municipality in Moore.

Misiaszek said more than half of the residents of the gated community have signed a petition supporting incorporation. He said representatives of Woodlake plan to meet with state Reps. Jamie Boles and Allen McNeill and state Sen. Tom McInnis as soon as possible to seek their support.

He said the required signed notification of intent to the county and each of the 11 municipalities were to be mailed out this past week. Required legal advertisements will run in The Pilot the next two Sundays.

This latest turn in the long and troubled saga of Woodlake comes as pieces of key real estate in the development will be auctioned off Oct. 16 on the courthouse steps in Carthage.

The auction was initiated by Geosyntec Consultants, one of several creditors seeking to collect on the extensive list of debts racked up in recent years by Woodlake CC Corp., the company that owns the lake, the two golf courses and a number of other properties inside the gated community. Some of the items up for bid include the golf courses, an antebellum-style clubhouse, hundreds of residential lots and the empty 1,200-acre impoundment that once contained Lake Surf.

Geosyntec, an engineering firm with offices in Raleigh, took Woodlake CC Corp. to court after the corporation failed to pay for engineering services related to the deteriorated Lake Surf dam. The firm was awarded a judicial lien judgement against Woodlake CC Corp. in April 2017.

Earlier this year, Geosyntec announced it would hold an auction to satisfy the judgement, which entitles the firm to more than \$268,000 for unpaid engineering services and nearly \$16,000 in legal fees, late fees and interest.

Woodlake CC Corp owes a number of other creditors, including \$1.1 million to the state for the forcible breaching of its dam. The 1,200-acre Lake Surf, once touted as the centerpiece of Woodlake, was drained after the deteriorated dam was nearly breached by the deluge of rain from Hurricane Matthew in October 2016.

Citing public safety concerns, the state Department of Environmental Quality went to court to force the ownership group to address the dam. When the German-based owners failed to act in time, the state stepped in and had the work done and then billed Woodlake CC Corp.

The lake's draining caused property values to fall sharply in the subdivision. Homeowners last year sued the ownership group. When that group failed to respond to the suit, Superior Court Judge James Webb entered a \$160 million judgment for the property owners.

Iron Horse in Rockingham will conduct the Oct. 16 auction. Marc Baysek, a real estate agent with the auction company, said more than 500 parcels will be lumped into 10 lots in an effort to streamline the sale.

Misiaszek told the commissioners that the Restore Woodlake Committee hopes to take control of lake and related properties at the auction but that they "cannot be assured" they will be successful.

He also said they asked officials at the UNC School of Government about the likelihood of an incorporated village of Woodlake being able to borrow money to repair the dam on Lake Surf, should it acquire the lake and related properties.

"We have been informed that the financing will most likely be achievable but at a very high interest rate," he said.

Misiaszek and others with the Restore Woodlake Committee have repeatedly expressed frustration at previous meetings with the commissioners' unwillingness to consider a proposal to issue bonds to pay for repairs to the dam — estimated at about \$9 million — that would be repaid by Woodlake property owners through a special tax assessment district. Richmond County took a similar step previously for Lake Ledbetter.

Before Lake Surf can be refilled, the dam must be rebuilt. Regardless of whether incorporation efforts succeed, the county has a stake in all of this, Misiaszek said.

"As I previously informed you, the county will continue to lose in excess of \$500,000 a year in property taxes from property owners within the Woodlake community beginning in 2019 (when revaluation occurs) until property valuations hopefully begin to recover," he said. "This will only happen once the dam is repaired and the lake restored.

"Incorporation is a big undertaking. The Woodlake community is undertaking this effort, this huge effort, and yes we hope to benefit. Make no mistake, so will Moore County and all of its citizens if we are successful."

Related to the property revaluation next year, the commissioners held a required public hearing on the proposed schedule of values that will be used. No one came to speak. It did not require action from the commissioners.

The commissioners' Tuesday night meeting lasted just under 17 minutes, a new record for the board, which was missing two members. Chairwoman Catherine Graham and Frank Quis were absent.

Vice Chairman Otis Ritter joked that it is harder than one might think to preside. The board approved several routine items and made three appointments during the brief meeting.

Their next meeting will be held Oct. 16 in the Historic Courthouse