

cont. from page 1

# Board debates Hillman Commons TIF progress

ing was adjourned.

The debate continued online after the meeting, with the mayor, aldermen and constituents using social media and email to communicate their positions on the subject.

According to a letter sent to his constituents who enquired, Martin gave specifics of what he recalled the project included when it was first proposed to the Board of Aldermen (BOA), explaining that the developer initially represented the apartments to include retail space on the entire first floor.

However, Martin says that when the apartment complex was presented to the Aldermen for consideration, the retail space was reduced to less than half of the first floor, being replaced with an apartment leasing office and a gym for the tenants. There was also a request to reduce the number of parking spaces required by City ordinance.

"The majority of the BOA approved the site plan for the apartments," said Martin. "I voted against it based on the last minute reduction of retail space and continuing concern over the developer and the apartments."

In a response to Martin's letter posted on the City's website, Fisher said, "Jim has not supported any major changes I have presented to the Board. He opposed... Hillman Commons from the beginning. Bottom line, this was not the issue Tuesday night and is not an issue for further discussion. The project was approved by the Architectural Review and Historic Preservations Boards on November 28, 2017, and the Board of Aldermen December 5, 2017. The only reason for a vote last Tuesday night was to hold a public hearing."

Martin also took issue with a TIF being used for a residential project.

"Historically, the BOA has approved TIFs for economic development for projects such as the Walmart Supercenter and the Hilton Garden Inn," said Martin. "The Walmart tax increase was used for some infrastructure for the project. While the property tax increase was pledged to the TIF bonds, the general fund received sales tax, and the store created jobs. The Hilton Garden Inn tax increase was used for some infrastructure for the project. While the property tax increase was pledged to the TIF bonds, the general fund received sales tax on the room rentals and the tourism tax."

"Clinton has never used TIF funding for a housing project," said Martin. "There is no direct secondary financial benefit to the budget of sales taxes or tourism taxes or jobs from a housing project. Including a

small amount of retail space was not enough to alter that scenario."

Fisher responded, "There was no TIF requested for the Hilton Garden Inn. There was a TIF request granted for the Fairfield Inn, but they failed to complete the project as proposed, and the TIF was pulled by the City."

"The economic benefit to the City is the



*The Clinton Courier*  
Site work continued earlier this month with the removal of trees at the property, which sits on the corner of Leake and East Streets.

potential 140 or so residents from 91 loft units that will create a huge marketing opportunity to expand the shopping opportunities in Olde Towne and generate sales tax dollars," wrote Fisher. "The question is this, who else is in line with an \$11,500,000 project for Clinton? For clarity – and because words mean things – this is not a housing project, it is a mixed-use facility."

Ward 6 Alderman Mike Cashion recounted in an online posting that he remembers the TIF being part of the original discussion with the developer of Hillman Commons.

"Contrary to comments, it has always been on the table," said Cashion. "The developer has a budget that includes parking lot sidewalks and lighting...all infrastructure for the public good... By providing the TIF, the developer does the work, and the TIF reimburses them for infrastructure for the public good."

Garrett said, "This vote was not a vote against public hearings. Every project has to be deemed appropriate by a majority of the Board of Aldermen and worthy of going forward for a public hearing. The project itself has already been approved. However, a majority of the Board of Aldermen have serious concerns about the need to give up twenty years of taxes for the benefit of these developers."

Martin further explained that arguments

for approving the TIF include that it will help pay for much-needed parking in the Olde Towne area. However, Martin believes that the parking will not be available as needed for public use, even if it is paid for using the TIF.

"There was some discussion about citizens and visitors being permitted to use the apartment parking lot, as a reason for the TIF funding of the parking lot," said Martin. "The developer has stated that they will market the apartments to MC students. If MC students rent the apartments, their cars will remain parked as they walk to class. If working people rent the apartments, most will drive to work and be gone from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Most Olde Towne events occur on nights or weekends. Tenants will expect their parking spaces, and there will be a problem if tenants cannot park in their parking lot during Olde Towne events. Also, remember that the normal number of parking spaces were reduced."

Fisher responded to the parking analysis, "Hillman LLC will market to anyone, but their target is young married with no kids and older married with no kids. They prefer to avoid the MC student market."

In the December 5, 2017, Board of Aldermen meeting, David Kelly of Chartre Consulting, Ltd. stated that the development would be designed to appeal to Mississippi College and graduate students as well as young families and empty nesters.

Martin expressed concern with the developer's track record and previous projects.

"Chartre...has only built low-income subsidy housing," said Martin. "It claimed that it would do quality market rate housing in Clinton, for the first time. Their track record with low-income subsidy housing has created much controversy in many locations around the state."

The Mayor's office states that Low Income Housing Tax Credits will not be used in the Hillman Commons project and that Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers will not be accepted.

Plans for the Hillman Commons project began over a year ago, with recent progress being seen as old-growth trees were removed and earthwork began in the past several weeks at the former Lions Club Park site.

The 2.7 acres, which was leased by Hillman-Berry Lions Club Park for sixty years, was sold by Mississippi College to Oxford

developer Clarence Chapman in December 2017. Chapman's Oxford-based company, Chartre Consulting Ltd., is developing the project, which retains the Hillman family name that is important in the college's history.

An Oxford full service architectural firm, Develop Design Studio, describes Hillman Commons on their company's website as "100 Class A apartments and commercial square footage on 2.7 acres in the historic downtown of Clinton, MS." The architectural firm specializes in the design and construction of single family homes, multifamily residential developments and restaurants. The anticipated completion date of the construction is in the spring of 2020. At press time, the website for Chartre Consulting was not active.

Kelly, who oversees land acquisitions, planning and design for Chartre projects, also estimated at the December 5, 2017, that the company's investment would be between \$18-23 million for Hillman Commons.

The loft-style apartment units proposed were designed to blend with buildings in the Olde Towne area and, at the December 5, 2017, meeting, were presented as featuring random balconies and canopies, to give the building the look of being developed over time, in the same manner in which the city developed, Kelly explained.

Plans show the one-bedroom units at 1,100 to 1,200 square feet, and the two-bedroom units at 1,500 square feet. Company officials said plans for all units include high-end amenities such as crown molding, granite countertops, undermount sinks and quality appliances. The complex is expected to have a swimming pool workout facilities and a common area.

Plans discussed in December 2017 called for parking of one space per bedroom, with thirty to forty on street spaces that will not be used for retail. That plan also called for fifty more spaces to be configured for overflow parking.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: A full copy of the letter from Alderman Martin and the responses from Mayor Fisher is available on The Clinton Courier website. Also of note, a computer glitch in the live streaming of the February 5, 2019, Board meeting resulted in only the last 14:03 minutes of the meeting being recorded and available for viewing. According to the City's website, the live stream glitch should be corrected by the February 19, 2019, meeting.*



## CHINA BUFFET

**601-924-9596**

**NEXT TO KROGER**

125 Hwy 80 East • Clinton, MS

Monday - Sunday: 10:45am - 9:30pm



## DEM ELECTRIC, LLC.

Commercial/Residential Electrical contractors  
serving Clinton since 1990.

**601-720-4273**