



# The Clinton Courier

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## Board debates Hillman Commons TIF progress

The Clinton Courier

Contentious debate among the Mayor and Board of Aldermen about questions surrounding legislative process, economic development financing and changes to the nature and quality of the development led to a 4-3 vote to not move forward with a public hearing for Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) on the Hillman Commons project in Olde Towne Clinton.

A point under debate by City leaders is the timing of a request for a TIF by Chartre Consulting, Ltd., the developer of the Hillman Commons project, which could be used to reimburse the developer for the cost of sidewalks, curbs and parking spaces for the development as well as to add lighting to the Olde Towne area.

Tax Increment Financing is a public financing method that provides communities with a means to fund redevelopment and infrastructure improvement. The City is allowed to borrow money against the future growth in property tax revenue within Hillman Commons, which has been determined by Mississippi Code to be a TIF-eligible project.

The request, which requires the setting of a public hearing before the TIF can be approved, was brought before the Board of Aldermen and Mayor Phil Fisher at their February 5 meeting.

As the agenda item came before the board, Ward 2 Alderman Jim Martin began to speak on his concerns that there had been changes in the project. Specifically, Martin said that, according to his recollection,



Develop Design Studio

Architect's rendering of the Hillman Commons project, set for the former Lions Club Park site in Olde Towne Clinton.

the development originally was proposed to have single-family houses and a restaurant, as well as apartments, but progress has only been made on the apartment portion of the development. He also recalled that the amount of retail space as originally presented to the alderman has been substantially re-

For more background information, see the December 19, 2017 article from *The Clinton Courier* at [www.TheClintonCourier.net](http://www.TheClintonCourier.net).

duced and that when the plan was approved by the Board, the developer was planning to pay for the curbs, sidewalks, and parking, but now the developer is returning to ask for a TIF for those expenditures.

Stopping Martin mid-sentence, Fisher suggested that it was not the proper time for Board members to be discussing the issue, despite the fact that Martin and Alderwom-

an-at-Large Ricki Garrett wanted discussion to be had.

"The issue before you tonight is whether or not to have a public hearing," said Fisher, addressing Martin. "The public hearing is not tonight. The speech that you are making right now is more appropriate for the public hearing, not for deciding if we are going to have a public hearing. As an attorney, you should know that. This is not going to be talked about tonight."

Garrett rebutted, "We did discuss this to some extent last night [referring to the Board's work session the previous night], and the Board is not the public, we're the Board, so I would think the Board could discuss it as a Board and that not be part of a public hearing. The purpose of a public hearing is to allow the public to respond to us, but I don't think Alderman Martin was out of order in discussing a subject that we discussed last night."

Ward 3 Aldermen Bill Barnett then presented a motion to hold a public hearing, which Ward 4 Alderman Mike Cashion seconded, and the vote was taken, with Ward 5 Alderwoman Jan Cossitt; Alderwoman-at-Large Ricki Garrett; Ward 1 Alderman Dave Ellis; and Ward 2 Alderman Jim Martin voting against the motion.

After the motion failed, a visibly upset Fisher expressed frustration, saying "those of you who voted against this have basically turned me and anybody involved in this project into a liar."

Fisher said the failed vote for a public hearing to discuss a TIF financing for the Hillman Commons developer has "made economic development for this city next to impossible."

Martin asked if he could respond to the mayor's statement but was denied the opportunity by Fisher, at which point the meet-

cont. on page 7

### INSIDE:

Legislative update.....	2
CCA Beauties and Beaus.....	4
Market vendors sought.....	5
Norell Road interchange.....	9
MC inauguration set.....	10
Mt. Salus basketball.....	11
Arts Council donation.....	12
Kingpins go to championships.....	15
Sporting clay shoot.....	19
CJHS basketball champs.....	22
Murder mystery dinner pics.....	33
Attaché dinner theatre pics.....	35

## Tourism tax passes in January 29 vote

Special to The Clinton Courier

Clintonians had the opportunity to vote on January 29 to apply a one percent hotel tax to rates at the ten hotels in Clinton, and the referendum passed with almost ninety percent approval.

There were a total of 541 votes cast, with 486 Clintonians voting for the tax and 55 voting against.

City officials say revenues from the new tax will be used for advertising to draw more visitors to Clinton by promoting tourism to the city by use of static billboards, printed maps with things to do in Clinton, and custom concierge kiosks in participating hotels.

"Drawing [tourists] to Clinton to eat, stay and buy enhances our economy, and I want

to aggressively move to capture those dollars," said Clinton Mayor Phil Fisher.

In addition to purchasing print, digital and billboard advertisements, funds will also be used to install digital kiosks in participating hotels. The kiosks would offer visitors four things to do a day in Clinton, and will be accompanied by a supply of paper maps the feature restaurants, places to visit within a twenty-minute drive of Clinton, and places to shop, City Communications Director Mark Jones said.

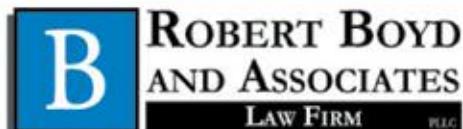
Currently, Clinton adds 2% to every hotel bill as a tourism tax to promote the city, generating \$200,000 per year.

Officials say the plan is to make a bulk purchase of static billboards to place from Monroe, Louisiana, to Vicksburg, to maxi-

mize where the city already has billboards located. Other routes for the billboards include Southaven to Grenada and Meridian towards Forest. The billboards will target travelers who are looking for a hotel.

Efforts will be made to leverage the existing audience of active Mississippi history seekers, as well, says Fisher. By targeting online searchers seeking out keywords such as "Mississippi History Museum," "Clinton Riot," "Civil Rights Trail" or "Civil War Tours," City leaders hope to be able to present the historical significance of Clinton to a primed audience. Ads will present Clinton as a central location for historical Mississippi trips.

The referendum required a sixty percent majority of those voting.



103 Woodchase Park Drive  
Clinton, Mississippi 39056  
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- Offshore/Riverboat/Dock Injuries



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