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Rock Hill nets sponsor for cycling arena at Riverwalk

Charlotte-based sporting goods store expresses support, agrees to help pay for cycling center set to open in 2013

By Shawn Cetrone - scetrone@heraldonline.com

Rock Hill is still years away from opening what officials believe will be a world-class cycling center, but a company has already offered to pay to put its name on it.

Gita Sporting Goods, a Charlotte-based bicycle equipment distributor, wants to pay \$20,000 a year for a decade after the center opens to call it the Giordana Velodrome, according to city documents. The company also would donate two dozen bicycles to the city.

The velodrome, or cycling arena, would include tracks for BMX Supercross, Cyclocross, a paved road course and mountain bike trails. It is scheduled to open by December 2013.

The City Council voted Monday to accept Gita's offer, much of which likely will go to help pay off the expected \$4 million it will cost to build the center.

Council member Kevin Sutton cast the only vote against the offer.

"I'm still not convinced that a velodrome will bring this economic activity that they say it will," Sutton said after the meeting.

The city is working with development company The Greens of Rock Hill to build the cycling center. Both are banking that it will be a key draw for Riverwalk, a planned 1,000-acre mixed-use community expected to include riverfront shops, homes and a business park all on the former Celanese industrial complex property on the Catawba River near Cherry Road and Interstate 77.

The \$600 million project is to be paid for by a mix of public and private money. Rock Hill has agreed to pay up to \$50 million for streets, utilities and other amenities.

It's expected to be finished in about 20 years.

"We're chipping away at it," council member Kathy Pender said. "We're at the infancy of this project."

Earlier this year, a committee began trying to raise at least \$500,000 in private money for the bicycle complex. City officials also hope to capture federal grants and subsidized loans to help pay for it.

The velodrome would be the development's second public portion.

Paved trails winding along the river opened last month in Riverwalk. The plan is to eventually connect them to other sections of the development.

In a report Monday night, the city council heard that 9,000 people have visited the trails and interest is growing.

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