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### A frustrated Beaufort courts other colleges

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BEAUFORT -- Frustrated with the University of South Carolina Beaufort's perceived lack of interest in expanding in Beaufort, the City Council this week said it will seek other colleges to establish branches in Beaufort. A local developer said he has already spoken with two groups interested in bringing colleges here.

Dick Stewart, principal of Beaufort-based developer 303 Associates, last month offered the Ramada hotel on Boundary Street to the university for \$4.3 million, saying the hotel could be used as a dormitory. Stewart told the City Council on Tuesday the school does not appear to be interested.

Mayor Bill Rauch also said USCB appears uninterested in buying the Ramada -- or otherwise expanding its eight-acre downtown campus -- and that Beaufort should begin marketing itself to other colleges.

"Since (Chancellor) Jane (Upshaw) took over, the thrust has all been for all the resources to go to (the) New River (campus)," Rauch said Tuesday. "I think we should start reaching out to the education community and saying, 'We can bring some things to the table. Why don't you come check us out?'"

Upshaw became the school's chancellor in 2002.

Council members Gary Fordham and Donnie Beerboth said Tuesday that they believe USCB will close its Beaufort branch in the near future.

Upshaw could not be reached for comment Wednesday, but USCB spokeswoman Deborah Reynolds denied the university has plans to close the Beaufort campus.

USCB has hired a consultant to estimate how much it would cost to convert the Ramada to a dormitory, Reynolds said.

Stewart, however, has begun marketing the Ramada to two other college groups.

One group is affiliated with Marquette University, Notre Dame University and a college in Rome, Italy, Stewart said.

The other group represents a Caribbean medical school looking to establish a four-year nursing school.

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