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our views

ETHICAL PROGRESS AT VICTORY CROSSING

THE ISSUE State Sen. Louise Lucas makes another proposal to build a hotel.

WHERE WE STAND Because her plan doesn't ask for government help, it is far more palatable than previous versions.

STATE SEN. Louise Lucas may have finally gotten it right in her long-running bid to build a hotel at Victory Crossing in Portsmouth.

Lucas says she and five business partners, including her two daughters, are close to completing a deal with Marriott to construct a hotel at Interstate 264 and Victory Boulevard near Tidewater Community College's new Portsmouth campus.

The plans, outlined in a story Wednesday by The Pilot's Dave Forster, are far more palatable than earlier proposals.

In 2007, Lucas and her partners talked of asking the financially strapped city for \$13.5 million in cash and tax breaks for a hotel and conference center. The idea was quickly batted down, but Lucas returned the next year with a request for up to \$38 million in low-cost, tax-exempt state and federal bonds.

When the City Council declined to endorse the request, Lucas and her partners filed a \$97.7 million lawsuit containing numerous specious claims, including allegations that the rejection was racially motivated.

The timing of the lawsuit — shortly before asking the council early last year to reconsider the request — was appalling. The council held its ground and

voted down the request; Lucas and partners dropped the suit but stuck the city with \$90,000 in legal fees.

Lucas says her new proposal won't include a request for bonds, which means the council won't have to sign off on financing. That's good.

The proposed hotel site lies within a state enterprise zone, which means it could qualify for tax exemptions and fee rebates. Access to those breaks, aimed at encouraging redevelopment of economically distressed neighborhoods, is fairly cut-and-dried and certainly less worrisome than her earlier appeals for assistance.

From the beginning, the chief problem with Lucas' dealings with the city has been the propriety of a state lawmaker asking for government help to finance a private development in which he or she is a major investor.

Her persistent requests for the council's backing were all the more inappropriate because she is chairwoman of the Senate's Local Government Committee. That role, among others, gives her considerable influence over municipal issues. She should have known better than to place the council in the untenable position of voting on the bonds.

Now, it appears, she's choosing the path she should have from the start — financing her private development venture on her own, without the council's involvement.

The long-struggling Victory Crossing area is in the midst of an impressive renewal, most evident in the recent opening of TCC's campus.

The ill feelings over the confrontations of recent years are likely to linger. But the hotel proposed by Lucas and partners also appears likely to play a welcome role in the economic revival of Portsmouth.