

## Best Western is coming soon

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By James Gallagher | *Staff Writer*

West Augusta might soon be the "best" place for travelers to stay the night.

A Best Western Inn & Suites is under construction on Center West Parkway and is expected to open in late March.

The \$3.5 million hotel is being built on the site of the Guest Inn, previously a Motel 6, that was demolished earlier this year.

The 61-room hotel, which will feature an indoor spa, will be the second hotel built on that site and one of a few hotels built along the Washington Road corridor in the past seven years.

"I'm trying to bring business back to Washington Road," said Jugal Purohit, the owner of the Best Western and the adjacent AmeriHost Inn, which opened earlier this year.

Since 1997, hotels built in the metro area have been concentrated near Belair Road in Columbia County. During that time, the hotels on Washington Road aged, and many lost their flags, including the Radisson, now the Augusta Suites, and Holiday Inn, now the Augusta Inn & Convention Center.

Based on sales tax data, the aging hotels in Richmond County have lost business to the newer ones in Columbia County. Hotel-motel tax revenues in Columbia County were up 26 percent through the first half of the year, while Richmond County tax collections were flat.

The new Best Western hotel is designed to have an interior corridor for security, which differs from the external, or drive-up, entryways common at most Washington Road hotels.

Mr. Purohit said he is trying to spark a lodging revival in Richmond County.

"When you put two or three hotels together, you draw more people," he said, adding that hotels along Belair Road have developed in proximity to one another. "Washington Road is the main road of Augusta, and Richmond County needs more good businesses."