

County wants big cut in Moran trailer plan

Buffalo Valley campsite owner should get only 27, not 140, units, commissioners say.

By Kevin Huelsmann

A Buffalo Valley campground owner should be allowed to bring only 27 recreational park trailers onto his property, not the 140 requested, county leaders said Tuesday.

Although they delayed a final decision on allowing the controversial trailers at the Buffalo Valley RV Resort, commissioners agreed that the owner of the campground should be allowed only one-fifth of his original request.

"This is not in an existing, developed area with development all around it," Commissioner Hank Phibbs said. "It is in a natural area, a gateway. This is fundamentally changing the nature of what is there. We're going from RVs and tents to permanent structures. It's important to localize them and limit the number of them."

While the trailers are wheeled onto a property and previously have been considered temporary structures, many people see them as permanent buildings hooked to electrical and sewage systems. If they are deemed permanent buildings, installing them at campgrounds would require a change of use under land development regulations.

On Tuesday, commissioners crafted more than 20 restrictions related to owner Harry Washut's request to bring trailers onto his property, but they postponed a vote on the entire application.

Commissioners said they wanted to allow Washut and other representatives of the resort time to review and respond to their proposed restrictions.

"This is far more than we can respond to right now," said Jerry Brown, who spoke on behalf of Washut.

Brown made the comment after listening to commissioners come up with all of their proposed restrictions.

Commissioners said they would work with Brown and Washut to determine when they will meet again and finalize a decision about the campground.

Commissioners agreed that trailers should be placed on the center of the campground and that Washut should have to develop a landscaping plan to screen the trailers from the highway.

Commissioners also agreed that Washut should treat sewage at the site using one, central treatment plant instead of the numerous systems being used now. One condition also proposed limiting trailer use to short-term stays. Other conditions would require that the units be owned by a single entity and that outstanding permit violations on the Buffalo Valley property be addressed.

'Year-round motel operation'

Phibbs unsuccessfully lobbied for a seasonal restriction limiting when the trailers could be used. He said allowing year-round use drastically changes what historically has been allowed at the property.

"We're creating a year-round motel operation where one did not exist," he said.

Other commissioners, however, said piling too many restrictions on the campground would run the business into the ground.

"There are so many limitations on there already," Commissioner Paul Perry said. "This would be the nail in the coffin."

Brown said two conditions discussed Tuesday immediately jumped out at him. He said he likely would challenge the ones restricting the resort to 27 trailers and requiring that the campground be served by a single

sewer treatment plant.

"It seems that the consensus of this board is that it does not favor [recreational park trailers] in Buffalo Valley," Brown said.

Washut's application marks the third time a landowner has pressed for trailers on campgrounds. County officials approved a request from Snake River KOA owner Bud Chatham to bring 27 onto his property and, through a settlement agreement, allowed Jamie Mackay 26 on the Jackson Hole Campground.

Washut filed his initial application in February. At the time, planning commissioners recommended that he be allowed to bring 86 recreational park trailers onto his 19-acre property, which currently has 164 RV sites, 30 tent sites, 16 cabins, five group tent sites, four employee housing units, two existing recreational park trailer sites, a gas station, a general store, a laundromat and a bath house.

A challenge to the application was filed by an attorney representing the owners of the neighboring Hatchet Ranch. The appeal primarily questioned the land-use review process used by county staff.

Washut withdrew that application in July and submitted a new one later that month, after county staffers changed the rules that outline the way they should review planning applications. In addition, county commissioners are slated to review in January new rules expected to govern recreational park trailers.

Sewer issues raised

Numerous valley residents have hammered Washut for his history of alleged sewer violations.

One septic system has failed, and county staffers have said two additional systems likely do not meet requirements for separating septic systems from streams, creeks and rivers.

Washut has been the subject of several investigations, including one in 1998 by federal prosecutors about whether the campground was dumping raw sewage into the Buffalo Fork river, which was designated in 2009 as a Wild and Scenic River, according to previous county staff reports.

This year, state officials cited Washut for completing a sewer system without a permit.

County staff members also have said in previous reports that they were unable to find permits for numerous structures on the property, including cabins, recreational park trailers and two sheds.

Washut and his representatives have adamantly denied any wrongdoing and have said they are working with state officials to correct any lingering problems. They said they have built a brand-new sewer treatment plant at the campground that is capable of treating roughly 20,000 gallons per day.

Residents also have criticized the application for taking a backdoor approach to pursuing a change in zoning, saying approval of the request would be tantamount to allowing a motel in Buffalo Valley.

"Creating what is essentially a mobile home park in a wet area where no development should ever have been allowed, without proper infrastructure, along a popular and scenic gateway to Jackson Hole, in the middle of one of the most scenic valleys in the United States, maybe even in the world, would be a lasting mistake," Story Clark said in an email to commissioners.

Supporters of the application have said Washut serves a critical function in the Buffalo Valley and is one of last outposts for visitors traveling to and from Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks.

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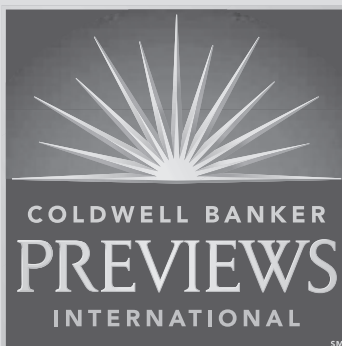
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