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# Structures or not? Trailers a gray area

Commissioners raise new questions about recreational park units on campgrounds.

By Kevin Huelsmann

Several Teton County commissioners on Tuesday further muddled the issue of campground owners installing recreational park trailers on their valley properties.

Toward the end of a hearing that lasted more than two and a half hours, commissioners questioned whether the trailers should be regulated as structures, a concern that could fundamentally shift how the units have been perceived by the county.

"We have to address these as structures," County Commissioner Hank Phibbs said. "I think we made an error not treating them as such and dealing with the consequences of that. I don't know what else those things are."

County Commission Chairman Ben Ellis also urged commissioners to address the issue, but he stopped short of declaring them structures.

"We need to have more of a discussion about whether or not these are structures," he said.

The question is one that has plagued county staff and commissioners since last year, when campground owners began submitting applications to bring the units onto their properties.

So far, the applications have been addressed piecemeal.

Snake River KOA owner Bud Chatham was allowed to bring 27 of the units to his campground after seeking special permission.

In contrast, Jackson Hole Campground owner Jamie Mackay was allowed to bring 26 of the vehicles onto his west bank property after ignoring the approval process and later signing a settlement with the county.

Attorney Larry Jorgenson, a former county commissioner, said the trailer approval process has become "jumbled and tortured" and has instilled a perception in many valley residents, perhaps falsely, that the county has failed to take action against landowners who ignore their rules.

"You seem to be rewarding the flouting of the rules or regulations of this county, ultimately resulting in success," Jorgenson said, urging county officials to explain their rationale and address the seemingly weak measures they have taken.

## County delays decision on Buffalo Valley trailers

Teton County commissioners on Tuesday postponed a decision about whether to allow Buffalo Valley RV Resort owner Harry Washut to bring recreational park trailers onto his property.

Though they outlined the outstanding issues related to Washut's application for 140 trailers, they had to conclude the meeting before reaching a decision.

Commissioners said they need more information about Washut's plans to handle sewage from the trailers, including information about his current waste system, which has several failing septic tanks.

County officials also said they needed more time to digest information that was presented for the first time Tuesday, including a potential plan for a new sewage treatment system and data outlining options for how many trailers to allow.

They said they planned to confer with planning staff in coming weeks to hash out a variety of questions, including whether to restrict the times of year campground owners are able to rent out the trailers, how to address ownership concerns for the trailers and whether trailers and the campgrounds fit with the direction being taken in the latest version of a long-term land-use plan for the valley.

Commissioners postponed a vote on the issue because County Deputy Attorney Nicole Krieger and County Commission Chairman Ben Ellis both had to leave the hearing due to other obligations.

Commissioners are expected to take up Washut's application during a meeting later this month.

A staff report outlining his request is available at [www.tetonwyo.org](http://www.tetonwyo.org) or at the county planning department.

The trailers fall in a regulatory gray area, somewhere between recreational vehicles and structures. While the trailers are intended to stay at campgrounds indefinitely, several department heads have been reluctant to regulate them as full-blown structures, a distinction that carries with it a host of building and fire code requirements.

Being designated a structure also might require commissioners to rezone campgrounds to allow for lodging to accommodate future requests, county staff said Tuesday.

While Phibbs' comments were not wholly dismissed, most commissioners focused their attention on the application in front of them Tuesday.

See **TRAILERS** on 15A

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**PLAN**

*Continued from 14A*

Downtown, just off Town Square, planners are calling for commercial uses, such as bars, restaurants and retail shops, to be located in building's first floors. Office, residential and lodging should be located on the upper floors of buildings, planners said in the maps.

Planning staff also expanded the area where lodging is allowed. If approved, the maps would permit short-term lodging rentals in buildings to the five-way intersection, where Broadway, Pearl Avenue and Flat Creek Avenue converge.

In east Jackson, along Broadway, the maps call for more mixed-use development that could provide services to nearby residents.

Elected officials have said having densely developed areas should help cut down on traffic and promote the use of alternative transportation.

Outside downtown Jackson, the maps identify Wilson and the Aspens as appropriate for redevelopment but do not target them for much more development. The maps also call for some development in the northwest portion of South Park. Planners said the area, if developed, should look similar to adjacent neighborhoods. They added that the area should not be a first choice for new development but is suitable because of nearby amenities, such as schools, pathways and retail shops.

In coming weeks, planning staff are expected to release data outlining how much development is permitted under current land-use rules.

Elected officials have agreed to limit future development to what is currently allowed.

Though the statistics are not expected to detail growth in specific parts of the valley, they should provide some context about the number

of new homes and amount of commercial space that has been approved, but not yet built.

Planners also are expected to start detailing how they plan to carry out all of the studies and research called for in the land-use document.

In their latest analysis of the comprehensive plan update, staff from the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance continued to press planners to offer up specifics and start researching how they plan to carry out the policies included in the latest version of the document.

"The alliance recognizes that the comp plan serves primarily as an aspirational document that outlines the primary goals of the community, but doesn't resolve how we will actually achieve those goals," alliance Executive Director Trevor Stevenson said in a Nov. 30 letter to elected officials.

Stevenson urged officials to begin working to develop specific tools to shift development from the rural parts of the county to already developed areas, one of the key tenets of the comprehensive plan. In addition, he asked planners to try to find a permanent funding source to protect open space and wildlife habitat and to develop a plan to improve natural resource regulations.

The maps are part of the last phase of elected officials' review of the comprehensive plan.

After the open house today, town and county officials are expected to meet in January with planning commissioners to start assembling and reviewing the final version of the document.

Town and county officials will meet with members of their respective planning commissions separately and then reconvene at the end of January.

In March, members of both entities are scheduled to approve the final version of the land-use plan.

**TRAILERS**

*Continued from 19A*

Commissioners were reviewing a request from Buffalo Valley RV Resort owner Harry Washut to bring 140 trailers to his property (see box on 10A for details).

Planning Commission Chairman Mark Newcomb last month also questioned why the trailers are not being regulated as structures.

During a Nov. 28 meeting, he said the trailers basically function as permanent structures but are not required to meet any of the rules that govern those kinds of units, which could pose safety risks.

Though some campground owners already have been allowed to bring the trailers onto their properties, the questions surrounding the units continue to mount.

Planning commissioners just ap-

proved a new set of rules for the trailers late last month but continued to raise questions and concerns about the units even after they approved the rules.

While reviewing previous applications and the new rules, county officials have struggled to define the units and figure out a way to address all of the potential impacts caused by the trailers.

County staff have questioned whether the units should be required to meet employee housing standards and follow building and fire codes.

Even on Tuesday, months after county officials started reviewing applications for the trailers and writing rules for them, new information was still coming forward.

County staff received information about how much sewage the trailers might generate and how that waste should be handled.

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