

County grapples with rules on trailers

Commissioners mull zoning, lodging restrictions.

By Kevin Huelsmann

Several Teton County commissioners on Tuesday suggested new restrictions to limit where recreational park trailers can be used and raised more questions about whether the units should be regulated like hotel rooms.

Commissioners asked planners to research whether the county can limit recreational park trailers to a specific zoning district, called the business conservation district. If implemented, the restriction would reduce the areas where campground owners could place the trailers, as some campgrounds straddle more than one zoning district.

"It's a matter of finding the right fit for the [recreational park trailers] and the associated uses of those," Commission Chairman Ben Ellis said. "They are more like lodging; in fact, they are lodging, and because of that they should be treated to a regulatory process like lodging, in a zone that allows that."

Ellis said he was concerned that the proposed set of rules being reviewed by the board on Tuesday left the door open for landowners to develop new clusters of trailers in rural parts of the county.

"Right now, in theory, you could take one and park it in a driveway," Ellis said. "By clarifying the definition of a [recreational park trailer] and saying where it can be used, we're also saying where it can't be used."

At issue are hard-sided trailers built on chassis that can be wheeled into campgrounds, where they are attached to electrical and sewer hookups. Some offer full kitchens, bathrooms and bedrooms and resemble a small house.

The set of rules that came before commissioners would allow campground owners to bring the trailers onto their properties if they meet a specific set of parameters and pass a special permitting process.

Commissioners suggested allowing more traditional forms of camping, such as tents, in the rural parts of the county, while precluding recreational trailers in those areas.

"Our intent is not to have these pop up like mushrooms anywhere in the county," Commissioner Hank Phibbs said.

Commissioners held off from making a decision and scheduled another, more informal meeting for 9 a.m. Jan. 11.

The county's land-use rules do not address recreational park trailers, leaving commissioners to adopt a case-by-case approach to the applications they have received from owners of existing campgrounds over the past year.

County staff and various officials have struggled to define the trailers and whether they should be regulated as structures or as temporary vehicles, such as RVs. Planning staff opted to create a new category for the trailers, pulling standards that apply to structures and combining them with standards often applied to temporary vehicles.

Valley residents have challenged the new rules and questioned whether they allow campground owners to offer lodging units without having to meet all of the requirements typically applied to those types of rooms, such as employee housing fees and lodging tax payments.

Campground owners have questioned county authority and said they are trying to keep up with new trends and meet their customers' demands.

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