

Lake residents concerned with RV bylaw

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LACOMBE COUNTY- A number of lakeshore residents made their voices heard during a public hearing to discuss a bylaw that would govern RV resort developments within Lacombe County.

Changes to Lacombe County's land use bylaw concerning RV resort developments were brought before the public Thursday, after council opted to take out the RV section and deal with it as a separate bylaw, which passed first reading in April.

County officials have said the purpose of the new bylaw is to create a zoning that is specific to the condominium-style RV resorts, which are becoming increasingly popular.

Sunbreaker Cove Mayor Gib Clark was on hand at the hearing to express concerns over Skyy Country RV resort, which could see 423 RV lots built next to the summer village.

"It's too big," Clark said, also questioning the process the county has followed in introducing the amendments.

Closer to home, concerns have also been expressed over DeGraff's BuiltGreen resort, which is one of the first major RV resorts slated for the shores of Gull Lake.

After a number of concerns were brought forward by residents, developers put a lighter version of the plan on the table, which included 1,700 to 1,800 RV lots on the west side of the lake, near Sandy Point, with the number of daily rental lots being chopped 165, down from 194.

Project developers have also proposed to build Sandy Point Resort in phases and altered the design by removing one of the two proposed marinas and have also reduced the size of a commercial area that was to include a 1950s-style boardwalk with restaurants and other businesses.

And while restrictions on RV lots would be put in place under the proposed bylaw amendments, residents aren't convinced it's enough.

Cindy Girard, who has been active in lobbying for the protection of Gull Lake, said land-use bylaw changes would restrict over-development of individual lots in a resort, but not on the overall site.

"The issues are much larger than one development," she said. "The lack of having a plan in place that is adopted and followed by all municipalities that border the lake is a glaring error. There should be a guide for developments in watershed areas."

Girard, who has called Wilson's Beach home for the past two years, first became concerned with over-development around the lake after hearing about plans to build Wilson's Beach Estates.

"I'm not against development, that's not what I'm saying, but development needs to be responsible. We need to protect our lakes," she said. "If developers own land that will be automatically designated R-RVR, they are essentially given the green light to build marinas, community facilities, restaurants and campgrounds in addition to the RV resort itself. With all of these new discretionary uses, a developer could build a small town. That's not sustainable."

Girard said she is also concerned that the public review process could be hampered if developers end up with land that is already designated under the new amendments.

"I appreciate that public hearings take time, but they are an essential element of development management and planning."

Girard has been tracking her work to protect the lake on her blog, Gull Lake Life, and also started a petition, calling for an inter-municipal watershed development plan and a review of the Gull Lake Management Plan.

Council will revisit the proposed amendments and new bylaw at a future meeting before any changes are moved forward.

Council moves on Anderson Park

Cayley Dobie/Globe Staff

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Anderson Park is on its way to becoming Lacombe County's newest recreation area as county council unanimously passed the latest proposed Anderson Park design plan at their regular meeting June 28.

The proposed recreation plan involves four phases of development for the area between Wilson's Beach and New Saratoga. The phases include a walking trail, development of the beachfront and a grass park with picnic tables and ball diamonds.

This was the second design county staff had presented to council. After two public open houses some issues were brought to the attention of staff, which required modifications to the plan.

Members of the community had voiced their concerns about the possibility of an off-highway vehicle (OHV) trail that was originally going to run through the park. This has since been removed and the area will be designated a non-OHV area, said Dale Freitag, manager of planning services at Lacombe County.

There were also concerns that the increased traffic in the area would wear out the surrounding roads but that issue has been addressed as part of the county's long range plan, said Freitag.

However, these amendments to the original plan aren't enough for the Wilson's Beach Community Association (WBCA).

During the meeting June 28, council opened the floor to members of the public who wanted to ask more questions about the proposed recreation plan. About 20 people attended the public forum to ask questions and hear from council.

Cindy Girard attended the meeting as a representative of the WBCA and when she took her turn at the microphone, she voiced the group's concerns with the current perimeter of the planned recreation area.

The plan, as proposed in the concept approved by council, crosses into a municipal reserve that is maintained and used by members of the Wilson's Beach community.

We want this space to remain a green space, as it is now, to be used by the community, said Girard.

Despite her concerns, council voted in favour of the proposed recreation plan. It will move on to second and third readings at a later date.

But this doesn't mean that the plan is set in stone; there are still lots of opportunities for change, said Terry Hagar, county commissioner.

The flexibility will come in handy when the recreation plan goes into development as there is still much debate concerning the boat launch.

Some of the councillors were concerned that the phases didn't match up appropriately. The boat launch is intended for Phase 1 of the project, while the majority of parking would be built during subsequent phases.

In order to accommodate boat users traveling to the lake, there needs to be enough parking spaces therefore we need to see the parking lot construction moved into the first phase, said Brenda Knight.

Until construction begins, timing of the phases is still uncertain. Right now the county will go ahead with surveying the site and finding the funding to put the recreation plan into action.