

Committee approves airport permit

With list of conditions

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WASHBURN — Despite overwhelming testimony in opposition to a proposed airstrip in the Town of Russell, the Bayfield County Planning and Zoning Committee approved a conditional use permit for the runway and 20 hangars — with the caveat that all Department of Natural Resources, Federal Aviation Administration and Army Corps of Engineers regulations and permits be "completely satisfied" before the county zoning department issues a permit.

The Town of Russell Board had recommended Wednesday the conditional use permit be approved.

The application was made by CFS LLC, for a project formerly known as Shadow Wood Landing, now called Waypoint. The project, sited on 380 acres in the Town of Russell on Compton Road, is a proposal including 20-some residences served by the private runway.

CFS LLC Chief Executive Officer Annalisa Cariveau told the committee that she has significantly changed the airstrip plans, moving it from a low-lying spot where wetlands were impacted to the top of a hill, where there are fewer wetlands and where the flight patterns of incoming aircraft would avoid going over the City of Bayfield or neighboring farms as much as possible.

Steve Katke, an attorney for CFS LLC, said the airstrip is expected to have about 10 airplanes go in and out each week, and that they would be single-engine or light twin-engine planes — not commercial jets.

"Jets can't realistically use this runway," he said. "It's not similar to Ashland's John F. Kennedy airport, and it's not a public airport."

Still, 27 area residents — including two members of the Bayfield County Board — came to a public hearing to voice objections to the project and ask the conditional use permit be denied.

Many were nearby orchard owners — including the families who own Highland Valley, Blue Vista and North Wind Organic farm.

John Dale of Highland Valley, located a half-mile away, said the hill on which the runway and 60-by-60-foot hangars are to be sited is in plain view from his farm and he fears the negative impact the noise and traffic of an airstrip could have on his business.

Eric Carlson of Blue Vista farm, about two miles from the project, said simply, "Their business plan is in conflict with mine. I'm selling not just fruit, but an experience. I'm asking you to stick up for my right. You need to have confidence that any economic development isn't necessarily intelligent economic development. This contradicts the values of people in this area."

Others cited concerns about the negative impact the project could have on surrounding property values.

Russ Klinger, who lives adjacent to the 380-acre parcel asked the committee "not to be so dazzled that you don't use good judgment. They're talking about something they want — not something that is guaranteed."

Others were concerned about noise and its impact on the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, including Park Superintendent Bob Krumenaker, who wrote a letter outlining concerns about noise and low-level flights over the islands.

Grant Herman, who operates a kayak rental and guide service in the Town of Russell, also had

concerns that the wilderness of the Apostles would be negatively impacted by an airstrip.

Several of those present, including Bayfield County Board member Bill Bussey, pointed out the county is still embroiled in a lawsuit over zoning for the area that has been brought by a grass-roots group, Citizens for Responsible Land Use.

Bussey said he believed this project is unprecedented in that although it is located in the Town of Russell, it greatly impacts the residents in the Town of Bayfield "as much or more."

Bussey said he felt the Town of Russell Board voted against the will of the people.

"The people at this hearing are not a fringe minority," he said. "They are a solid majority."

Beth Meyers, who represents the Town of Russell on the Bayfield County Board, said she was concerned that there are many developments in the region that have been started and are sitting idle because of the depressed economy. She urged the board to wait until the lawsuit — scheduled for a February 2011 hearing — and any issues with the Department of Natural Resources had been resolved before making a decision on issuing permits.

After the public hearing portion of the meeting had been closed, the committee asked questions of DNR water specialist John Spangberg, who was in the audience.

Spangberg confirmed that moving the airstrip had cut the amount of wetlands affected by the project down to about eight-tenths of an acre.

He said he planned an extensive review of the site next Tuesday.

"I couldn't approve it now, they need to address the water flow, and it will take a lot of engineering to prove to me it can be done," he said. "Could I approve it today? No. But tomorrow (if engineering is properly planned)? Maybe."

The committee, including Brett Rondeau, Shawn Miller, Kenneth Jardine and Patti Rantala, voted unanimously for issuing the permit with the stipulations attached. Committee member Harold Maki was absent.

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