

'New lakeshore' plan stirs up Bayfield County

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A Twin Cities developer is eyeing 380 acres of forest land near Bayfield for a resort complex of vacation homes, condos, a hotel and restaurant — and a 4,800-foot private airstrip for its well-heeled patrons.

"Shadow Wood Landing" by CFS, LLC has secured the backing of the Town of Russell Board of Commissioners and the Bayfield County Planning and Zoning Committee. But it also has attracted the attention of neighbors and others who say the development is too big and out of character with the region's pastoral beauty.

"That land has been wild all my life, and it's zoned that way for a reason, to keep it that way," said Tom Galazen, 56, who owns a small farm less than a mile away on land settled by his grandparents. "This is the worst kind of example of what's called 'spot zoning,' where you change the zoning for a specific project. It's completely out of character with this area."



Opponents hope the full Bayfield County Board will lend a sympathetic ear to that argument on Sept. 30 when it takes up the CFS request to rezone the land from forestry and agriculture to agriculture,

residential/recreational, business and commercial use. The board also will have to consider the supporters' case — that the project will add to the region's tax base while providing a desirable place to live for tourists who fall in love with the Bayfield Peninsula and the nearby Apostle Islands.

At least one commissioner appears sold on the idea.

"Having a little private development that's done right isn't going to damage our environment," said David Good, Bayfield County commissioner for the area where the development is proposed.

Good said protected land — state or national forests, county land or national lakeshore — already accounts for 60 percent of the county.

The project's large, single-family homes would sit on the hilltop offering views of the lake. The airstrip would be in the valley along an old railroad grade. Condominiums, a hotel and tavern would be in between. Supporters say it would become a Mecca for snowmobilers, and developers estimate as many as 125 housing units could be built.

Local officials say the project, billed as an "exclusive residential development," is an indication of how desirable the region has become. That's especially true for private land with vistas of Lake Superior and the nearby islands, even if it isn't actually on the lakeshore.

"The new lakeshore lots are now up on the hill with a view of the lake," Good said. "There is no more developable land on the shore. So the hillside land is where the growth is."

Good said the proposal may be the best development option for the land. If the plan moves forward, developers will be required to keep at least 35 percent of the property — about 90 acres — undeveloped. And the developed area probably will be clustered.

“People want to recreate here and they want to live here. The question is, can we have logical development that fits in with our natural area. And I think we can do that,” Good said. “I’m going to vote in favor of it and speak in favor of it.”

The land was owned for years by Goodman Forest Products. But it recently was sold to a central Wisconsin logger who clear-cut thousands of old-growth oak trees at once and then immediately put the land up for sale.

CFS bought the land and approached the Town Board in February with the development idea.

“They’ve been very upfront with us. This is going to be a phased-in project over 10 or 15 years. If it happens, it’s not going up overnight,” Good said.

That still may be too soon for some opponents.

“It amazes me that the county is willing to accommodate and welcome these developers that we really don’t know anything about,” Galazen said. “We don’t know about their other work or any track record. I think we deserve to know more.”

Representatives of Minneapolis-based CFS did not return telephone calls or e-mails from the News Tribune. On its Web site, the company describes itself as a real estate holding company and developer of “unique properties with hidden potential and exclusive destination value for target niche markets.”