

Shame on the Bayfield County Zoning Committee

Letter to the editor

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Is it any wonder that people feel so alienated from and disgusted by their government officials? The public hearing before the Bayfield County Planning and Zoning Committee on Thursday regarding the CFS LLC fly-in airport resort in the backwoods of the Town of Russell was a case in point. It was an astonishing display of arrogance and contempt by elected officials for the people they purport to represent.

The meeting opened with a brief presentation by the out-of-state applicant of a completely new project – now called Waypoint rather than Shadow Wood Landing — from the one previously approved (and still in litigation). It was supported only by the applicant's big-city lawyer and two speakers from outside the Town of Russell. These latter two made no reference to the project itself, but simply extolled the tiresome and cliché virtues of so-called "economic development" and dismissed the roomful of some 60 project opponents as dishonest "boo-birds" (whatever that means).

They were followed by 27 – 27! — speakers opposed to the project who struggled to squeeze into their three-minute slots articulate and impassioned pleas to consider the negative impacts of this project upon their lives, their businesses, the Pike's Creek watershed and the special appeal of life on the Bayfield Peninsula. The speakers – overwhelmingly residents of the Towns of Russell and Bayfield – were business people, farmers, wage-earners, contractors, retirees and others. Their carefully researched and fact-based presentations – each sharply cut-off at the three-minute mark – showed clearly that the project does not conform to the town comprehensive plan and fails to meet minimal health, safety and quality of life requirements. Even the local county board supervisors Bill Bussey (Bayfield) and Beth Meyers (Russell) spoke adamantly against the project.

And what was the response of the committee – Brett Rondeau (Cable), Patti Rantala (Iron River), Kenneth Jardine (Port Wing), and Shawn Miller (Mason) – all from areas far removed from the project site? They sat stony faced and indifferent. Their attitudes reeked of impatience for the process as well as contempt for those who appeared to testify. Their attention was riveted upon the three-minute stopwatch. They asked not one question! They made not one comment! Aside from a weary, pro forma "thank you" from time to time there was not even the expression of graciousness that one might expect to hear for such a display of citizen participation in government. Nothing! Time's up! Good riddance!

It was an ugly and disgraceful display of arrogant government officials acting as if the people work for them rather than the other way around. They ignored and dismissed the concerns of profoundly involved citizens. They steamrolled the views of the supervisors who actually represent the affected districts. They looked like country bumpkins dazzled by the showiness of big-city development waifs and big-city lawyers. They rolled over to the wishes of a tiny cadre of town movers and shakers with personal financial stakes in the project. That's what Bayfield County government has come to. Shame!

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Town of Bayfield