

Ashland Daily Press 9/17/2008

TOWN OF RUSSELL DEVELOPMENT RAISES QUESTIONS, OPPOSITION

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Published: Wednesday, September 17, 2008 10:34 AM CDT

Zoning changes in a 380-acre parcel on the Bayfield Peninsula that could eventually lead to the construction of condominiums and a private airstrip have sparked concerns not just within the Town of Russell, where the project is planned, but also in the adjacent Town of Bayfield.

The project, proposed by a Minneapolis-based group called CFS-LLC, is known as "Shadow Wood Landing" and has been a regular topic of conversation at Town of Russell meetings since February, said Town Clerk Dave Good. Representing the firm has been company Chief Executive Officer and President Annalisa Cariveau.

"She has pretty much been on the agenda every month since then," Good said.

The firm describes itself on their Web site as a real estate land holding company with a focus on aviation, marine, resort and residential development properties.

"CFS seeks to identify unique real estate development opportunities that are targeted towards various niche markets that have outstanding revenue potential," the Web site says.

The site says the firm is privately held.

Goodman Forest products formerly owned the tract in question. The firm has been in the process of selling off all their lands in northwest Wisconsin, and sold it to a logger from central Wisconsin who then logged off all the merchantable timber and sold the property to CFS.

Good said Cariveau then came to the town board with the Shadow Wood Landing proposal.

"Everything so far has been conceptual," said Good. "They requested to change the zoning on the property as part of that."

The Town of Russell has given its approval to plans to change zoning on the parcel from Agricultural 1 and Forestry 1 to Commercial and Residential-Recreational Business as a preliminary step towards making the project a reality.

"Their proposal" and they haven't requested any permits for it, they have only asked to change the zoning" is to put in an airstrip that would parallel Compton Road," Good said. "They are very interested, because they are on the snowmobile trail, in putting in a bar or restaurant and then eventually building some motel/hotel units and possibly some condo units."

Good said the plan was to cater to a "fairly upscale" clientele that was seeking an easy way to get in and out of the area. He said the airstrip would be private, not open to the public, and would begin as a grass strip, move up to gravel and potentially eventually be paved.

Good said the strip would be similar to one already located in the Town of Russell near the Gillnet Tug Restaurant. He said CFS has applied to the Wisconsin Bureau of Aeronautics for airstrip approval.

"That is in the works; the town was notified by the Aeronautics Division of the Department of Transportation about that," he said.

Good said in keeping with the town's development overlay, plans for development, including condominiums and other features, would have to be done as a cluster, with large areas of the property set aside as non-developable in a conservation easement.

Although the County Zoning Committee has already passed the zoning change, the full County Board must also approve it. The board will take up the matter at their September 30 session.

Meanwhile, opposition to the planned development appears to be mounting. On Monday, a large number of residents from the towns of Bayfield and Russell attended the meeting of the Town of Bayfield Board, with several speaking about impacts on both towns caused by the development.

According to Town of Bayfield Chairman Tom Gordon, the Town Board agreed to ask the Bayfield County Board to table the zoning change until Town of Bayfield officials could research the project's impacts.

"We need to find out more about it," he said, noting that the project may actually have greater impact on the Town of Bayfield than on the Town of Russell. "It's right on our border, and most people in the Town of Russell are several miles away from it."

Gordon, who also serves on the Bayfield County Board, agreed that it was quite unusual for one town to seek to become involved in a project taking place in another town.

"All we can do is ask," he said. "The county board doesn't have to grant our request; that's up to them," he said.

Those who question the development will likely take their concerns to the Bayfield County Board meeting where the zoning change gets its final scrutiny.

One of those with questions is former Bayfield County Board member Tom Frizzell.

"When the land use plan was created in the Town of Bayfield, the whole community was surveyed, and the top priority in the survey results was to maintain the character of the town. We feel this development, with the prospect of jet planes, is totally outside that area," he said.

Frizzell said noise caused by aircraft operations would have an impact on existing businesses, including fruit farms, that sell an atmosphere of tranquility as well as apples and berries.

"What they sell is not only the fruit they have available, but the ambience of the solitude and quiet of the orchards and berry patches where people are picking," he said.

He said this was not simply a case of "not in my backyard."

"Unless you stand up to them, the developers just run roughshod over the locals," he said.

Frizzell said there had also been no background investigation on the developers, or on environmental or infrastructure issues.

"None of that has been discussed at all," he said. "We think that there is a lot that needs to be brought forward before it gets approval."

Efforts over several days to contact Annalisa Cariveau or other CFS company officials were unsuccessful.

Even if the county board approves the zoning change, the project has a long way to go before it becomes a reality.

According to Bayfield County Zoning Administrator Karl Kastrosky, CFS will need to seek a conditional use permit and other approvals to proceed with the development.

"This project is still at a very early stage," he said.