
Mount Sunapee expansion largely opposed at public hearing

By NANCY A. CAVANAUGH | May 07, 2015

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NEWBURY — The lodge at Mount Sunapee was teeming with residents from around the region as the Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED) held a public hearing for the proposed expansion of the ski area. The hearing was led by Nate Miller, executive director of the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission, and Jeff Rose, commissioner of DRED.

After introductions were made, Rose addressed the 200 or so people gathered at the main lodge.

"This has been quite a process, a journey. We had a public hearing in August. We received 300 comments. We cataloged the information and put it on the website. We took those comments to heart," he said. "We wanted to be as honest and open as possible. We gave a detailed response, which is available on the website.

"Things have changed. We wanted to have a second comment period for 50 days," he continued. "There's one month left from today — June 5. You can submit your comments by writing, email and speaking tonight."

Rose then gave an overview of the changes made to the original plan, including changes to the trail layout and size of the chair lift going over an area referred to as Polygon D, as well as mitigation that will add 260 acres of protected lands that will be wholly owned by the state.

During the public hearing, 81 of the more than 150 people in attendance spoke. They were each allowed two minutes to express their opinion. Of those who spoke, 59 were opposed and 21 were in favor. One speaker didn't offer an opinion either way, he simply wanted to make sure the hiking trails were addressed in the final draft and that something would be done to ensure the trails were maintained by others, not just a dwindling pool of volunteers.

Opposed

By a margin of more than 2:1, the majority of the speakers were opposed to the project. They questioned the legality of the destruction of areas that have been designated exemplary forests for their unique nature, including old growth and rare species of red spruce trees.

Concerns over the environmental impacts of the construction and use of the land, the loss of hiking trails, the dubious economic benefits to the area, additional expenditures by the towns and the threat of condominiums were also expressed.

Holly Flanders, a two time Olympian who was the director of skiing at Park City Mountain Resort in Utah, spoke against the draft plan.

“I learned how to ski right here,” she said. “I am against the expansion. The locals are asking, ‘What have we done?’ and questioning the quality of life here. Does it raise the quality of life for many or for a few?”

A 15-year-old from New London was also against the expansion.

“It is not going to do anything to get my peers to come here. We think it is the stupidest idea out there,” he said.

Jennifer Shay of Sunapee was one of a few who shared their thoughts on the public comment process.

“I feel like you’re just going through the motions, that this is already a done deal. It fails in so many ways. If condos come to Goshen, it will be on your watch,” she said.

Jim Carrick of Goshen commented on the town’s need to hire a second police officer.

“We have 850 people in town and one police officer. With the proposed parking lot we estimate that will account for 1,000 people. We would have to hire a second police officer. The \$90,000 of revenues Goshen will get will be for a second police officer.”

Supported

While those who support the expansion were outnumbered, they spoke passionately about why they felt the expansion should happen. Many of them said they believe it is a balanced compromise.

Drew Kellnor, who lives in Brookline but winters in Sunapee, was the first speaker.

“I support the expansion. My mother was born and raised in New London. She taught skiing and was skiing decades before there were ski lifts. This is conservation rather than preservation,” he said.

Joe Meyer of Greenfield agreed.

“I’m in favor of the expansion and the balanced approach. You have to have a sensitivity to the environment and have to figure out how to bring the land to more people. This does just that.” Greenfield said.

Fred Smith of Goshen held up a picture taken from his front yard.

“I have the most dramatic view in town of the West Bowl. I strongly support the expansion. I want to see ski slopes there in my lifetime,” he said.

Others, like Janet Kruger of Newbury, expressed their frustration over how long the process has taken.

“I want to thank the commission for their well thought out plan. The time to act is now so we can get on with our lives,” she said.

What now?

The public comment period is open until June 5. Those who are interested in making a comment can mail them to DRED or email them to mountsunapeecomments@dred.nh.gov.

Rose, who will be considering the public comments before making a final draft

decision, said, “I don’t have a timeline for the final draft.”

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Comments (0)

Staff Profile



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I'm a resident of Keene. I was an editor at *The Keene Sentinel* and *Parent Express*, covering Cheshire, NH and Windham, VT counties. Before that, I was a reporter and editor in northern New Jersey. I enjoy covering town news and interacting with people. You can follow me on Twitter at [@NCavanaugh_ET](#).

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