

Mount Sunapee Advisory Committee Meeting

October 26, 2004

Mount Sunapee Resort at Mount Sunapee State Park, Spruce Lodge

Committee Members present:

Commissioner Sean O’Kane, Committee Chairman

Melanie Bell-Harrington, Town of Goshen

Lionel Chute, Division of Forest and Lands

Jack Diemar, New London-Lake Sunapee Region Chamber of Commerce

Tim Drew, Department of Environmental Services

Rich McLeod, Division of Parks and Recreation

Nancy Marashio, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests

Phil O’Brien, Lake Sunapee Protective Association

Dan Wolf, Town of Newbury

Mount Sunapee Resort present: Tim Mueller and Jay Gamble.

DRED staff present: Torene Tango-Lowy, Committee clerk.

Welcome and Introductions Commissioner O’Kane called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. Committee members introduced themselves. Commissioner O’Kane stated the MSAC purpose.

Minutes Dan Wolf motioned to accept the July 13, 2004 minutes. Rich McLeod seconded. Motion carries.

Old Business

MSAC Status Commissioner O’Kane reported that he received Governor Benson’s approval to continue the Mount Sunapee Advisory Committee and for the appointments of Tara Bamford, UVLSRPC, and of Melanie Bell-Harrington, Town of Goshen.

New Business

MDP/EMP 2005-2009 Commissioner O’Kane has received written comments from LSPA, Town of Goshen, UVLSRPC, SPNHF, and DOT. Commissioner O’Kane asked for comments from each member. Nancy Marashio said SPNHF is against the lease expansion because it does not support the park mission of conservation; there is no compelling need for expansion; the public benefit is not clear; the expansion would be a conversion and major change in policy; and the expansion would set a precedent. Park policy should go through the legislative process.

Melanie Bell-Harrington said the Town of Goshen does not have enough information; they are concerned about traffic; Mount Sunapee Resort had asked the town to establish recreation overlay district zoning, but it was rejected by the board.

Lionel Chute said it would not be appropriate for the Division of Forests and Lands to have an opinion; but that the division provides scientific, objective information about natural communities to DRED and the committee. The Natural Heritage Bureau has studied the proposed expansion area and will report on its results in the next two weeks.

Rich McLeod said that many know of his personal opinion on the lease expansion, but that his official position will be based upon Commissioner O’Kane’s decision.

Dan Wolf said the Town of Newbury opposes the lease expansion because there is no state policy on leasing public lands; the town has general concerns about state actions within the town (boat access at the Wild Goose property); and the town did not foresee ski facilities expansion beyond the current leasehold boundary.

Jack Diemar said the Chamber of Commerce will leave the environmental issues to the experts; if the expansion is approved, there are no better people than the Muellers to implement the project.

Tim Drew provided written comment from DES, dated October 18, 2004. He thanked the Muellers for their working with DES and for responsible development. DES written comment covers three areas: a) the current leasehold; b) the proposed lease expansion; and c) the proposed residential development. DES' role is as a neutral and objective processor of environmental permitting. DES encourages "smart growth," as state agencies are directed by RSA 9-B; however, the residential development remains under local decision-making. DES will work with all department levels and the Resort to assist with any proposed development.

Phil O'Brien said the LSPA views the MDP/EMP as guiding documents. An independent EIS would serve as a basis for decision making because it includes the long- and short-term effects of the project, project alternatives, and additional public process. The LSPA is not for or against the expansion proposal, but an EIS would provide complete information for a decision.

Commissioner O'Kane asked the Resort for comments. Tim Mueller said that a "no action" project alternative would jeopardize the Resort's economic viability. The proposed expansion provides social and economic public benefits, including employment, fees to the state, and taxes to the local communities.

Melanie Bell-Harrington urged Commissioner O'Kane to consider the expansion issue as a whole, beyond the parkland. Goshen is a small town: the legal costs of expansion will be overwhelming and the impact huge without assistance to the town. By comparison, VT Act250 assists VT towns with state funded building inspectors. Resort growth will fundamentally change the town. Commissioner O'Kane stated that, although the state does not have jurisdiction over private development, he recognizes the importance of providing assistance. Senator Bob O'Dell is working to bring town leaders together with the Resort to identify specific issues to address. All parties need to come together as a collaborative effort.

Jay Gamble said that the Resort has agreed to phase the development of the real estate. Also, site plan review before the local boards will provide details of the conceptual proposals. The MDP is the first step for planning; the site plan review process provides the plan details. The Resort is committed to working with the towns in bringing the site plans to a mutually agreed upon final plan. Commissioner O'Kane stated that state agencies, including DES and DOT, are willing and obligated to assist the towns in addressing specific issues and regulations.

Nancy Marashio said SPNHF is concerned about the public benefit of expansion, the setting of public policy, and that State Parks is in a financial bind. The state needs to step up to its obligation to State Parks and the issue needs to be on the table. Dan Wolf said that nothing negative has been said about Mount Sunapee operations; the opposition is regarding the next step for operations.

Phil O'Brien asked Jay Gamble about the VT Act250 comparison. Jay Gamble said the Resort created a simple spreadsheet, but the Resort is following the lease requirements. The additional studies included in the MDP/EMP are similar to the categories of Act250. The studies address some long-term effects of development. Tim Mueller said the lease was authorized by legislation and the RFP required expansion proposals. The Resort has followed the state's process for consideration of the expansion proposal. The Resort would be the only private business in New Hampshire that is asked to do an EIS on property that is not federal land.

Tim Drew asked about the National Park Service review under the LWCF program. Rich McLeod said the residential development would not be part of the review. Commissioner O'Kane said LWCF review encompasses the recreational aspects.

Lionel Chute clarified for the record Natural Heritage Bureau's study of the area. In 1998, NHB studied the leasehold area for rare plants, exemplary natural communities, and old growth forest characteristics. NHB completed a more detailed study of the East Bowl area in 2001. NHB is completing its study of the leasehold expansion area. They maintain the database on plants and wildlife, but NHB does not have the in-house expertise on wildlife – that rests with NH F&G.

Nancy Marashio said that UVLSRPC comments had also been received; they do not recommend approval of the lease expansion.

Mount Sunapee Resort Update Jay Gamble reports that snowmaking may begin November 18-19; with opening on Friday, November 26. The Alpine Race Hut will be ready for the start of programs, December 5. Job fairs for winter hires begin this week. The Resort anticipates a total number of employees of approximately 700, with over 500 employees onsite during peak operating days.

Next Meeting Date Commissioner O'Kane will call a meeting when he has additional information to report to the committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 a.m.

The next meeting is at the call of the Chairman.

Minutes submitted by Torene Tango-Lowy.