

Marina neighbours worried about wells

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Plans by an Algonquin Highlands marina to expand its operation are rocking the boat for some of its neighbours.

Rob Walisser operates Old Mill Marina on Kawagama Lake east of Dorset and wants to construct a new boat storage building.

The project, which would include the construction of a 90-square-metre building 10 metres in height on 12.5-acre property near the marina, was approved in principle by Algonquin Highlands council in January.

It would require changing the lot from rural residential to recreational commercial zoning.

Walisser said demand for boat storage at his facility has outgrown capacity and that the new building would allow him to double his storage capacity from about 140 to about 280 boats.

Hugh Reynolds lives on Russell Landing Road, where the marina is located, and has for the past 10 years.

Reynolds's home is located on a lot between the marina and the lot where Walisser wants to build his new building and told the Times he and other residents of the neighbourhood have serious concerns about the proposed project.

"There is a group of us here that have issues with it," Reynolds said, adding that these issues include increased noise and traffic and related safety concerns, oil and gas spillage in an area where people rely on wells for drinking water and destruction of natural habitat.

"It sort of plunders the natural serenity of the lake," he said.

Walisser though, said there would be very little spillage of gas and oil.

"We are Clean Marine-certified," he said, explaining that there are codes of conduct he must follow.

Walisser said since his business operates five days a week and since boat storage and removal occur mainly in the spring and fall, he didn't think the traffic increase would be dramatic.

He said about two acres of the 12.5-acre lot would have to be cleared to allow for the construction of the building and added he would try to make sure damage to the area's sprawling deciduous forest was minimal.

While Reynolds said he plans to show the project would decrease area property values and contravenes the township's official plan, Walisser said he plans to prove the expansion would have no impact on area property values and maintains the proposed project is completely within the guidelines of the official plan and added that the zoning changes would be site specific, allowing boat storage and nothing more.

Walisser said that he has sent letters to his neighbours inviting them to come and talk about his proposed project, but has received no response.

Walisser provided copies of those letters to the Times.

Reynolds said he and other area residents preferred not to speak directly to Walisser.

Algonquin Highlands' clerk and planner said she planned to schedule a public hearing on the matter for May 6.