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Old Mill Marina Proposal Faces Opposition

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By: Liz Danielsen

Word that a new boat storage facility to enhance the Old Mill Marina's operation is being considered on Russell Landing Road along Kawagama Lake has reached some of the local cottagers and the proposal is not sitting well with them. Despite the fact that representatives from the Kawagama Lake Cottagers' Association have indicated that there are no major concerns about the development, it has become apparent that association members in attendance at a Council meeting weren't speaking on behalf of all of the cottagers in the area. Late in January Rob Walisser of the Old Mill Marina presented a proposal to the Algonquin Highlands Council. At the same time Council also received a planning report from Greg Corbett of Planscape providing comments and recommendations. In the report Corbett wrote that the owner had advised that he requires additional storage given an ever increasing demand for the service from cottages on a number of local lakes. The marina owners have requested a rezoning of an approximate 12 acre parcel of land along Russell Landing Road from Rural to Commercial and to clear an area sufficient to construct a 10,000 square foot, 35 foot high storage building and land for trailer storage. While the municipality's Official Plan calls for the preservation and promotion of the rural character of the area it also allows for commercial ventures that are related to outdoor recreation and makes specific reference to boat storage. Corbett advised Council that the development is compatible with the character of the area and that adequate water, sewer, parking and loading facilities as well as landscaping could be provided on site. During the meeting it became apparent that there could be one hitch to the development. Any commercial

development is required to front on a year round municipally owned and maintained road. While the municipality does maintain Russell Landing Road, it remains a private road. A number of questions were raised about this during the meeting and Clerk Angie Bird agreed to seek a legal opinion for a subsequent meeting. During their discussions, Council made suggestions about increasing the setbacks and leaving substantial buffer zones. As several members of the lake association (one of which was Chuck MacDonald) were present at the meeting, Reeve Eleanor Harrison inquired whether the membership had any issues with the development and she was assured that there were not. Concerns were voiced by both Deputy Reeve Tom Gardner and Councillor Diane Griffin about the need to acquire the road if the development was to proceed and the fact that their decision could be precedent setting. Despite a number of outstanding questions, the Council supported the development in principal. Since that time Bird has advised the County Voice that a number of restrictions will apply to the rezoning. First, the property's use will be restricted to boat storage. In response to comments by Council and a recommendation by Corbett, setback requirements will be increased to 15 metres for the side yards and to 35 metres for the front yard. Another recommendation is that boat storage will be restricted to 50 percent of the lot area and outside storage will have to be screened from adjacent properties, the road and other buildings by either vegetation or fencing. Even though Corbett's suggested that the development will not detract from the character of the area, at least six full time residents and a number of seasonal cottagers do not agree. Hugh Reynolds, a permanent resident, says that the area to be developed is fully forested and a very tranquil area and that up until now boat storage has been limited to either end of their stretch of road. "All of a sudden the marina wants to develop a large boat storage facility smack bang in the middle of this quiet residential area," he said. To Reynolds the negative impact on the surrounding residences and cottages will be devastating in terms of noise, traffic and safety for children and families walking along the narrow road. According to Reynolds, the land will be cleared, the ground generally levelled, traffic will increase, boats will be brought up a narrow bending road and there will be a problems with water runoff. "There's also the question of spillage; we have wells in the area with excellent water. Suddenly all this is being foisted on us." Reynolds said that a group of permanent residents and cottagers have hired Lanny Dennis, a professional planner with Wayne Simpson and Associates out of Huntsville, to represent them at the public hearing scheduled for May 6th. "It's our position that the development doesn't gel with what the OP says," Reynolds said, adding that the group sent a submission in to the Reeve and Council last week. Even though Council was leaning towards restricting the property to boat storage alone, Reynolds suggested that it would only be a matter of time and ultimately storage would not be limited to boats. "Both of the marinas here have ATV's and snowmobiles that roar around the place and go to the marinas for service," he said, adding that the Old Mill Marina already has boat storage at their existing facility and they should simply expand that. As to the private road, Reynolds said, "That's one of those tricky things that calls for lawyers and surveyors." Putting all those concerns aside, Reynolds'

greatest concern is the reduction in land value for those properties in close proximity to the storage area. He also greatly enjoys night skies and said that, with a storage yard came motion sensor lights and there would no longer be dark skies to enjoy. "Overall, this type of development would be extremely intrusive and a dangerous precedent." Terry Berg, a cottage owner on Russell Landing Road agrees whole heartedly with Reynolds. Berg's first comment was, "Obviously the property values will go down considerably." He said, "If you look at the storage areas right now, they're by themselves at one end of each road and the Old Mill is down by the water. If you look higher on the hill at some of the storage already in place and imagine 10 times the amount of storage, you can just imagine what it will look like." In fact a letter sent out to neighbours from the Russell Landing Road Residents/Cottagers' Group, described the marina/storage facility on the hill as an 'island in the middle of residences and residential cottages that would be a massive intrusion and would destroy the peace and tranquility of the area.' According to Berg, the reality is that any storage facility is unsightly. "No one would want to buy a cottage that has the upper view of this location. The terrain is higher than any of the surrounding properties." Berg commented on the fact that normally marinas are located on shoreline properties that can provide docking facilities and in fact, the municipality's OP suggests that marinas should be on the waterfront. Berg is also very concerned about water quality and pollution from the facility. "Imagine the runoff from 500 boats dripping oil and gas." Overall, Berg agreed with Reynolds that this type of facility should not be built right in the middle of a residential cottage area. "It would be different if they were proposing an addition to their existing facility. It's already zoned commercial there, but instead they're proposing to hopscotch up the hill." When it came to the issue of the road, Berg said, "The road is privately owned; it's right on my deed." Not the words of someone readily willing to negotiate away his rights. According to Berg the members of the lake association that attended the meeting saw the development as an extension of the original marina and he felt they hadn't really represented his or other cottage owners' interests. "They're just sitting on it or proposing to meet with the owner to talk about how the proposal will go, but it is our preference to go to the meeting and present our concerns directly to Council." Berg also felt that putting a facility like this immediately adjacent to residences would set a precedent in the area and would lead others to making similar requests. "Any cottager could face the same possibility in the future." Last week the Russell Landing Road Residents and Cottagers' Group delivered a letter to the municipal office addressed to Harrison detailing the group's concerns about the development. In the letter there was a not so subtle reference to the fact that should the Council approve the application, the matter would be taken to the Ontario Municipal Board and the members would likely be entitled to considerable compensation for injurious affection. The development will be the subject of a public meeting at 9:00 o'clock on Thursday, May 6th in the Algonquin Highlands Council Chambers.

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