

County exploring new zoning for non-resource lands

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

The Deschutes County Planning Commission and the Community Development Department staff came to Sisters last Thursday, April 25, to share their draft work plan for the coming fiscal year, as well as receive input from residents of Sisters Country regarding a new zone being considered called non-prime resource lands (NPR). Non-prime resource lands have low capacity to be managed for farm and forest use.

There are currently six areas in the county that qualify for the new zoning, one of them near Sisters off Wilt Road at Squaw Creek Canyon Recreation Estates Addition. The Planning Commissioners toured the property prior to their meeting. Resource lands are those designated for exclusive farm use (EFU) or forestlands (F1/F2).

According to the County, the six identified acres are incorrectly zoned. Squaw Creek Canyon Recreation Estates, which was platted in 1977, is a legacy from when the County implemented State land-use laws 50 years ago. The lots are 2.5 acres and most are developed with a house on the property.

The middle section is zoned Rural Residential 10 (RR-10), the western section is zoned forest use, and the eastern section is zoned EFU. Currently, in order to build on the remaining lots, a property owner faces a six-month-long land process costing about \$4,000 to gain

county approval to construct a dwelling.

With a new NPR zone for the six incorrectly designated EFU areas, the owner could go straight to a building permit, which would be allowed outright, and reduce the current financial and time barriers. A single-family dwelling or manufactured home and accessory dwelling would be allowed.

County staff contends there would be no increase in density in these areas and that the new zoning is not just a way to open the door for more development in rural lands. They assert that low-density rural development needs to be identified to help meet the growing demand for housing, but the new zoning would not jeopardize existing Deschutes County farm and forest lands that are actually being used for those purposes.

The citizens in attendance at last week's meeting mainly reside outside the city of Sisters, under county jurisdiction. The majority expressed skepticism about the new zoning not paving the way for more development.

Tied to the first part of the plan for changing the zoning on the six identified areas is a proposal to establish NPR-10 and NPR-20 zones that would clarify a path for other eligible rural properties to correct inaccurate designations with future partitions. Currently, EFU land can be rezoned to Multi-Use Agriculture 10 (MUA-10), but the County is after the establishment of broader comprehensive zoning of

non-urban, non-forest, undeveloped and uncommitted lands originally designated farm and forest.

Community development director for the County, Nick Lelack, told the assembled residents, "The County is undertaking a pioneering effort with its assertive approach to rezoning." If the plan succeeds, changes would be made to the County Comprehensive Plan, which would have to be approved by the State.

Property located in a Goal 5 wildlife zone wouldn't be able to take advantage of the NPR zoning. A 1992 overlay codified the wildlife protections.

Concerns raised by those in attendance included the problem of these types of properties usually having special road districts with little or no money and no expertise, according to Jack Goddard, who lives on the east side of Whychus Creek in the canyon. Increasing development would put increased pressure on sub-standard roads.

County resident Paul Lipscomb contended that the County is making zoning proposals based on 50-year-old farming practices. He said that lands considered not usable for older farming practices may very well be suited for modern farming including greenhouses and a variety of cultural and irrigation practices.

Planning Commissioner Jim Beeger of Bend pointed out that 46.5 percent of the improperly designated properties are what's left of earlier failed projects. There are a total of 110 located in the six developments that are left from economic condemnation. He said 110 lots is only a 51-day supply of housing for the County.

Commissioner Les Hudson, at large, stated, "The status quo can't be maintained." Urban growth boundaries are being stretched, and with less available buildable lands the problem of polarization between the haves and have-nots increases.

The County is actively

seeking community input on their proposed zoning changes. Last week's public meeting in Sisters was the third held in the county.

The County Planning Commission has two public hearings scheduled for May 23 and June 13. Following that, the Board of County Commissioners will hold a hearing, at a yet-to-be-determined date. The meetings will be held at 5:30 p.m. in the Board Hearing Room at the Deschutes County Administration Building at 1300 NW Wall St. in Bend. Public testimony will be taken on the proposed zoning changes.

One of the audience members raised the questions: "Are you solving an existing problem while creating consequences that will result in other problems? What does this really mean? What are the real future results?"

Information is available on the project website, www.deschutes.org/npr or contact County Associate Planner Zechariah Heck 541-385-1704.



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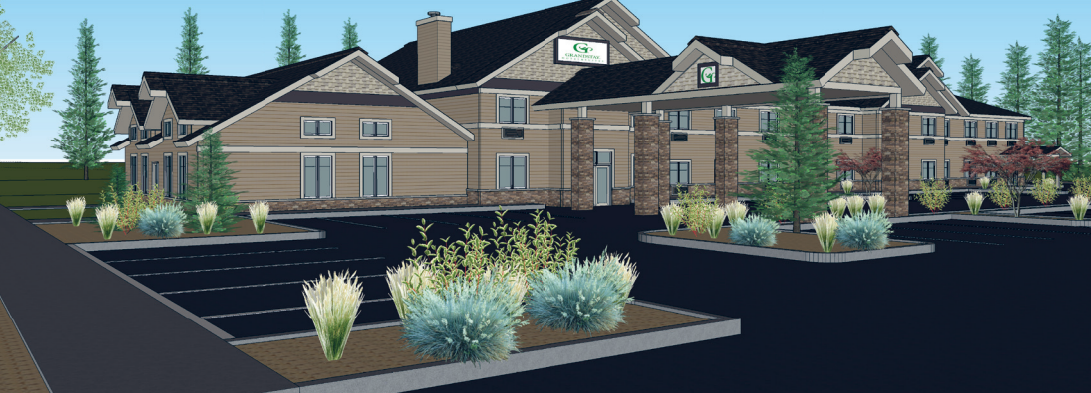
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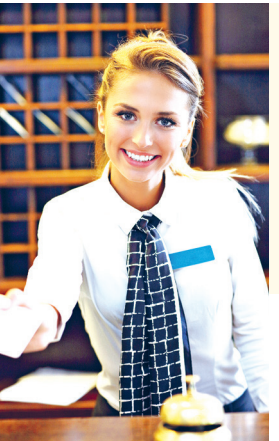
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