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Westward Shores expansion receives conditional site plan approval

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Reporter

write the author

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OSSIPEE — The expansion of Westward Shores Lakeside Camping Resort on Ossipee Lake received conditional site plan approval from Ossipee Planning Board on Sept. 20.

This was the fifth time the Northgate Ossipee, LLC application was heard at a planning board meeting. The application also went for a zoning board special exception and variance.

At the end of the hour-long meeting Sept. 20, members Bruce Parsons and Rick St. Jean, who appeared to be opposed to the expansion project from the beginning, voted against the site plan approval, though neither gave a reason. Chairman Ski Kwiatkowski, Connie Billings, Frank Riley, and Dennis Legendre voted in favor. The approval has three caveats – the applicant has to receive State of New Hampshire approval for water supply, subdivision, and septic.



DURING the Westward Shore presentation to the Ossipee Planning Board, Dan Flores of SFC Engineering demonstrated the self-closing septic connections to be used at all campsite as Board Secretary Laura Nash listens to board questions. The planning board gave conditional site plan approval to the proposed campsite expansion on Sept. 20. (Image courtesy of governmentoversite.com) *(click for larger version)*

Dan Flores of SFC Engineering spent time answering the board's questions about the plan, septic shut-offs, parking, and whether or not recreational vehicles are actually structures. He asked the board to grant conditional approval because without that the project will stall. Without that approval, the owners would be apprehensive about implementing the next, and substantially costly, phase of installing wells and septic systems.

Flores noted that, since the application was submitted in December 2015, the development proposal has been scaled back, zoning board approvals have been received, 25 acres has been committed to a conservation easement as requested by the town's conservation commission, the entire project has been scrutinized by a third-party engineering firm hired by the planning board, and "we have responded to everything you've asked of us."

A representative partner of Northgate Ossipee, LLC. spoke to the board and requested their conditional approval. "If you look the other campgrounds in our portfolio we do invest a significant amount of money to improve these properties. We're not just giving lip service to this. We're ready to fund this. We've already improved the park quite a bit. Our goal is to bring this to a resort level," he said.

A few months ago, as allowable by state law, Freedom and Effingham officials were granted abutter status because both towns have land on Ossipee Lake. This allowed land use boards in both towns to comment on the application. At the Sept 20 meeting, Freedom Planning Board Chair Anne Cunningham asked the board to delay their decision until her board had time to thoroughly review the third-party engineering report by Jones & Beach that she had just received Sept. 19. The reason for that delay is unclear as this reporter requested and received the engineering report back on Aug. 10. She said without the extra time to review the "very technical material" her board would be unable to meaningfully comment about the project.

"I understand your concerns but this is the Town of Ossipee. I was elected by the people of Ossipee. I'm supposed to look out for their interests. Their interest supersedes anything you might have to say...I cannot see the argument here. They are willing to put millions of dollars into this and we're sitting here fighting about a 100-year flood. I'm sorry, it's a lake. People are going to get their feet wet," said Legendre.

Former selectman and zoning board member Sam Martin didn't hold back in her public comment. "I am embarrassed by this board. I am embarrassed by the rudeness of some of the people on the board. You have held these people (Northgate) up for no good reason in several instances for absolute nonsense. They've met

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everything they needed to meet. They are willing to spend all kinds of money. They are willing to do it right and you just keep firing stuff. I said this months' ago but you kept doing it and you're still doing it. I am mortified to say this board is my town's board," said Martin. Billings defended the planning board and said most of the delays in the application process have been at the request of the applicant and are not the board's fault.

Former Westward Shores owner and founder of Ossipee Lake Dam Authority (1991) John Picard spoke to defend the rumored allegation that somehow control of the dam has been negligent and caused flooding in the area. He strongly denied that claim. Further, he told the board, while he is neither in favor nor opposed to the expansion project, he doesn't see high water as an issue of concern and said "campers are resilient people." Back in June 1998 was the last high water problem of note in the Westward Shores area, he said, and by July 4 campers and staff had everything cleaned up and the campground was fully operational.

The planning board's Sept. 20 vote, though conditional, gives the project a boost of support and, according to Flores, water system work can commence within the month.

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