



Record-Eagle file photo/Andrew Rosenthal

The clear-cut area is the site of a proposed RV park in Milton Township's unincorporated Torch River village.

Public hearing set for Torch River RV park

Commission sets Jan. 3 hearing for controversial RV park plans

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KEWADIN — New, somewhat smaller plans for an RV park near Torch River are headed for a public hearing.

Milton Township planning commissioners on Monday agreed to set a hearing at 6 p.m. Jan. 3 for

the 70-site campground on land Jim and Lori Brewer own between Torch Lake and Miller roads. Commissioner Joe Merillat voted against, while commissioners Tom Cole and Chantal Lefebvre were absent. Two new members, Joe Renis and Noel Peters, voted in favor of setting the hearing.

Jim Brewer spoke about the plan, the second submitted for the same spot, as did Gourdie Fraser Associates Project Manager Carrie May and other representatives for the

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land owners.

May went over site plan details, including plans for handling storm water that she said would be built to the maximum of what the site and other constraints allow.

Erosion from the site has been one of several issues of contention among critics of the plan — neighbor Terry Roote told planners about how runoff covered his lawn. Several people, including nearby residents or seasonal homeowners, spoke out against approving a plan they saw as little better than the first. They raised concerns on everything from traffic congestion to the possibility of sewage contaminating the groundwater.

Brewer and a few other audience members pushed back on what they argued were exaggerations at best or lies at worst — while several critics in the audience said the park would allow up to 700 people total, including guests, Brewer and project partner John Peal argued the actual number would be a fraction of that, citing state park averages and their experience with 10 spots at a marina Peal co-owns.

Planning commission members had several questions, including

whether storing RVs at the park year-round would violate township ordinances that don't allow outdoor storage in that zone. After four hours of public comment, the plan presentation and planners' questions to Brewer, May and others, planners largely agreed to move ahead with setting the meeting.

It's the latest turn for a plan that Brewer and Peal say is a good fit for the spot and which meets township ordinances, but which opponents say could cause environmental harm while leading to overcrowding and other issues.

Miller Road resident Kellie Wells asked planners to carefully consider Torch River's future as they weigh the application.

"Will it be a quiet village among the third-most beautiful lake in the world, or will it become an overdeveloped, overpopulated vacation mecca," she asked.

Brewer voiced his frustration with an application process that ran into opposition and left him scrambling to meet various requests for changes or more information as it stretched on.

"We asked the right people the right questions all along," he said. "Now we have been stuck with changing perspectives."

Township planners previously rejected a special use permit the Brewers requested for an 80-spot RV park at the same spot. Those plans are at the center of a handful of

legal battles, one by Roote over runoff damages he's claiming, another by Torch Elk Skegemog Alliance after contractors started clearing the site before the township approved a special use permit, and a third by the Brewers appealing the planning commission's rejection.

Brewer said he went ahead with the clearings after getting storm water and other permits and the township's former zoning administrator gave the go-ahead.

Since then, the state Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy ordered the Brewers to stabilize the site and clean up sediment that ran onto neighboring land, including a wetland in one spot, as previously reported.