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Marina expansion proposal in trouble

By BEA LEWIS

Northern Lakes Region Bureau

MEREDITH — The Planning Board appears poised to vote down a proposal to expand Shep Brown's marina on Meredith Neck.

Following a public hearing, the board instructed the town planner and town attorney to jointly draft motions to reject both site plan and architectural design review approvals for the project.

Both motions are expected to be acted upon during the board's next regular monthly meeting on Jan. 27. The board could still vote against the motions. That action would send the project back into pre-approval mode.

After lengthy deliberations Tuesday night the board ultimately came to the consensus that they would deny the site plan approval based on questions about parking, lot coverage and buffering for abutters.

To date, the board has received about 200 letters from the public, with all but three opposing the proposed expansion.

Board Chairman Herb Vadney said the board is finished taking testimony from both the public, or applicant Bill Littlefield Jr. and his representatives. But prior to making its final decision, the chairman said, the board could decide to ask additional questions of the applicant.

About 80 people attended the last of three public hearings on the proposal and spent more than two hours telling the land use board they opposed the project. The first of four hearings was canceled after so many people turned out to attend that they exceeded the capacity of the hall.

During deliberations regarding the architectural design review application, Vadney said the board reached agreement that the proposed boat storage buildings are too large and out of scale with the neighborhood.

Earlier, representatives of the applicant offered to paint the buildings dark brown with green trim. In a prior hearing, board member Pam Bliss had urged the applicant to consider using material other than metal to side the buildings.

On Tuesday, the applicant's representatives said the metal siding is part of the structural integrity of the buildings and that because they are three-sided it's essentially their only choice. The buildings are designed to protect boats from the weather and are built with slightly pitched shed-style roof that has no peak.

During deliberations, Vadney said, the board decided that any motion needed to be both specific and accurate.

Vadney said that all five board members agreed that the four-level 38-foot-tall buildings represent too large of an expansion and would have too great a visual impact. The board came to the consensus that they would not vote to support it.

"I see fully the need for a neighborhood marina out there with all the boating activity and the islands, but any attempt to grow it into a regional marina to me is just not acceptable," Vadney said on Wednesday.

During deliberations it came out that the ground level of one of the existing boat storage buildings known as B4 is used to warehouse boats in the winter and used for vehicle parking in the summer.

Meredith Fire Chief Chuck Palm indicated that the mixed use violates fire codes. As a result, the applicant lost 23 or 24 parking spaces for use by customers.

The applicant's engineer has previously indicated that 276 parking spaces are needed based on the mixed use of the property. He initially told the board that 330 spaces were available. The latest modification reduced that number to 306, said Vadney, explaining they need 301 as a result of other modifications.

Vadney said he took exception to the applicant's representation that each wet slip at the marina would require 1½ parking spaces as well as their calculations for dry slip customers. The boating season on Lake Winnepesaukee is so concentrated, he said, that the bulk of the use occurs during weekends or holidays in good weather, straining parking.

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