

Press Republican
October 9, 2009

APA admonished as staff changes over

By KIM SMITH DEDAM, Staff Writer

— RAY BROOK — Thursday's meeting marked a day of passages for Adirondack Park Agency commissioners.

A moment of silence remembered long-time Adirondack conservationist Nellie Staves, a former president of the Tupper Lake Rod and Gun Club, who died Wednesday at age 92.

Then commissioners bid a public farewell to longtime staff Regulatory Programs Director Mark Sengenberger, who has worked with the APA since September 1999 and for 20 years before that with other state agencies, including the Department of Transportation.

SALUTE

APA Commissioner Curt Stiles commended Sengenberger's leadership integrity, his passion for the APA, its people and its mission.

"Mark never allowed the issues or differences to become personal," Stiles said.

Sengenberger said that as a landscape architect "this has been a dream job. It has been a special experience for me. I learned very early the fragile nature of the (Adirondack) economy. I learned at an early age some of the challenges we have here."

Sengenberger said staff planners at APA work hard with people seeking land-use permits to build developable projects.

"This (APA Act) is a land-use and development plan, not a no-use and development plan. There is a very talented group of people (at APA), and all of our staff live here."

Sengenberger said the Adirondack Park holds many opportunities for win-win land-use agreements, "if groups come together."

In parting, he said the park was designed as a special place for everyone, "not just a park for the high-end resident who can afford a second home."

APA Attorney John Banta offered an emotional public farewell to his colleague with words that caught at times in his throat.

URGED TO LISTEN

The retirement honors were preceded by public comments from three Adirondack residents who have long accused the APA of being unsupportive of local economics.

Jim McCulley, president of the Lake Placid Snowmobile Club, challenged commissioners to listen to everybody, not just environmental groups writing what he called "back-door deals."

"I don't think this board takes it into account, but the Forest Preserve was created for the use and enjoyment of all New Yorkers."

Mike Vilegi, a former forest ranger from Black Brook, questioned why three or four commissioners have a background with the Adirondack Council though not one has past ties with any snowmobile group.

Black Brook Town Councilor Howard Aubin accused the APA of setting an environmental agenda crafted by preservation groups, urging commissioners to change course.

“You see a lack of local response because you’re not trusted,” he said, by the “economically starved” local population.

“The anger level is rising. You can see and you can feel it.”

OUTREACH

Newly hired APA Executive Director Terry Martino gave her second report to commissioners amid the fray, directing attention to the agency’s Paul Smith’s Visitors Interpretive Center, which has hosted weekly programs for Bloomingdale Elementary School children crowded into temporary classrooms.

It is, she said, a good example of local APA outreach.

Martino appointed APA Assistant Director of Regulatory Programs Holly Kneeshaw as interim director.

APA has been given clearance to fill the post left vacant by Sengenberger’s retirement.

With Gov. David Paterson’s recent call for an additional 11-percent reduction in state agency spending, the park-planning agency has to trim \$78,000 more from its current budget, Martino said.

“We can anticipate additional funding cuts in the future.”