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Ski area backers to craft new plan

Adirondack Park Agency, says mediation fruitless, calls for formal process

By LEIGH HORNBECK, Staff writer

TUPPER LAKE -- Mediation meant to smooth the road toward an agreement on a large housing development in the Adirondacks is over. How well it went depends on who you ask.

The Adirondack Club and Resort, as it was originally proposed in 2007, was a plan to reopen the Big Tupper Ski Area and build 700 houses on 6,300 acres around it. The plan met with mixed reactions from townspeople, some who thought the proposal from the Pennsylvania-based Preserve Associates would help revitalize the economy in the small town and others who thought it would be too much for the way of life in Tupper Lake. Environmentalists were nearly universally opposed, calling the proposal -- the biggest ever reviewed by the Adirondack Park Agency -- devastating to the environment.

In February 2007, the developer asked the APA to allow mediation between Preserve Associates and dozens of groups who wanted a say in the project. Last month, APA staff deemed mediation fruitless and called for a return to the formal process by which the agency reviews applications. APA spokesman Keith McKeever said Thursday only 11 of the 30 or so parties involved in mediation signed an agreement, which was nonbinding.

McKeever said it will likely be a three-month wait while consultants draw new plans for the club and six to eight months before a new set of hearings is scheduled for the commissioners to consider the application.

Tuesday, the Adirondack Council issued a statement listing its remaining suggestions for changes to the project and questioned the developer's ability to pay for the project.

Also this week, a lawyer for Preserve Associates issued a statement calling mediation successful and lauding the developer for the number of concessions made.

The developer withdrew plans for 36 ski-in, ski-out lots on the East Ridge of the property and took out 26 lots on the west side. Preserve Associates also agreed to reconfigure the "Great Camp" section of the proposal, reducing the number of acres on each lot where construction will be permitted; canceled plans for a shooting school; took out a wastewater plant in favor of using the Tupper Lake village sewer plant; redrew plans for the remaining sewer plant on the property and withdrew plans for a canoe launch on Lake Simond.

In all, lawyer Robert Sweeney's statement said, the project will disturb only 900 of the 6,300 acres, put people to work and offer free and reduced-price skiing to Tupper Lake residents.