

Residents oppose land swap

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by Raelynn Gill

A land-use watchdog group is bristling over a proposed timber land exchange between Hood River County and Mt. Hood Meadows, Ltd., of Oregon.

Members of the Hood River Valley Residents Committee believe that if the swap of forested acreage takes place it will pave the way for Meadows to build the destination resort it has been planning for more than 20 years.

"This would no doubt become a small city in a very visible place on the slopes of Mount Hood," said Kate McCarthy, a member of the committee, to the county board at its Aug. 6 hearing on the proposed trade.

However, Dave Riley, general manager of Mt. Hood Meadows Ski Resort, said the only problem with the question of development plans is that there has been no application submitted for any project.

"Any question, debate, analyzing or decision is not ripe when it is directed toward land-use zoning that is not even on the table," said Riley. He said for the county to base its approval or denial of the timber land exchange on the possibility of a future use would be purely speculative.

County forester Ken Galloway told county officials the exchange was negotiated because it makes good business sense. He said the county will gain about 140 acres since Meadows is proposing to give 785 acres in exchange for 640 acres, both of which are equally zoned for forest use. In addition, Galloway said acquisition of the new property would allow access to eight acres of high yield county timber that can now only be reached for harvest by helicopters, an operation that increases logging costs from the standard \$50-\$75 per 1,000 board feet to between \$375-\$450.

Galloway said after the county completed the exchange of its 1,000 acres of Scenic Area properties with the U.S. Forest Service for about \$7 million, he was instructed to seek out other properties that could replace that revenue base. In addition, he routinely searches out parcels that can consolidate property for both landowners to save survey and roadbuilding costs.

To date, Galloway said Longview Fibre Company and Meadows are the only positive respondents to the exchange offer made to 22 parties this spring.

However, the 120-member Hood River Valley Residents Committee believes history is just repeating itself. It said Meadows made two previously unsuccessful bids for developments in the late '70s and early '80s on the property four miles south of Parkdale that it now proposes to trade. The group believes that Meadows is making a strategic move since it recently purchased Cooper Spur Inn and lodging facility on 155-acres that abuts the county land it is seeking to acquire.

In fact, the residents committee formed, in part, just to wage a fight against Meadows prior

development proposals that were ultimately rejected at the state level. The group has worked actively since that time to protect forest and agricultural lands from zoning and use changes.

But Teunis Wyers, county counsel, said the suggestion by Ken Maddox, the committee's president, to base an independent appraisal of the property on its potential future use could backfire. Maddox told the county board on Aug. 6 that the potential for the site of a destination resort should be factored into its ultimate worth.

"It would not be good business not to take the property's future use into account," said Maddox. "How would it benefit the county to trade away the land at low value and then be asked to have that value increased by the new property owner?"

Wyers said the flip side to taking that approach is that the appraised value could then be used in support of a development application by Meadows. He said it would open the way for the company to argue that since it had been charged for a development it should be granted one.

After Maddox and several other committee members raised concerns about the lack of visible publicity to alert citizens about the proposed land exchange, the county board said it had followed all legal procedures for the formal hearing but would grant more time for comment at its Monday meeting.