

Resort map testimony will continue Feb. 5

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The growing list of speakers seeking to comment on Hood River County's draft destination resort map has necessitated the scheduling of a third hearing.

Time ran out on Wednesday before the Planning Commission had gotten a little more than half way through the roster of 132 citizens scheduled to testify at the hearing, held at Hood River Middle School. In addition, 87 other people out of the estimated 400 audience members penciled in their names for time at the podium.

To accommodate those requests, the Commission will again convene at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday in the middle school auditorium. The hearing was moved there after an overflow crowd appeared at the first hearing, Jan. 22 in the Gorge Room of the Hood River Inn.

At the upcoming forum, the Commission will listen to three-minute presentations until 11 p.m. and then decide whether to schedule a fourth hearing to allow more comment or close the public hearing so that deliberations can begin on the proposed map. The appointed body is charged with recommending that the Hood River County Commission accept the map and accompanying ordinance in its entirety, adopt it with revisions, or reject it altogether.

The controversial map was developed by the consulting team of Cogan, Owens, Cogan after Mt. Hood Meadows, Ltd., made a formal request last July and paid the \$8,300 fee for the work. The Portland-based consultants were warned by Planning Director Mike Benedict not to have any contact with Meadows during the independent study of potential sites or they would be fired. About 70 acres of Meadows' Cooper Spur Mountain Resort property near Parkdale has been listed in the inventory along with three other private forest properties. Officials have also made the controversial move to include the majority of Mt. Hood National Forest lands within the county in case these later fell into private ownership through a land exchange.

At the onset of the mapping process, environmental and recreation groups from across the state formed to fight against inclusion of Meadows' holdings on the map. The Cooper Spur Wild and Free Coalition, claiming 70,000 members, is opposed to commercial development on the north face of Mt. Hood because of potential damage to the Crystal Springs watershed, resources and wildlife habitat.

In turn, the Friends of Cooper Spur Mountain Resort, boasting 95,000 supporters, recently formed to advocate for an "environmentally-sensitive" Meadows development that would bring needed jobs to the economically-depressed county.