

Planning officials wind up resort comments

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By RaeLynn Gill

The Hood River County Planning Commission wound up more than 10 hours of public testimony on Wednesday over a draft destination resort map.

Chair Bill Lyons gave 64 audience members the final opportunity to register remarks at the third hearing before closing the oral comment period. However, he said written statements will still be accepted into the formal record until Feb. 19.

The seven-member appointed body will then take a week to review hundreds of pages of submitted documents before meeting for a work session at 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 26. At that time, Lyons said it is doubtful a decision on the map will be made since it is likely there will be many questions that need to be answered. Once any outstanding issues are addressed, Lyons said a recommendation will then be made and forwarded to the Hood River County Commission for review and further public comment.

He said that even if a final map meeting Goal 8 state land-use rules is approved, it does not mean that a destination resort can automatically be sited on one of the eligible properties. Under the county's comprehensive land-use plan for forest zones, Lyons said a resort is listed as a conditional use and not permitted outright.

"If an application is ever submitted to anyone then the ultimate decision process is one where the county has more discretion," he said.

In addition, he said the land-use plan also requires resort applicants to pay into a special fund that can be used to hire independent consultants. For example, he said the county could chose to bring in wildlife or hydrogeologist experts if necessary to address any outstanding concerns. "Those two things put the county in a very good position – if there is ever an application – to say either 'no' or 'yes,'" said Lyons.

The draft 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. Controversy arose when about 70 acres of Meadows' Cooper Spur Mountain Resort property near Parkdale was listed in the inventory along with three other private forest tracts. An opposition group has formed to fight against commercial development because of damage to resources and wildlife. In turn, a proponent group has stepped forward to advocate for development that would bring needed jobs to the economically-depressed county.