

HOOD RIVER NEWS

New resort bill on table

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Sen. Rick Metsger, D-Mt. Hood, has vowed to fight pending legislation that would make it easier for Mt. Hood Meadows, Ltd., to build a destination resort.

"Basically this bill has no life, but what it does is show the card of Mt. Hood Meadows and it's not a pleasant card," said Metsger, whose District 26 encompasses Hood River County.

But Dave Riley, general manager for Meadows, said House Bill 3626 simply addresses a "fairness and equality" issue. He said resorts along the state's coastline are allowed to be developed on minimum parcel sizes of 40 acres – whereas those constructed inland have to be on at least 160 acres. The bill would make 40 acres the minimum standard for resorts.

"This just corrects a discrepancy in the law, what's good for the coast is good for the rest of Oregon," said Riley.

He convinced Rep. Robert Ackerman, R-Eugene, and Rep. Cliff Zauner, D-Woodburn, to introduce the bill last week to the House Environmental and Land Use Committee. The two officials were joined in that move by four other Democratic and Republican colleagues. However, Riley said because of Metsger's strong reaction to the bill, Meadows has decided to drop its lobbying efforts during the current legislative session.

"Although the bill has received bipartisan support in both the House and Senate, we've decided not to pursue it because our local senator has expressed concerns – but that doesn't mean others in the state won't continue to push for its passage," Riley said.

Although the county lies within House District 52 which is served by Rep. Patti Smith, the Corbett Republican declined to review the issue during the current session. She said the state was mired in financial problems that needed to be addressed and required her full-time attention.

"We are facing incredible budget issues in Oregon and I think it's too late in the session to address these kinds of issues," Smith said.

Metsger believes that HB 3626 will never make it out of the House committee for a full hearing – but he is determined that it will not survive any bid for attention in the Senate. That strong stand has been taken, in part, because he believes that since the law requires 50 percent of the 40 acre resort parcel to be reserved for green space, Meadows would only have enough room on its Cooper Spur holdings to build upscale residences.

"It's basically permission to have a housing development where no one else can," he said.

His comments echo those of the Cooper Spur Wild and Free Coalition (CSWFC), whose membership includes recreational and environmental groups from across the state. The

organization is dedicated to fighting major commercial development on the north face of Mt. Hood.

"We see it as just another attempt by Meadows to go around the local review process," said spokesperson Heather Weinstein.

Ken Maddox, chair of the Hood River Valley Residents Committee, the local arm of the CSWFC, expressed the same concerns following his testimony against the bill.

"This is just a repeat of the same sort of attempt Meadows has made in the past – if you don't like the result try to change the rules," he said.

But Riley "respectfully disagrees" with all of his dissenters, pointing out that HB 3626 follows the current legal requirements that at least \$7 million be spent for on-site recreational facilities. In addition, he said that 150 overnight lodging units, meeting rooms and a restaurant with seating for 100 visitors had to be legally included in any development plans.

Riley contends the legislation actually eliminates three contentious issues in the county's current mapping process for siting of destination resorts. He said passage of HB 3626 would take away the following arguments over Meadows 160 acres of private holdings in the southern sector of the county:

- * Nullify concerns over the proposed three-mile buffer to protect nearby commercial farm land.
- * Place the development outside of the Crystal Springs Watershed boundary.
- * Leave more land untouched to provide a larger conservation easement.

"This state legislation does not change or affect the local process at all, it does not force the county into anything but it does give officials more options when considering a resort," Riley said.

He said a golf course is the only recreational pursuit that could be eliminated with the smaller amount of acreage. However, Riley said Meadows will not finalize plans for its resort application until the company knows exactly what size of a parcel they are working with. The county has undertaken the current mapping process to determine how much of Meadows' land, if any, meets local and state criteria for a resort.

"This bill is not essential to achieve our goals anyway but one thing is certain – we do not intend to submit an application that in any way harms the watershed or the environment," Riley said.