

WNBZ
June 29, 2011

Both sides reflect on marathon ACR hearings

Environmental groups have used a lot of ammunition fighting a large-scale development planned for Tupper Lake.

After 19 days of sessions held over the last three months, state Adirondack Park Agency hearings over the proposed Adirondack Club & Resort ended late last Friday.

The developer, Preserve Associates, and the project's supporters say they're still standing strong. They told the Adirondack Daily Enterprise that they expect the APA to approve the project and begin building the largest resort in the history of the Adirondack Park by spring.

But if the environmental groups have their way, the resort will have to be redesigned to mitigate its impact on the environment.

After spending more than \$100,000 to fight the 6,000-acre resort proposed for Mount Morris and the Big Tupper Ski Area, green groups say they punched some serious holes in the developer's plans.

John Sheehan is spokesman for the Adirondack Council, an environmental group that has been quite critical of the project.

He says the Council's expert witnesses at the hearings made it clear that the developers didn't adequately consider impacts to wildlife.

"We think the developer could have done a huge amount more than was done in the seven years that he had to prepare this application," Sheehan said. "Frankly, he didn't do the minimum that is generally required. So I think the Park Agency has a tough decision on their hands: to send this back to a hearing or somehow find out what the impact on wildlife is going to be."

Some critics have been even more outspoken. Protect the Adirondacks attorney John Caffry said the project shouldn't be issued a permit at all.

Jim LaValley is chairman of ARISE, a local economic advocacy group that has backed the resort project since day one. He says all the "huffing and puffing" on the part of the environmental groups has been a distraction.

"The opportunity allows [environmentalists] to go down a path that's really a distraction, rather than really focusing on the subject at hand," LaValley said. "That's one of the most frustrating things. One [person] can belabor certain points that have already been discussed ad nauseam."

LaValley says the hearing process needs to be revised.

“The adjudicatory hearing process is one that needs to be looked at from top to bottom,” LaValley said. “There needs to be some way of creating a focus that does not drag things out for an indefinite amount of time.”

Keith McKeiver is spokesman for the APA. He says there are no current plans to revise the hearing process. He adds that the additional scrutiny was relevant because the project is unusually large.

The next step is for interested parties to submit their closing arguments, according to McKeever. That process could take as many as 60 days. After that process is complete, the APA has 60 days to review the application, agree on any final conditions, and render a decision.

McKeever acknowledged that APA commissioners will need to wade through a mountain of information, but said staff would help them move through it in an orderly fashion.

-George Earl 6-28-11