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ACR witness argues with Council's alternate designs

By JESSICA COLLIER - Staff Writer

RAY BROOK - Alternative designs an environmental group presented Tuesday for the Adirondack Club and Resort would not be approvable under state Adirondack Park Agency guidelines, according to a witness for the developers.

On Wednesday, Jeffrey Anthony, president of the Saratoga-based LA Group, showed maps his team created in response to designs presented by an Adirondack Council witness. The LA Group aimed to show the designs would violate several APA regulations.

The Council's designs would exceed the number of principal buildings allowed in lands classified for resource management by at least 64, would have at least 27 structures in or too close to wetlands, and would have 87 built on slopes with grades 25 percent or steeper, Anthony said.

Council attorney Meave Tooher said it's important to note that the designs presented by landscape architect Harry Dodson, an expert witness retained by the Council, were only conceptual and not final site plans by any means.

The designs showed alternative site layouts for the resort that pulled housing units closer to the base of the Big Tupper Ski Area rather than leaving them spread out over the 6,000-acre site. Dodson created a walkable "village center" area at the base of the ski mountain, which he said is more desirable for buyers and cheaper to build with less infrastructure.

But Anthony argued Wednesday that he believes his group's plans for the ACR are more desirable, with houses more spread out for privacy and housing types uniform in a specific area, with townhouses grouped with other townhouses and single-family houses grouped with other single-family houses.

Anthony also refuted other examples Dodson used to show the kind of layout he was shooting for. Dodson had presented photos from "village center" areas at resorts in Stratton, Vt., and Whistler, British Columbia, but Anthony said that while both do have vibrant, walkable center areas at the base of ski mountains, they also have mixed-use development areas that spread out around the center, like the ACR would have.

He said he is concerned that APA commissioners would not get the whole story from Dodson's testimony.

"They were given the impression that the high-dense core of the ski area is the only part of the resort," Anthony said.

ACR attorneys presented Anthony as a rebuttal witness to Dodson; other parties to the hearing are set to cross-examine him today.

The alternate designs also drew outcry from Tupper Lake officials who said they were concerned that the "village center" in the conceptual designs would keep people from spending money in the village of Tupper Lake.

In a press release titled "The Adirondack Council Turns Their Back on the Village and Residents of Tupper Lake" from Adirondack Residents Intent on Saving Their Economy, an advocacy group formed to support the ACR project, ARISE Chairman Jim LaValley, Tupper Lake Chamber of Commerce President Doug Wright and Paul Maroun, Tupper Lake's representative on the Franklin County Board of Legislators, expressed outrage over the Council's alternative designs.

"The Adirondack Council through their star witness is attempting to ruin the village of Tupper Lake's economy by placing dense commercial activity at the mountain rather than in the village," Maroun said in the statement. "The Adirondack Council had pledged to assist the village with economic stimuli and growth, not destroy the downtown commercial areas of Tupper Lake."

Also in the release, LaValley referred to the "village center" area a "new commercial center/hamlet at the base of the ski lifts" and called it a "real threat to the existing village."

Wright said the chamber does not support the alternative plans.

Council Executive Director Brian Houseal Wednesday clarified that there would actually be no new businesses added to the resort in any of the alternative plans, so concerns about the plans are unfounded. They use only the elements that are already included in developers' plans for the resort, just in a reconfigured fashion.

Houseal admitted Dodson had been unclear about that fact in his testimony.