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## Adirondack Council seeks APA reforms

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GLENS FALLS -- The Adirondack Park Agency was a model for regional planning in environmentally significant areas when the agency was founded in 1971, said John Sheehan, spokesman for the Adirondack Council, an environmental organization.

"It was, for its time, state-of-the-art, the best thing out there," he said in a recent meeting with The Post-Star editorial board.

But land-use planning methods and conservation science have evolved since then, making an update of the agency's rules and regulations necessary, he said.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo's emphasis on government efficiency makes it an opportune time to revise the rules and regulations, he said.

The Adirondack Council has proposed reforms in several areas.

The environmental group wants new rules to require that backcountry development be clustered into a compact area, and that major projects complete detailed wildlife assessments as part of the application process.

"Certain types of wildlife do extremely well when they're not close to people. But those places are getting smaller and smaller as the development goes farther in to the backcountry," Sheehan said.

Sheehan said the organization isn't attempting to stop development.

"We don't really want to slow it down. What we want to do is channel it into the appropriate places," he said.

The group also wants the APA to have the authority to deny "a badly flawed permit application" before sending it to a hearing, which can be a lengthy and expensive process.

Sheehan cited the Adirondack Club and Resort project in Tupper Lake, which the APA recently approved after seven years, as an example of how the process can be lengthy and expensive.

The Adirondack Council also wants measures to protect shorelines of lakes, ponds and rivers, including increasing shoreline lot sizes and setbacks, and the group wants the state to reinstate APA enforcement staff positions that were cut because of budget constraints.

Furthermore, the group wants the state to establish a fund to assist municipalities in the park with the cost of developing local land use plans.

Only 19 of the 103 towns and villages in the park have APA-approved land use plans, Sheehan said.

"And that's basically a function of not having enough money to get it done," he said.

The Adirondack Council has proposed the fund would receive revenue from new application fees the APA would collect.

Proposed application fees would be on a sliding scale, based on the size of the proposed project, Sheehan said.

But state Sen. Elizabeth Little, R-Queensbury, and local government officials have said they do not support imposing new application fees.

Sheehan said the Adirondack Council proposal is intended as a framework for discussion, not a formal legislative proposal, at this point.

"Really we'd like to get a dialogue going," he said.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has indicated he is open to changes in rules and regulations if various factions that have interest in the APA can reach consensus on a reform proposal, said Fred Monroe, executive director of the Adirondack Local Government Review Board, a state-appointed APA watchdog panel.

"The feedback we're getting is it's likely to happen if we can get consensus. But if there's controversy on either side, it's not going to get done," said Monroe, whom The Post-Star contacted for comment on the Adirondack Council proposal.

The Review Board agrees with the Adirondack Council that the process for hearings on major projects needs revised, Monroe said.

"This Adirondack Club and Resort project was just an extremely time-consuming and, I think, wasteful process both for the applicant and the agency," he said. "It cost the applicant millions of dollars, and it cost the state untold hundreds of thousands."

The Review Board has mixed feelings about the Adirondack Council's proposed measures to protect water quality.

"I think we're willing to take a look at it, although we think it is fairly burdensome now," Monroe said.

The Review Board would like to add to the application a section to discuss benefits of a project, but the Review Board opposes establishing application fees, he said.

Read more: [http://poststar.com/news/local/adirondack-council-seeks-apa-reforms/article\\_8f9f2a5e-8cb5-11e1-b21b-0019bb2963f4.html#ixzz1stH7JiaJ](http://poststar.com/news/local/adirondack-council-seeks-apa-reforms/article_8f9f2a5e-8cb5-11e1-b21b-0019bb2963f4.html#ixzz1stH7JiaJ)