

Mount Sunapee Advisory Committee Meeting (*Minutes pending approval*)
September 15, 2009 at Newbury Town Hall

Committee members present:

DRED Commissioner George Bald, Committee Chairman
Ted Austin, Division of Parks and Recreation
Melanie Bell, Town of Goshen
Tim Drew, Dept of Environmental Services
Don Kent, Division of Forests and Lands designee
Nancy Marashio, Society for the Protection of NH Forests
Christine Walker, UVLSRPC
Dan Wolf, Town of Newbury

Members absent:

Vacant, c/o Rob Bryant, Chamber of Commerce
Gordon Marshall, LSPA

Others present: Jay Gamble, Mount Sunapee Resort; Torene Tango-Lowy, Committee clerk; several members of the public.

Welcome and Introductions Commissioner Bald called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. Committee members introduced themselves.

Minutes Ms. Marashio requested amendments to the minutes of July 14, 2009, clarifying testimony provided by Will Abbott of SPNHF. Mr. Wolf motioned to accept the minutes as amended. Ms. Marashio seconded. Motion carries.

Old Business Commissioner Bald asked the committee for comments on the Master Development Plan (MDP) and Environmental Management Plan 2009-2014. Mr. Wolf brought forth the comments from Gerry Gold of the Sunapee-Ragged-Kearsarge Greenway Coalition (SRKGC) requesting improved signage for hiking trails within the leasehold area. Commissioner Bald will ask Bureau of Trails (BOT) Chief Chris Gamache to coordinate a meeting with SRKGC, Mount Sunapee Resort and BOT to collaborate on the issues.

Ms. Marashio asked Mr. Gamble what has changed in this plan from the last one, in which the West Bowl expansion had not gotten general support. Mr. Gamble replied that there was little change in the content, rather the Resort is putting forth its 20-year, long-term plan for the ski area and contains “build out” plans. Future MDPs will provide a 5-year update. Mr. Gamble detailed the land conservation proposals, summarized in Section 3, Land Ownership on page 11. A total of nearly 500 acres will be donated to the State as parkland (approx. 250 acres of ridgeline) and as additional ski area (approx. 200 acres). These conservation efforts are in response to Commissioner Bald’s letter of 2000 and Commissioner O’Kane’s letter in 2005.

Ms. Marashio thought these details should be part of the record and asked how the plan is in the public’s interest. Mr. Gamble responded that the Resort has demonstrated 11 years of commitment to the region, including employment and working with various organizations. The company is willing to invest \$10-15 million in projects and conservation lands. RKG Associates did an economic analysis that includes tax benefits to the towns of Goshen and Newbury, and to the State and Cannon Mountain ski area. Similar to U.S. Forest Service and other State models for ski area leases, the State will likely continue the ski area lease and the Resort anticipates being there for the long term.

Ms. Walker asked about the 2004 traffic analysis for Brook Road. Mr. Gamble stated that the study represents a maximum traffic scenario; 90% of traffic comes from points south. Traffic impacts to Goshen would come from the Keene area and would be a relatively small proportion of overall traffic. Onsite lodging would have a positive effect on traffic.

Director Austin recognized that the lease boundary alteration is significant, and the need to remain competitive is meaningful. The expansion proposal suggests that the need is based upon the ski operation being beyond capacity on certain days. Mr. Gamble replied that capacity days may be measured by the use of the beach parking lot used for overflow parking. Such use is documented in the Annual Operating Plan and includes the weekends of New Year’s Day, Martin Luther King Day, President’s Day, and other three-day holiday weekends. The Resort is looking at long-term viability, ski industry competition, and “build out” based on the geographic parameters. The Request for Proposal (RFP) asked operators for their long-term competitiveness, so the Resort provided its long-term vision while retaining the essential character of Mount Sunapee.

Ms. Bell asked about the State's intent regarding expansion during the RFP process. Commissioner Bald said he came to DRED after the RFP and lease award, but believes the State envisioned some expansion to the East side. It is not known if use of private lands were part of the discussion at the time, but the State's controls over private land is limited. Proposed condos rest within Goshen; and planning and zoning decisions rests with the community.

Mr. Wolf asked if the change in lease would require renegotiation. Mr. Gamble responded that the lease was written by the State and the RFP asked bidders to submit their plans to include expansion. The Resort's approach was that one additional major lift was more reasonable than several small lifts. Former Commissioner O'Kane requested clear delineation of donated lands as parkland and ski area land. Mr. Wolf suggests that if the expansion goes forward, the lease be renegotiated to include issues in Goshen. Ms. Bell strongly supported that consideration. Ms. Walker asked for clarification on the approval process. Commissioner Bald stated that the Committee provides him with their suggestions and he'll make a decision.

Mr. Drew asked if the proposed donated lands are part of wetland mitigation. Mr. Gamble replied that the Resort envisioned a straight donation. Ms. Bell asked about the potential property tax benefits of the lands. Mr. Gamble said that the 250 acres are in agricultural/forestry. Of the approx. 200 acres in Goshen, about 75 acres would be developed as a ski area and the remaining kept as wooded. Goshen would see an increase in its revenues. The Resort will work with Goshen on any development of the West Bowl base to retain an alpine character. The Resort will have to assess the economic viability of any development, as there are currently no services. Mr. Gamble said that the master plan is a long-term plan for the ski area, not a real estate development plan. Currently, the region provides a 300-bed base; other ski areas average a 500-bed base. Ms. Bell recommends that the Resort complete projects that are currently approved. Mr. Gamble said the Resort will continue to keep the facilities in good condition and that maintenance has been a focus.

Ms. Walker recommended that regional impacts on traffic be reviewed, including DOT's study on the I-89 corridor. The Newbury traffic circle impacts could be mitigated by use of a shuttle to/from the New London park & ride lot. Lodging accommodations are lacking, resulting in additional traffic. Drainage and water shed impacts from snowmaking should be investigated further. Mr. Gamble stated that the Resort completed an extensive, macro-level drainage analysis in 2004. However, the Resort would conduct more detailed analysis for state and local permitting, should the plan be approved.

Commissioner Bald encouraged committee members to provide any additional comments to him in the next coming weeks.

New Business There was no new business.

Mount Sunapee Resort Report Mr. Gamble reported that summer visitation was the same as last year and, with the current economic situation, the numbers are considered a good indication. There have been no layoffs of full-time staff and the Resort will be hiring for the ski season.

Next Meeting Date The next meeting will be at the call of the Chairman.

Public Comment Commissioner Bald opened the floor to public comment.

Gerry Gold, SRKGC added that updated and improved trail maps are needed. The local Chamber of Commerce has said that hiking is the leading question from the public; there are a wide variety of trail opportunities in the area. Four season tourism is a draw for the region and should have more emphasis in the MDP.

Bruce McCloy, MSR said the proposed West Bowl area would provide easier terrain for the "baby boom" demographic. The new ski area would compliment existing ski trail options. The high speed quads will improve skier circulation and lessen the load at Ridge; the plan provides a good balance and mix of trails.

Meeting adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

Minutes submitted by T. Tango-Lowy.