

Danbury To Sign Development Agreement With Ragged Mountain Resort

Construction Delayed Until Economy Improves

By Bud Rice
For the Beacon
February 24

Although Ragged Mountain Resort (RMR), the developer, is delaying the beginning of residential construction due to current economic conditions, Danbury's Planning Board continued its public hearings on Phase 1 of the development. Phase 1 of the plan calls for 120 cabins or lots, with a total of more than 890 residences eventually. The meeting took place February 24. The next session is scheduled for March 5.

Several aspects of RMR's development proposals were tentatively approved. Approvals of broad or conceptual plans don't become final until after more detailed documentation is presented and considered.

Drinking water will be provided from two already developed wells, which are to be covered and isolated by a 200 foot, then 400 foot, radius buffer zone. The initial New Hampshire State permit applied for is for small groundwater withdrawal (57,000 gallons per day; 40 gallons per minute) from the larger capacity well. Large withdrawal authorization is a separate procedure

requiring about a year's lead time.

The distribution system is to be pressurized and will incorporate two or more storage tanks, which are primarily for fire suppression purposes. After water usage patterns from seasonal use of residences become more clear, the need for a third well will be evaluated.

A sewer system will serve all homes and community facilities. Waste water will be collected by an underground piping system, primarily gravity operated, and be treated in a central, enclosed facility.

Board members have visited a site employing the recommended treatment technology, called membrane bio-reactor (MBR), and found it impressively suitable from odor and residual volume standpoints. The system is said to enable high solids concentrations and minimizes the need for separated settling tanks. Waste is broken down biologically, which is conventional. Treated clear water outflow will be used to irrigate the golf course, make snow, and water trees in forested areas.

RMR's storm water and drainage plan is based on the idea that water should be returned to the ground in many small doses close to where it arises, rather than through a collection system leading to a central settling pond.

Details of the implementation of this concept, such as terrain alteration techniques, channel size and placement, location of detention ponds, and the like are to be presented later.

A centralized propane system with above-ground storage and underground distribution is envisioned. Delivery traffic will be minimized in that way.

Power and telecommunications networks will be underground. Telephone is expected to be carried over the Internet (VOIP) rather than over conventional telephone wires. Bandwidth will probably be consistent with cable installations. Vendor selection is not final. Comcast has the more attractive proposal at the moment.

Lee LaJoie of Public Service of New Hampshire made a presentation concerning electricity. RMR's development represents a significant increase in Danbury's load, set against the background of existing flow already nearing capacity. As a result, Public Service anticipates having to spend \$1 million or so to rebuild lines to carry higher voltages to the resort and provide step down transformers near the resort.

Among other things, poles would increase to 40 feet in height, from 30 or 35 feet; cross arms, which are now six feet wide, would become eight feet. Public Service wants to delay making that investment until it is needed. Therefore, the power line rebuild will not commence until residential construction is substantially underway.

The step up in capacity, when completed, will be substantially greater than needed for the RMR development by itself.

The meeting on March 5 will cover traffic and will deal with the Board's work plan for the months ahead.

March 5

The Danbury Planning Board and RMR are trying to adjust to the open-ended residential construction delay that resulted from straitened economic conditions.

RMR wants assurance that its past and future investments, as well as the project funding it is seeking currently, will not be endangered by a change of rules by the Town. The Board wants assurance that RMR will not abandon or delay the project for so long that the Town is left with unfinished work or limitations which might adversely affect a successor development company.

All this is set against the background of economic conditions severe enough to change the scope as well as the timing of the project. Neither Phase 1 nor the Master Plan have yet been approved, so RMR is without Town commitments.

A rough plan was tentatively agreed to. The Town undertakes to avoid disruptive rule changes if:

- RMR first presents its Phase 1 application within three years.

- when Phase 1 application is approved, RMR will, within four years, complete a substantial portion of Phase 1 development, including at least roads and utilities, community water system, and waste water systems at cost estimated by RMR at over \$10 million.

- at the completion of Phase 1, and with other RMR undertakings, the remainder of the project will be completed without substantial (say 10-year) periods of inactivity.

Thus this "vesting" agreement, which will be part of the overall development agreement, could span 17 years, and phases can be extended with mutual consent.

The Board and RMR agreed that the development agreement will incorporate impact fees of \$1,200 per residence to offset costs borne by the Town, in particular with respect to traffic and roads. This amount can increase with inflation.

Lou Caron of LC Engineering identified six road improvement projects. Four are in the nature of pre-existing conditions along New Canada Road. Two relate to intersections which may need work depending on traffic. Other traffic impacts may become evident, so the traffic situation will be reviewed every two years, if not more frequently.

The development agreement will also provide for RMR to pay up to \$15,000 to fund a study to identify the project's cost impact on Town buildings and apparatus. That contribution is to be made before Phase 1 approval. Likewise, RMR will pay another \$3,000 to support Town administration efforts.

Finally, RMR will pay a fair and proportional share of other identified costs. These may be collected through building fees or be in a lump sum, and RMR will have an opportunity to pay in cash or in kind.

The next Planning Board meeting will be March 24 to discuss a draft of a development agreement, among other things.

March 24

The Danbury Planning Board met March 24 to review a proposed Development Agreement and Notice of Decision concerning Ragged Mountain Resort's (RMR) plan to develop, in phases, up to 890 residences, and to improve ski and golf facilities. Development plans have been suspended for an unknown period because of the current economic situation.

The Development Agreement summarizes the commitments and opportunities of the Town of Danbury and RMR. It serves to document and preserve the state of negotiations during the period of suspension of development activity. The Agreement supplements

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