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Development cuts off Bow River access

Dawn Smith, Rocky View Publishing

In a split vote, County council approved an application May 25 to create an additional 103 recreational lots in the CottageClub Ghost Lake development.

The new subdivision, which is located immediately north of the Ghost Dam and eight miles north of Cochrane, will encompass about 40 acres of land, including 2.5 acres previously set aside to provide a staging area for public access to the Bow River.

The decision will effectively cut off public access to the Bow.

"We are going to upset a lot of people," said Division 2 Councillor Mitch Yurchak. "A lot of our residents use this access. It is the only place where people can access the river for rafting in the area."

Currently, the entrance is reached through the use of a private gravel road on land owned by TransAlta and is deemed dangerous because of the steep escarpment and the release of water from the dam.

Council had discussed building a stairway within the Range Road 60 road allowance, which would have extended south to the river.

However, a site inspection revealed that the slope, which exceeds 90 degrees in some areas, was too great to build a safe stairway.

Additionally, council was concerned that building the stairs would suggest it condoned trespassing on private property.

"Originally, I think it looked attractive to maybe have a way to get down to the river, but I could also see that could rear its head," said Division 9 Councillor Paul McLean. "We could have a parking lot full of people attempting to get down a steep river bank and then we have another issue that we have created."

Since the proposed staging area was considered a Municipal Reserve, the County will receive cash-in-lieu in the amount of \$35,000 per acre.

Sewage from the summer cottages will be stored in tanks and hauled to the Town of Cochrane at the expense of owners. Water is accessible from two wells on site via a water treatment and distribution system.

Council expressed concern that the cottages could be used year round, rather than seasonally, as intended.

However, administration and the developer eased those concerns by saying that although they couldn't restrict owners from occupying their cottages in the winter, necessary services would be unavailable at that time.

Natural gas won't be permitted in the cottages, and water will be turned off from Oct. 31 to April 1 each year.

"You aren't going to have people necessarily squatting there," said McLean. "It is going to be a recreational use primarily in the summer."

Phase one of the development includes 71 lots and was approved in February 2009.

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