

Council delays decision on Viking Creek RV proposal

By **RICHARD HANNERS** Whitefish Pilot | Posted: Thursday, January 14, 2010 12:00 am

Citing significant changes in the Viking Creek developer's original proposal, the Whitefish City Council on Monday agreed to reopen the matter for public comment.

The Viking Creek project's 39 acres include a hotel currently under construction, along with a future spa and a skybridge across Wisconsin Avenue to The Lodge At Whitefish Lake. Twenty-nine of the acres are creeks and wetlands preserved by a deed to the Whitefish Lake Institute.

The remaining land, Phase 2, includes 17 single-family lots accessed off Wisconsin and Colorado avenues and 1.3 acres of open space adjacent to the Crestwood Resort.

Developer Dan Averill had requested that Phase 2 owners or renters be allowed to reside in Class A motor coaches for up to seven months, a deviation from city code's 30-day limit. Each lot would eventually have a small, single-story home — a "cabana" — and the RVs would likely be in Whitefish only during the summer, he said.

Both the Whitefish City-County Planning Board and city staff recommended approval of Averill's request with four conditions. The planning board asked for additional landscape buffering on the side facing Wisconsin.

When the proposal came to the city council on Dec. 7, however, the request was tabled and planning staff were directed to provide additional information, to wit:

¥ Clarify if both the cabanas and the RVs would be available for short-term rental. Eric Mulcahy, of Sands Surveying, speaking for Averill, said the plan calls for allowing the cabanas and RVs to be rented together on a short-term basis but not separately.

Planning staff supported that request, noting that Phase 2 and its neighbors, including Crestwood Resort, are zoned resort-residential.

According to Phase 2's "covenants, conditions and restrictions," rentals under 30 days must be administered and managed by The Lodge At Whitefish Lake, which could also charge usage and management fees for rentals under 60 days.

¥ Clarify how soon a permanent home must be built on the lot. When presented to the planning board, Averill had indicated lot owners would have up to five years to build a cabana, but board members wondered how that would be enforced, and what would happen if the lot was resold.

Averill's position, however, changed after the council tabled the request. According to staff, "the

applicant has decided that the enforcement of this (five-year) provision would be difficult and believes the owners of these lots will eventually construct a home to more fully enjoy their property." As a result, "it is unclear how long the neighborhood will be only motor coaches."

¥ The planning board wanted additional landscape buffering between Viking Creek Phase 2 and both the Crestwood and Wisconsin neighborhoods. Staff were satisfied with the applicant's response.

City staff also suggested to the council that they consider restricting the RVs from parking on the lots until they were sold by the developer, an idea the applicant did not address.

Averill told the council the intent of the project was to preserve a wetlands threatened by dense development and that he put up significant funding to get that preservation process going.

Noting that the Phase 2 lots were originally appraised at \$190,000 apiece and were now worth \$75,000, Averill said he "now needed some help from the community."

"Every time this project is delayed, the meter keeps on running," he said.

Averill also pointed out that "anyone can park an RV next to their home right now, they just can't live in them," and he said he wasn't opposed to putting the five-year building-requirement back into the proposal.

The council, which noted it wasn't generally opposed to the developer's request, asked Averill to return with a better definition of a "Class A motor coach," a condition requiring home construction within five years, and a suggestion on how the seven-month limit on RV stays could be monitored.

Mayor Mike Jenson asked that the matter be brought back to the council as soon as possible.