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Portage Point Inn owner presents grand vision

Posted by Justine McGuire on April 27th, 2015

Future includes ramped up marina, boating opportunities

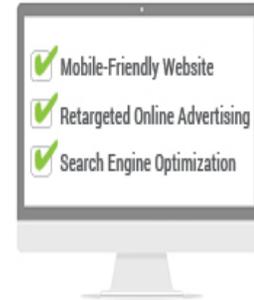
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Portage Point Inn owner Bob Gezon poses with a site plan for the resort at a public session held at the Farr Center in Onekama on Monday. (Justine McGuire/News Advocate)

ONEKAMA — It seemed as if the whole Onekama community came out Monday to hear about what's next for Portage Point Inn — a historic resort situated between Lake Michigan and Portage Lake in Onekama Township.

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There were about 80-90 people packed into the Farr Center to hear from the owner of the resort, Bob Gezon, about his plans for the future.

“There is something about when you drive up to Portage Point Inn ... unique about the feel when you drive up to the place,” he said. “It’s the cottages, it’s the architectural style, and just the historical feel.”

But his long term vision to make the resort a year-round destination centers around what he knows: boats.

“I’ve been involved in the marine business since I was 16 years old — it’s all I’ve ever done,” Gezon said.

Gezon’s main business is White Lake Dock & Dredge — which works hand-in-hand with marinas.

The need to expand on the 6-10 week peak season stems from the need to provide year-round jobs, which is one qualifier for some state grants that will help renovate the property. The other qualifier is investment.

“It’s really important that we know this thing can work,” he said.

He asked for the community’s help with ideas and connections to make it happen.

Expanding the season is also needed to attract a restaurant. Gezon said the right restaurant is critical to the resort’s success, but no business will commit to moving in unless they know it will be a successful year-round operation. Hotel operators are looking for the same sort of year-round draw.

“The one’s I’ve met want to know we have a hook — something that makes us stand out from the competition,” Gezon said. “Our hook is the waterfront.”

The plan for Portage Point Inn includes rearranging and adding docks and a pier to what will be a marina — but is currently more like a “parking lot for boats,” Gezon said.

The rearranged waterfront would include one dock with five non-motorized slips that would be on the north end of the resort’s property, either side of that dock would be protected swimming areas. South of that there would be two sections of docks separated by a pier, according to site plans Gezon presented. The docks would include 80 slips, some of which could accommodate 150-foot vessels.

A public fishing pier would be located at the south end of the marina. It would be accessible through a parking lot that would replace tennis courts, which Gezon said are rundown and not ideally situated. Just north of the parking lot would be a boat house that would include restrooms, showers,

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laundry service and harbor master's quarters upstairs, he said.

Gezon's vision is to attract hard-core, year-round boating enthusiasts. He said for people who are "really into their boats" it's a year-round endeavor. In the off-season they have mechanics working on them, interior designers refurbishing them, and hold parties on them while they're parked in storage, he said.

For the storage part, Gezon proposed building what he calls the "Boat Barn" on what is currently a field used for overflow parking, often referred to as "the ball field."

The 52,000-square-foot building would be used as secure, indoor valet parking during the peak season, he said. That would help alleviate problems in the past that caused Portage Point Drive to be impassible due to cars parked on either side during big events, such as weddings.

Onekama Township Supervisor Dave Meister commended Gezon on the Boat Barn idea, since, he said, it will save him from having to ask people to move their cars at 11 p.m. on Saturday.

That building could also be used to house a historic boat renovation business, Gezon said.

In front of the Boat Barn, as a buffer, Gezon said he wants to move the existing doll houses for use as summer employee housing. The doll houses would be replaced by seven new ones that would be closer to the road than they are now with the parking lot behind them instead of in front on the north end of the property.

His plans also include renovation of the main hotel, restaurant and casino.

The session was hosted by the Alliance for Economic Success, and included the presentation from Gezon and a question and answer session. Many questions could not be answered in the time allotted for the session. AES collected questions, and will send out answers via email. To get on the email list, call (231) 723-4325.

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