

Portage Point Inn plans still in working stage

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ONEKAMA TWP. — Work toward a viable resort continues at Portage Point Inn, but specific plans continue to change.

The planning process for the resort remains “fluid” because negotiations with the on-site condo association will probably be “messy,” said Bob Gezon, owner of the resort, along with Windfalls Landing LLC.

Condo association members who attended an Onekama Township meeting on Tuesday were wary about connecting the resort to a sewer line that they would have help pay for.

Gezon plans to apply for a Community Development Block Grant through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation that would cover more than half the cost of the connecting the resort to the Village of Onekama’s sewer system. The total cost is estimated at about \$2.2 million, and the grant would be about \$1.2 million.

The grant would be for infrastructure improvements, and could be used for a multitude of things, but Gezon has said he intends to use it on the sewer if it’s approved. Eligibility for the grant is determined by job creation and private investment, he said.

The application is a commitment to create jobs within a certain range and to have private investments within a range, Gezon said. If those requirements are not met, the MEDC would ask for the money back.

“It’s a big commitment, it makes us a little nervous,” he said.

The president of the resort’s condo association, Mark Konecny, said it supports the work that Gezon is planning — but it’s a tough situation because some are full-time residents, others only seasonal, and others rent out.

“We aren’t going to be a road block to what (Gezon) wants to do,” he added.

But a condo owner, Jim Pratt, said he agrees that there should be a sewer system to protect the Portage Lake, but the cost shouldn’t be born by the condo owners, and more people should be hooked into it because it would be beneficial to them and the lake, and lower the cost per property owner.

However, the problem is that hooking in other homes right away wouldn't fit with the intentions of the grant that Gezon is seeking. Others could be added later, and their tax assessment to pay for the sewer system would be calculated to include the historic cost of installing the system, said Dave Meister, Onekama Township supervisor.

"(Gezon) has always gone for the long term solution, not the Band-Aid," he said.

James Wisniski, township trustee, added that Gezon doesn't have to use the grant money — if it's approved — on the sewer line.

"He would be helping you," he said to Pratt during the meeting.

The village president Rodney Hudson said the sewer is in preliminary stages, and the village, which would own, operate and collect taxes on the sewer, hasn't received engineering drawings or agreements to sign in relation to any sewer project.

Gezon said he wants to do the sewer project because the block grant from MEDC would require the resort to provide year-round, full-time jobs, which would significantly add to the amount of sewage coming from the resort. The drain field already leaks into the lake, and that could become a problem in the future with increased use.

He added that the state will likely increase requirements for drain field clean up and replacement in the future, and at some point a sewer could be mandated by the state.

"We need to look forward in our master plan," Gezon said.

Portage Lake Watershed Forever, which monitors the water quality of Portage Lake and surrounding bodies of water, is in favor of installing a sewer to the resort, or all the way around the lake, said the council chair, Mary Reed.

"There are a lot of potential issues with so many people in one spot," she said.

Gezon said progress is being made in the resort plans, but it's slow going.

"The result will be a long-term asset to the community," he said.

In addition, Gezon submitted a special use permit application to the township zoning administrator on Tuesday.

The permit would allow the land to be used in a special way — in this case a resort, although the details of his application won't be public until April 17 when the township's planning commission sees it for the first time, said Kris Philpot, the zoning administrator.

She added that the earliest he could get the permit would be July.

The next township meeting will be at 9 a.m. on May 6 at the township hall, located at 5435 Main St. in Onekama.