Residents have questions, concerns about proposed Jay resort

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A sketch of the proposed Jay development. (Provided — Adirondack Park Agency)

A Miami-based developer who bought 355 acres of property in Jay wants to develop a portion of the land into a resort with residential homes, townhomes, hotel facilities and possibly some mansions. Initial public comments submitted to the Adirondack Park Agency, which is reviewing the developer’s plans, are mostly opposed to the development.

The Jay project is still in a premature stage, according to developer Eric Stackman. Locals are asking questions about its long-term effects.
Stackman is proposing the construction of 20 townhomes, 60 villas with an optional guest suite, 18 estates with an optional guest suite, and possibly six mansions or two hotels containing 17 rooms each. The development would also have “amenity” buildings, like a clubhouse. It’s one of the largest developments to come before the APA since 2012, when the agency reviewed a proposal from Pennsylvania-based investment group Preserve Associates for a housing development in Tupper Lake with about 700 units, plus a spa, marina and an equestrian center. The development ultimately did not come to fruition.

APA Public Information Officer Keith McKeever said Monday, Nov. 8 that the APA updates public comments for large-scale residential subdivision proposals on a weekly basis, but this project is attracting a higher volume of comments than normal. The agency posted the first round of comments on Nov. 5, but McKeever said they received so much additional feedback over the weekend that they updated the comments again Monday afternoon. The number of commenters jumped from 56 on Friday to 180 on Monday.

A majority of the comments are opposed to the proposal. They bring up concerns about the Adirondacks’ “Forever Wild” status, Stackman’s Miami residency, the possible environmental impacts of the build and the lack of affordable housing in the area. Some feedback is from people born and raised in Jay who don’t want to see their hometown developed; one comment simply reads, “NO.”

McKeever said the APA takes public comments seriously, and that they’ll be considered before Stackman moves forward to the second phase of his proposal, which would include a more detailed plan. McKeever said that the first phase of the proposal is strictly conceptual.

Stackman said Monday that he’s seen the initial feedback, but he said he’d “rather not comment” on what he’s read so far.

“Everyone is entitled to their opinion,” he said.

He said the APA just released the project plan to the public a week ago, and he wants to see the public comment period through before responding.

“Let’s revisit it,” he said.

Questions and concerns:

Stackman said Nov. 4 that he’s looking for public feedback before nailing down specifics for the plan.
Some public commenters are concerned that Stackman’s out-of-town status separates him from local issues.

Stackman said he builds high rises in South Florida, where he said he works for “premium” developers and contractors. He said he’s been rooted in Florida since the late 1980s, but he’s from Queens and grew up on Long Island. He said he looked at buying property in Colorado before opting to purchase land in his “home state.”

When asked if he’d be interested in becoming a full-time resident of the Adirondacks, Stackman said, “That’s a good question on my journey in life,” and that he would answer the question in a couple of months. He said that if he wanted to have a house in the mountains, he’d rather have one in the Adirondacks instead of Colorado.

Saranac Lake resident Karen Davis left a public comment asking about deed restrictions in the development. Lake Placid developer Joe Barile has agreed to deed-restrict the units in his Peaks at Lake Placid project, prohibiting those units from being used as short-term rentals. Wilmington resident Daniel Winkler wrote a comment saying that short-term rentals are why he left Lake Placid.

When asked if he had plans to allow long-term or short-term vacation rentals in his residential units, Stackman said, “In this day and age, that’s a great question.” He said that in the current plan, the homes are intended to first be sold, and that “what a resident may do later on is not my decision.”

Some locals, like Tahawus Center owner and Artistic Director Rebecca Kelly, are concerned that the development won’t provide affordable housing for area residents.

“Does the area really need or want more housing for affluence?” Kelly wrote. “Where is the low-income housing part, for which there is a significant need in this region?”

When asked about which target Area Median Income the residential portion of the development would serve, Stackman said it’s still too premature to estimate the target AMI. He said that the Jay area provides opportunities for people looking for “growth potential,” and he believes the development would serve people looking for second homes and vacation homes who want to “come up” and enjoy the region.
Other commenters are concerned that building up the undeveloped land would compromise the APA’s conservation of the Adirondacks.

“There is no large-scale development compatible with conservation,” Ticonderoga resident Joshua Ross wrote. “If the APA approves this, it has obviously strayed from its intended mission to conserve the park.”

Stackman has plans to invest in some green energy for the subdivision, and he said there’s a possibility of building a greenhouse for veggies and windmills to partially source energy. He said he purposefully placed the proposed buildings in a “cluster” to avoid clear-cutting trees.

Stackman believes the Jay area has a lot of land and homes for sale, but he said it’s all “existing stuff.” He said the whole purpose of his project would be to bring a “fresh,” more updated look to the area to create more opportunity. He said “it’s been a bit of a sleepy time up there,” which he said he understands with respect to the environment, but he believes people are looking for jobs and places to stay in the area and having a hard time doing so.

When asked if he knew that there is a local staffing crisis in Jay and surrounding areas, Stackman said, “Could be — I think everywhere there is.” He said that he knows restaurants everywhere are struggling to keep staff, and he said that “everything is being considered.” While his development would create jobs at the proposed hotel and elsewhere in the subdivision, he said he wasn’t sure if he would source staff locally or with J1 workers.

Stackman said he was waiting to secure funding for the project until after the public comment period.

People can view the project application, read public comments for the project, and submit feedback on the development on the APA website at www.apa.ny.gov. Comments can be emailed to RPcomments@apa.ny.gov or submitted directly to Devan Korn, Adirondack Park Agency, P.O. Box 99, Ray Brook, NY 12977. The APA will accept public comment until Dec. 3, 2021.