Developer defends plans for large-scale Jay subdivision

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A sketch of the proposed Jay subdivision, submitted as part of the application submitted to the Adirondack Park Agency.

--- Saying he’s built among mangroves and citing landowner rights, a Miami entrepreneur proposing one of the largest luxury resorts envisioned in the Adirondacks is defending his plans against critics.

In a recent letter to the Adirondack Park Agency, Eric Stackman emphasized his experience building in sensitive Florida habitats and of developing on private property.

Stackman, based in Miami, submitted his subdivision application this fall to the APA. He proposes to build a 72-room hotel, multiple mansions, villas, and townhome lodgings on 350 acres in the Town of Jay along the Ausable River.
The APA collected nearly 200 comments through Dec. 3 on the application. Several influential nonprofit organizations also criticized the APA for releasing Stackman’s application for public comment, noting that it lacked critical maps, species studies and other criteria.

Application link: https://apa.ny.gov/Projects/P2021-0248/20211019-FromApplicant.pdf

Keith McKeever, spokesperson for the APA, said Tuesday that the application process includes two public comment opportunities. According to the application, APA staff may require more information from the applicant before it is deemed complete and the agency’s regulatory timeclock kicks in. McKeever said staff will now identify and request all the required application materials. Once the application is complete, the second comment period will begin.

This is the second project to go through the APA’s new large-scale subdivision application. Legislation stalled last year in the state Legislature that environmental groups argue would bolster conservation protections when reviewing subdivision proposals.

Many of the public comments referenced keeping lands in the park “forever wild,” a clause in the state constitution protecting the Adirondack Park’s roughly 2.6 million acres of forest preserve from development. The constitutional protection does not cover private lands in the park, though the APA regulates land use and development on private property.

“These parcels are privately owned and already approved buildable lands zoned for moderate housing development,” Stackman wrote. “Landowner rights are very important to residents, and I am no exception.”

Stackman said he has built high-rise boutique hotels, residential and commercial buildings as well as historic preservation projects “to some of the strictest building codes in the country, dealing with issues such as rising sea levels, mangroves, turtle habitat protection and more.”

He added that multi-use trails proposed in Jay would be open to residents and visitors, and that the lodge, hotel, restaurant and spa would also be open to the public. Stackman also anticipates providing housing for employees. Some
commenters had raised concerned about the lack of affordable housing in the area.

Reached by phone on Monday, Stackman declined to comment beyond what he wrote to the APA.

The APA also received recent comments from the Adirondack Mountain Club, Protect the Adirondacks, the Adirondack Council and the Sierra Club’s Atlantic Chapter. Those groups echoed Adirondack Wild: Friend’s of the Forest Preserve’s comments delivered weeks ago which pointed out missing information in the application. The groups also questioned whether Stackman’s designs would protect natural resources.

Kate Bartholomew, chair of the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter, said even if the application’s “deficiencies were corrected” the chapter would call on the APA “to reject this application as inimical” to the state’s carbon emissions goals.

Wilbur Rice, president of the Adirondack Landowners’ Association, wrote the APA that it was premature to make a comment on Stackman’s specific proposal and also encouraged the agency to provide more review and information. The Adirondack Landowners’ Association is made up of 5,000 individuals owning about 200,000 acres in the park.

“We hope that you will take this opportunity to follow your existing regulations,” Rice wrote. “Everyone may not agree on the final recommendation by staff or the decision by the Agency but if you follow a robust review process using all these tools, your decision should demonstrate that the APA has a credible process.”