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Residents say planned Lake Keowee restaurant bad for the community

By Ray Chandler

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WALHALLA, SC — Residents near the site of a planned new restaurant on Lake Keowee Tuesday asked county officials to not make changes the residents say are bad for their community.

A requested change in Doug Hollow Road would mean the loss of a boat ramp in existence for decades that local residents paid for themselves, Steve Kelly told members of the Oconee County Council transportation committee.

Kelly spoke for about 20 residents living in the community near the road in opposition to a request by Richard Cottingham that would mean changing the position of the road and eliminating the boat ramp.

Cottingham, of Cottingham and Associates, spoke as a representative for investors planning an upscale restaurant on commercial property near the lake accessible by both road and lake. Included in the plans are a 10-slip boat dock and a 55-foot tall lighthouse to mark the restaurant.

The restaurant would employ about 20 people and pump an estimated $4 million to $5 million into the local economy, including about $20,000 in property taxes, Cottingham told council members. Plans are to break ground for the project in the summer of 2011 and open in May 2012.

Specifically, Cottingham asked council members to accept the last 477 feet of Doug Hollow Road from the South Carolina Department of Transportation and then allow his group to build another rerouted road to county standards. The county would them abandon the old road.

Cottingham said his group planned to build the restaurant with or without the changed road but preferred the plan that included the change.

Kelly said the changing of the road would eliminate the boar ramp, which was put in by local residents and has been there since 1984.

Without the boat ramp, Kelly said, the local residents would have no ready access to the lake, being miles away from other launch ramps.

“That's the only access to the lake we have on this side of the lake,” Kelly said.

The boat ramp is an unauthorized one, Kelly said, adding later that it uses an easement his family has with the state, guaranteeing access down to the lake, that came about when his family deeded rights of way.

Kelly said local residents were also concerned about the increased traffic on the road that would result from the restaurant as well as the 55-foot lighthouse, which Kelly labeled "an eyesore."

"This is a small residential community," Kelly said. "He's talking about putting a restaurant in a residential community."

Cottingham lived in a gated Lake Keowee subdivision, Kelly said, and questioned whether Cottingham would want such a restaurant and bar near his home.

Kelly also disputed Cottingham's assertion that the developer had fully informed local residents of his plans.

Cottingham pointed out that the area of the shoreline where the planned restaurant will be is designated in Duke Energy's shoreline management plan as a potential site of a commercial marina.

"What we plan will have less impact than a commercial marina," he said.

Council member Joel Thrift, chairman of the committee, directed Cottingham to make his request in writing to the full council for future consideration.

"We'll schedule a public hearing and get input from Duke, too," Thrift said.



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