

Cooperstown Crier
June 27, 2013

Boatloads of people speak at public hearing

Village attorney gives rationale on wanting to prohibit boat trailer parking

By Michelle Miller The Cooperstown Crier Cooperstown Crier

A large group of fishermen, boaters and others who are concerned about access to Otsego Lake came to a public hearing Monday to speak out against a local law that would prohibit boat trailers from parking on Fish Road in Cooperstown.

Before Cooperstown Mayor Jeff Katz opened the meeting up for public comment, the village's attorney Martin Tillapaugh made some clarifications. He said the reasoning behind the board wanting to pass such a law came after receiving a number of complaints from people not being able to park near the launch, especially during fishing tournament days. The trailers take up a number of spaces, he said.

"The board recognized that it had created a little bit of a problem because we prohibit trailer parking throughout most of the rest of the village," Tillapaugh said.

According to the attorney, the village board passed a law a few months ago that allowed various paid-parking lots to permit people from parking their trailers in them. A couple places mentioned by Tillapaugh were at Fairy Spring and Vinnie Russo's lot on Chestnut Street.

Once this was allowed, Tillapaugh said the board continued to receive complaints about people with trailers still taking up more than one parking spot because they would unhook the trailer and park their vehicle next to it.

"The board's intent, by prohibiting parking of trailers down there was certainly not to in any way prohibit or to make more difficult access to the lake. They actually believed they would make it easier," he said.

"What I think happened was some miscommunication," he continued. "When the notice went into the paper it said we are prohibiting trailer parking down here. It probably would have been better to add, because we were opening up about 900 spaces elsewhere for trailers."

The intent was to allow more people access to the lake, according to Tillapaugh. People would have had the option to launch their boat and then drive it to Fairy Spring to pick up the second person, who would drive their vehicle and trailer to park there.

The problem, said Tillapaugh, is people then began to question what if there is only one person.

The second option would be to launch the boat and then unhook the trailer someplace else and come back with the vehicle, which would take up less space. This suggestions created questioning during the meeting about who would be liable for lost and damaged goods.

“We have heard from so many people that we are holding the public meeting to hear the input, but I don’t think the board tonight is prepared to pass that because we want to hear that input and then make a subsequent decision,” Tillapaugh said.

Fishermen who transport their boats to the lake, local boat owners and those with interest in the lake and its access argued that the law will not work as intended. “This isn’t Cooperstown’s private pond,” said one opponent of banning parking of trailers on Fish Road.

Chris VanMaaren, DEC regional fisheries manager, read a letter advising the board that the department will have to reconsider its Otsego Lake stocking program if a law is passed.

Paul Lord, representing the Otsego Lake Association, said he anticipated there would be stocking issues as soon as he heard about the proposed law.

“Without DEC’s continued support, there is no way that we can find, locally, the funds needed to ensure that Otsego Lake continues to be stocked for fishing,” he said.

“It’s just isn’t going to happen,” he continued, “and if we lose that fishery we are going to lose our key component of the lake and will actually upset the ecology of the lake.”

Lord called the proposed law a “public relations fumble.” He suggested that the board step back and look at the potential impact the law would have. In this case, he said, hesitance may actually have its benefits.

His sentiments were echoed throughout the room overflowing with people as the board was asked to think hard about what they are doing before “doing anything too crazy.”

It was mentioned that there is already a sign on the road that parking is for boaters and it was questioned why it isn’t enforced.

It was also suggested at the hearing that the law exclude everyone but the ones using the lake as well as having the state reconsider the plan for a boat launch at Glimmerglass State Park to ease pressure on the village’s access point to the lake.

If any changes are made to the proposed law another public hearing is required. Action on the current proposed law was tabled pending public comment.

- See more at: <http://www.coopercrier.com/localnews/x1912993574/Boatloads-of-people-speak-at-public-hearing#sthash.JJiAbu3J.dpuf>