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Wilmington briefs APA on new zoning, waterfront development

By *KIM SMITH DEDAM*
Staff Writer

RAY BROOK — Adirondack Park Agency commissioners turned a spotlight on Wilmington at their July meeting.

What they saw is a new zoning code nearing completion in a plan written and reviewed by the local community.

Town Supervisor Randy Preston presented an overview of waterfront revitalization in process that lead to updates in town zoning.

Wilmington is one of more than 80 towns in the Adirondack Park without an APA-approved land-use plan.

The new zoning will not seek APA approval; instead it works like a puzzle piece to snap Wilmington's hamlet and adjacent development zones into surrounding APA land-use classification.

"It is in our lap," Preston said of zoning in Wilmington.

"But our board has to be prepared to handle that (review).

"We felt the need to have expertise up to snuff as far as our boards are concerned."

The town has spent years working to establish a volunteer Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals to direct growth under town rules.

Wilmington land-use codes from 1975 provided some hindrance to growth, Preston said, so the code has been revised.

Funding support for the process came from Department of State grants.

Since 2003, Wilmington has received nearly \$700,000 from the Waterfront Revitalization Program to produce a Master Plan for Lake Everest, facilitate beach improvements and update storm-water drainage management in areas impacting the AuSable River.

Three phases of AuSable River corridor management are nearly completed.

The Department of Environmental Conservation assisted in storm-water management review, Preston said.

APA Chairman Curt Stiles asked what barriers town planners ran up against in the APA Act.

"It really might just be hamlet expansion," Preston said. "We haven't gotten that far, but we're close."

Property Wilmington calls Village Area overlaps a Low-Intensity APA zone, limiting growth in the center of town, where planners would like to entice a 25-room inn.

"But there is no place in the (APA) hamlet boundary where one could be built," Preston said.

Zoning review focused on what property owners in Wilmington want for their future, he added.

"The people of Wilmington do not want to see development to the tune of Lake Placid. But we can have some good growth and not see the hustle and bustle.

The town does not have a wastewater treatment plant and likely won't try to build one.

Sewage treatment plants costs millions and millions of taxpayer dollars, Preston said, and are paid for over 30 years, when they become outdated.

"Then it's time to build another one."

Preston reported a measure of progress with approval of a new 27-townhome development that was controversial for its location near the town beach.

"It would not have been controversial if it were anywhere else."

Waterfront revitalization was vital to Wilmington's land-use review process.

The AuSable River is designated an inland waterway and therefore eligible for DOS funding support, said Andrew Labruzzo, a watershed resource specialist with the State Division of Coastal Resources, who has worked with Wilmington over the past few years.

Wilmington is the third town in the Adirondacks to implement waterfront revitalization review, behind Saranac Lake and Essex.

"It increases the ability to attract appropriate development; increases the (town's) ability to obtain public and private funding for projects; coordinates state (agency) actions; and builds (inter-municipal) partnerships," Labruzzo told APA commissioners.

Wilmington is also currently working with Whiteface and the Olympic Regional Development Authority to strengthen their role as a ski town.

And the Whiteface Memorial Highway is awaiting word on a \$700,000 Save America's Treasures grant from the National Park Service to restore the historic roadway and stonework.

The Town Recreation Department is also partnering with Essex County and the AuSable River Association to open community paddling programs at Lake Everest next year.

Preston said the new Wilmington land-use code would be unveiled to the public on July 28.

E-mail Kim Smith Dedam at: kdedam@pressrepublican.com