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Wilmington land-use hearings under way

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WILMINGTON - The new land-use code for the town of Wilmington was unveiled at a hearing last week that aimed to make the public aware of proposed changes to generate feedback.

The zoning ordinance update that was presented is only a preliminary draft for public review and comment, according to town Supervisor Randy Preston.

For anyone who could not attend the July 28 hearing, copies of the document are available at the Wilmington town offices. A second public hearing will be held on Wednesday, Aug. 25.

"Right now it's very important that we get public input," Preston said. "That's what we want."

The public hearing last Wednesday was attended by nearly 30 people, according to Preston. Lisa Nagle from Saratoga-based Elan Planning and Design gave a 45-minute presentation on the new land-use code, outlining inconsistencies between the town's zoning maps and its state Adirondack Park Agency land classifications.

"We've really tried to clean up a lot of the verbiage so it was plain English as much as possible," Preston said. "The goal was to cut down on any confusion. We've also introduced new flow charts that will be much easier to follow."

Preston said the town is looking to lesson zoning restrictions in some areas and tighten them in others. For example, current zoning restrictions require a 1-acre parcel of land to build in the hamlet area, which covers Wilmington's "town center" along state Route 86. The proposed land-use code would make it possible to build on a half-acre piece of land.

"If this goes through and there's favorable feedback, it will, essentially, reduce the cost of living in that area," Preston said. "If we lesson the requirement to a half-acre, it will make it more affordable to buy property."

The new plan also will increase restrictions near the West Branch of the AuSable River, dealing with issues of sewage and runoff.

"These are mostly common-sense things," Preston said. "We're basically making updates that will help protect the water quality and ecology of the river in the future."

Preston said he is aware of some negative feedback surrounding the new land-use code and understands the concern of residents.

"We don't want the same type of development that's happened in Lake Placid," Preston said. "I don't mean that in a derogatory way, but we want to have very controlled development in Wilmington."

Some of the controversy comes after the town's recent approval of a 27-townhouse subdivision next to the town beach on Bowman Lane.

"I'm adamantly opposed and upset about what's happening to the beach property," said resident Alison Follos. "I'm coming from a very personal perspective, but I've lived here for a long time and I've noticed that the whole feel of the community is changing.

"It seems that the town is so business and tourism oriented in terms of their goals. But most of the residents here are here for the residential quality."

Other residents, such as Ray Curran, who served on the committee that worked on the town's waterfront revitalization plan, said he thought the proposed land-use code was "a step in the right direction," but he emphasized the importance of guided development.

"The key is to get citizens involved, and there's a lot of people who care," he said. "People here don't want to just be another offshoot of Lake Placid; they want their own identity."

Preston said approving the proposed land-use code is likely a year away.

"We're going to go over any feedback after the meeting on the 25th, and then make changes and bring it back to the public," Preston said. "That process could happen two or three times until we've addressed all concerns."