April 29, 2011

TO: John Bluemke
Columbia County Planning & Zoning

Members, Columbia County Planning & Zoning Committee

FROM: Town Board of the Town of Wyocena

RE: Proposed Changes to New Zoning Ordinances

We appreciate the opportunity to express the concerns of the Town of Wyocena in relation to the proposed zoning ordinances.

Below please find comments related to some of the proposed ordinance changes regarding the campgrounds in Columbia County. These comments have been relayed to us by representatives of the campgrounds in our town; however, we, as a board, are equally concerned about the proposed changes and ask that you review the comments below and consider giving appropriate consideration to these concerns.

We also request that you forward this memo to all members of the Planning & Zoning Committee for their review as well. Thank you.

3. A preexisting camping unit that exceeds 400 square feet that is identified in the initial plan shall be considered a legal nonconforming structure.

This statement should exclude Yurts and tipi's over 400 SF. They are a tent and have been so for many, many years. The usable floor space in a tipi is much smaller than the footprint and is a temporary structure.

The ordinance does not define a type or style of camping unit that is left up to the operator. If an operator wants to offer a yurt as a rental option they should be subject to the same regulations as other camping units.

Town of Wyocena

H. Maximum gross density shall be eight individual camp sites or camping units per acre of active camping area. Active camping area consists of camp sites and land supporting the camp sites including access roads, recreational facilities, and other permanent campground infrastructure. No more than 10 percent of the area used in the calculation of maximum density shall include navigable water, wetlands, or woodlands in which there are no camp sites or units.

This restriction may render a new campground or addition financially not feasible. There is no reason for this restriction when the State code is 20 per acre.

The states definition of density has been in place for many years and certainly doesn't appear to take into consideration how "camping" has changed. Our analysis of the existing camp ground illustrates that all but one would have the ability to expand and even the one that is close to the 8 units per acre at 7.3 units per acre may be able to expand. See attached map. Also there is no indication that the campground which is at the 7.3 units per acre is having financial problems.

I. Individual camp sites shall be at least 1,200 square feet in area and camp sites created after [insert effective date of new County zoning code] shall mark the corners of said sites with permanent stakes. Each camp site shall be clearly marked with an alpha or numeric symbol on a sign which is clearly visible from an access road. Annually a map shall be available to the campground occupants and the County indicating active camping area and the layout of the camp sites and their location in that area.

Marking corners of sites with stakes creates a safety issue for customers and a liability issue for the owners of the campgrounds. It also creates obstacles for those mowing the grounds. Most sites are currently delineated with trees.

Marking the corners of new camp sites with ground level stakes should not cause any safety issues.

J. There shall be a minimum separation of 10 feet between camping units. Any accessory structure on the campsite, such as but not limited to, a deck, porch, awning, or storage structure shall be considered part of the camping unit for purposes of this separation requirement. The total footprint of these accessory structures shall not exceed 200 square feet. Any pre-existing camping unit that does not meet these standards shall be considered a legal nonconforming structure.

The requirement to limit total footprint to 200 SF is unreasonable and will only encourage our customers to seek seasonal camping in other counties. Are we trying to

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send tourism dollars to other counties? There is no zoning issue here. To limit a customer to a 150 FT deck if they have a 50 SF little storage building to keep their belongings out of site means the deck is to small to use. You can't put a picnic table and a grill on the 150 SF deck and still have room for your family to walk around it.

Many of the campground operators currently restrict deck size to 320-400 SF already. 400 SF is fine and there is no reason to make is less. Is the county getting lots of complaints about decks over 200 SF in campgrounds?

Again the ordinance does not attempt to limit design or type or number of accessory structures, it simply limits accessory structures to a total footprint of 200 square feet. The concern expressed here seems to revolve around decks, which by definition are uncovered structures. If the 200 square feet is considered too restrictive perhaps language it could be increased to 320 total square feet, which differentiating between covered and uncovered structures. However, allowing a 400 square foot camping unit with an additional 400 square feet of accessory structures on a camp site presents a large footprint that is almost equal to a single family home, and it is total size of structures on a campsite that is a concern for some towns and staff.

M. Each campground may, for only those persons camping on site or otherwise paying for the use of the campground, provide for purchases of sundry supplies, cooked meals, and drinks including alcoholic beverages, if so licensed by the town.

Amend as follows: Each campground may for those persons camping in the campground, registered as guests or visitors or persons making a bonafide visit to check out the campground, or otherwise paying for the use of the campground, provide for purchases of sundry supplies, cooked meals, and drinks including alcoholic beverages, if so licensed by the town.

This restriction is very troubling. What other business in the county is being restricted like this? There is no basis for crushing the tourism industry in this county by doing this. Every week campgrounds get visitors that stop by to check out the campground in response to the hundreds of thousands of dollars campgrounds in this county spend on advertising to attract tourism customers to the county.

All uses within the ordinance are subject to certain standards which pertain to the type of the use. Such standards can include parking, landscaping, height restrictions and others. While a campground can be considered a type of commercial use it is not in the same class as hotels or restaurants because it is more oriented to recreational lodging than transient lodging or eating facilities. However, the ordinance does provide a zoning classification C-1 Light Commercial which if approved by the town and county could be used by the campground operator to increase the intensity of both the camping by moving to more resort type lodging and have a restaurant/general store that serves not only the campground/resort but the public.

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Everyone in this county benefits from our customers who come to Columbia County and spend money during the summer. We get families who stop by to see the campground and while they are here we hope they make a reservation for a future stay. While they are here their kids may play in the game room, ask for an ice cream cone, or maybe they will eat something before they head home from their trip up north or from wherever they just were. How embarrassing it will be to have to explain to them that we cannot sell their kids an ice cream cone or they cannot eat there because the county says it is illegal for us to do so. If the campgrounds that sell incidental groceries, snacks, or soda are not allowed to sell that to someone who is not a registered guest, how can that even be enforced. A 15 year old kid working behind the counter is not going to be able to tell the difference between someone who rode their bike by the campground to check us out vs. someone who is a registered camper. This restriction cannot realistically be implemented or enforced so why have it?

If the campgrounds cannot sell a cone, soda, or a burger to someone who is not a registered guest then will the county prevent others from being in the campground business who have property but no legal campground license even though their property meets the states guidelines for requiring a state campground license. This type of sale is a small part of our business. As long as the campground is not advertising it's restaurant or camp store as a separate entity then it should not be an issue. Just as the a few pieces of property in the county which have more than 3 campsites and are not advertising itself as a campground are allowed to exist without having to follow any of the state or county campground rules and codes.

This restriction is simply anti-business, anti-economic development and anti-tourism.

Any property that meeting the definition of a campground will either have to adhere to the same rules or the County will seek enforcement action. If the operators are aware of such cases all they have to do is contact the Department and let us know where the unadvertised campgrounds are located.

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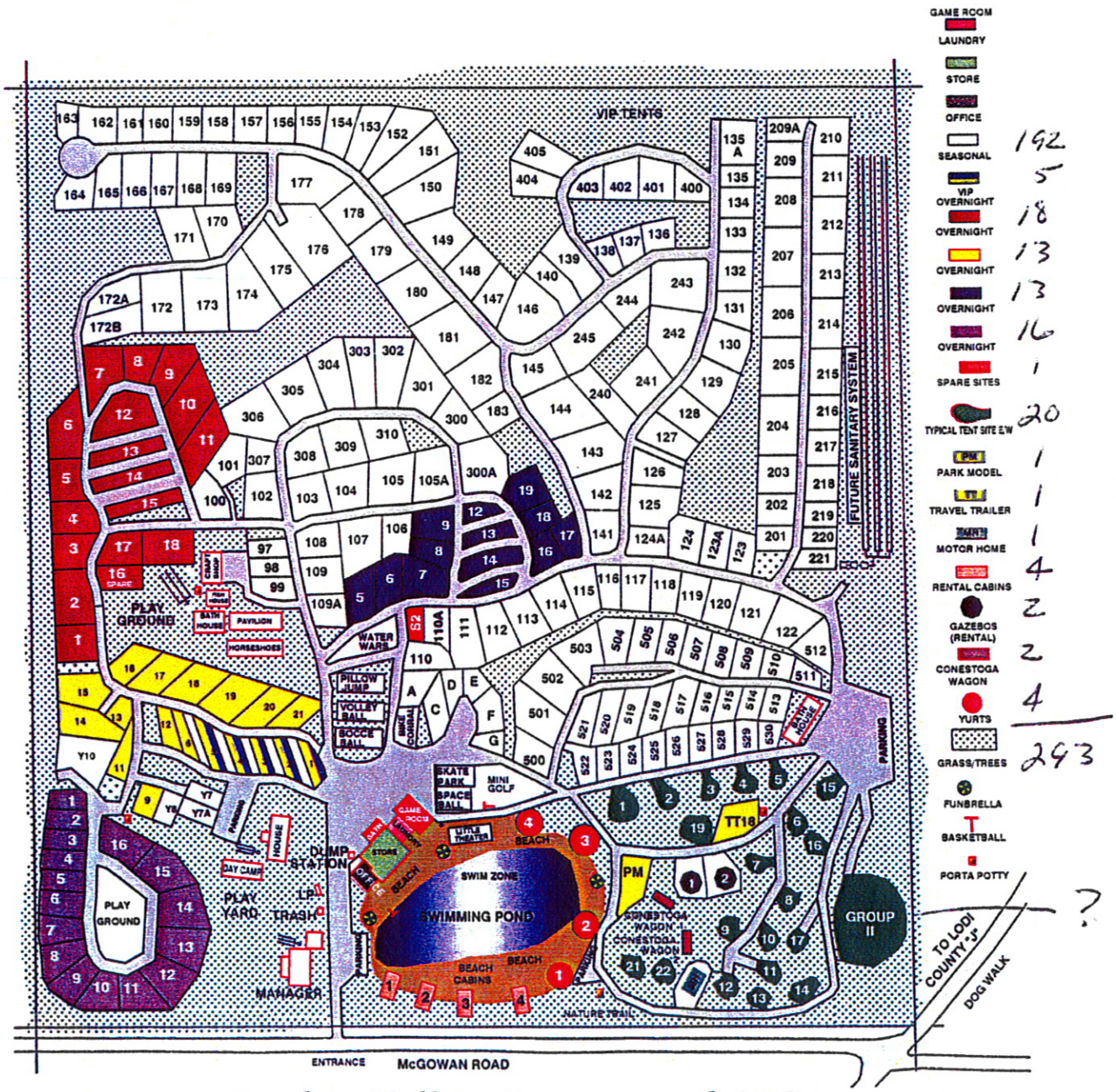

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5/2/11 293/40 ACRES = 7.3

40 ACRES
X 8 UNITS/ACRE
320