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Drum Triggers Request for More SLEOC Staff

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The St. Lawrence-Eastern Ontario Commission has asked the state to fund a two-year staff increase and is citing the Fort Drum expansion as the major cause for change.

Hiring a second recreation planner and making a part-time project review specialist job full-time were recommended by SLEOC Executive Director Daniel J. Palm during a Wednesday afternoon commission meeting at offices in the Watertown State Office Building.

Although the staff does not provide any planning directly related to Fort Drum on the border of Jefferson and Lewis counties, Mr. Palm said traditional SLEOC services are becoming more in demand. As the population grows with the location of the 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum, more developers are attracted to the area and more community officials have decided to institute municipal improvements.

The commission provides planning guidance to coastal communities and has 11 full-time staff and two part-time employes.

Cost for increasing staff would be $22,000 for the new job and $11,000 for expanding the project review position. The changes are expected to be included in a proposed 1987-88 budget that may be available by the Sept. 10 commission meeting.

Thomas M. Cutter does project review as well as Carol Tinsley, a part-time employe who is resigning.

The staff examines proposals for environmental and other impacts, and often recommends mitigating actions to a developer. The commission can go through the Attorney General's Office to force a developer to comply with their recommendations.

The development of Carleton Island was used as a prime example of how the commission's review responsibility has become more complex.

Patten Corporation Northeast, Stamford, Vt. bought the St. Lawrence River island near Cape Vincent to subdivide into 20 lots for sale. After lengthly negotiating sessions, Patten officials agreed to protect shoreline, forest and historic properties with easements or property transfers to the Thousand Island Land Trust. They also contributed $10,000 to the land trust.

Mr. Cutter said development projects, especially for housing, have become more complicated. "Some of it's associated with Fort Drum. Some of it's due to the salmonid program" by which the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has improved trout and salmon fishing in Lake Ontario.

Mr. Palm said the staff additions would only be needed for about two years until development tapers off. "We have a legislative mandate of project review. We have to give it high priority."

Taking an employe from another function such as planning is not a good idea because more communities are demanding the commission's help with historic, recreation and tourism development, he said.

"It's like land use planning," he said. "You have to strike while the iron is hot." That's why the commission should get a second recreation planner, to help communities design parks, trails and other facilities, he said.

Mr. Palm also recommended the commission spend an estimated $25,000 to $50,000 for a study on river and harbor capacity. He said the staff needs a way to determine when a proposed project such as a marina expansion would make a river or harbor too crowded. "It's not hard to say no to a developer if you have a solid basis."

He said a study setting up a method to assess capacity would cost about $25,000, and the costs for making case studies would push that to about $50,000.

The concern was prompted by actual cases in Little Salmon River, Sackets Harbor and French Creek Bay, he said. Even the tip of Henderson Harbor is becoming congested, he said.

Although other state and federal agencies have a part in reviewing applications for shoreline development, departments are not getting a clear picture of the situation, he said.

"Most agencies are now only looking at specific projects. They don't look at cumulative impacts," he said.

The budget this year is $521,700. Total costs of the additions recommended by Mr. Palm range from $58,000 to $83,000. That addition will be partially offset by a $40,000-reduction in the budget proposal. The $40,000 in the 1985-86 budget went for Seaway Trail geological and bicycle guides that should be completed this year.

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