

Carleton Island residents continue their opposition to Carleton Villa campground/glampground

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An excavator works on Carleton Island Tuesday morning to clear trees on a property that is undergoing a site plan review before the Cape Vincent Zoning Board. The owner has proposed building a campground. Provided photo

CAPE VINCENT — The Cape Vincent Planning Board is expected to bring up the controversial Carleton Villa restoration project on Wednesday at its regularly scheduled meeting.

On Tuesday, Ronald Clapp, the owner of the property, was seen around the property with what appeared to be excavators to clear some of the area.

Clapp, who is from West Palm Beach, Florida, purchased the property in July 2022 and is hoping to turn some of the area around the historic villa into campgrounds/glampgrounds. He says he would use money from the campgrounds/glampgrounds to pay for the renovations.

The plans call for 13 guest rooms in the main villa and 12 cabins for camping/glamping.

A post on the Carleton Villa Facebook page, which Clapp runs, says that the villa had lost the top of an ash tree, and there were down trees from “intense wind.”

“Unfortunately, we lost the top of a large ash tree, and there’s a lot of cleanup due to downed trees. But fear not, progress is on the horizon!” The post reads.

Clapp could not be reached for further comment on Tuesday.

Residents have spoken out at multiple town meetings, both at the Zoning Board of Appeals level and the Planning Board level.

Christine Martin, who owns property on Carleton Island, says a major concern for her is fire safety.

“Between us and this proposed campground is nothing but trees and grassland, all very flammable material,” she said.

The closest fire department to Martin, she says, is the Clayton Fire Department.

“By the time a fire vehicle has been called, my family and myself are very high at risk,” she said.

She said she was concerned with Clapp clearing space as she did not want the trees to go away.

“I really don’t want the trees to go, I want the idea of the campground to go, the thing that’s the problem,” she said.

Martin also does not believe that the campgrounds will be able to fund the villa restoration after expenses are factored in.

“It’s pretty disingenuous to act like that’s actually going to be something that can fund a probably \$20 million restoration,” she said.

Martin also wrote a letter to the town of Cape Vincent. In that letter she states that the land under the north and south bays belongs to property owners next to those bodies of water.

“It would be wise to require he prove any legal right to build the proposed docks before he is granted further permissions and exceptions to zoning law,” she wrote.

Jim McQueeney, who owns two properties in the Cape, one on Carleton Island and another in the mainland town, said he thinks there needs to be more information about Clapp as a developer.

“Developers have to have a secure financial base,” he said.

He also feels that the proper information about Clapp is not being offered or asked.

“Anyone who becomes a partner in business, or in life with marriage, wants to know the background of somebody who they’re going to be in partnership with and that’s what a big issue is,” he said.

McQueeney said he also feels as though there has been “a lack of transparency.”

“It’s just troubling that this process is tumbling down the tracks without the developer being questioned about his financial, personal, and professional wherewithal. That’s a problem for the community,” he said.

He also questioned the ability to pay for the restoration using the campground/glampground.

The planning board meets at 7 p.m. on Wednesday at the town’s Recreation Park.

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