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Group Opposes Proposed Boone Steep Slope Regulations

Story by Kathleen McFadden

The Committee for Responsible Environmental Regulations—a 25-member group that includes, according to spokesman Jeff Templeton, bankers, farmers, Realtors, lawyers, homeowners, apartment managers and politicians—is mounting an organized protest to the proposed steep slope development regulations that would apply throughout Boone's planning jurisdiction.

After more than one year of work, the Steep Slope Development and Multi-Family Housing Task Force submitted final recommendations regarding steep slope development to the Boone Town Council in July. Based on a geohazards

map that identifies all the land areas in Boone and its extraterritorial jurisdiction with three colors—red, orange and green—that signify its suitability for development, the task force recommendations limit development and land disturbance in orange and red zones to a percentage of the tract size and require geologic and/or engineering surveys prior to construction.

The colors on the geohazard map reflect two factors—not only the steepness of a given slope, but also its geologic characteristics.

According to Templeton, who is a local tour operator, members of the Committee for Responsible Environmental Regulations understand the task force's objectives for maintaining the beauty and integrity of the area, but are concerned about the potential results if the Town Council adopts the regulations: decreased property values, restricted use and enjoyment of

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property and increased development costs.

Committee members are concerned, Templeton said, about the need to apply for Town of Boone variances to add to existing structures in orange and red zones, about the cost of geologic analyses (Templeton's research pegs the cost at between \$2,350 to \$10,000, rather than the \$200 estimate from the task force) and about the availability of geologists who will perform residential evaluations.

An additional issue, Templeton said, is the proposed limitations on the percentage of land that can be disturbed in orange and red zones, thereby potentially prohibiting a small lot owner from being able to cut trees for a yard, build a retaining wall or construct a driveway.

The committee, he said, also feels that the definition of a slope as a grade of 15 percent or higher is too restrictive and that a 25 percent grade would be a more equitable basis for defining a steep slope.

"The regulations would affect 75 percent of the town's property," Templeton said. "That's like driving down the road and having a flat tire. You don't change all four."

According to Templeton, the committee advocates a "second look" at the proposed regulations and suggests controlling density through zoning, revising the steep slope definition, revising the town's Unified Development Ordinance to enhance the regulations and inspection regarding foundation design and installation to help prevent failures such as the one that occurred at the White Laurel subdivision.

The committee's immediate goal, Templeton said, is "to motive people to attend the public hearing on September 14 and to obtain a protest petition from the town's Development Services Department."

"We're not bashing the task force," Templeton said. "They're good people and did good work, we just don't agree with their solutions."

The Boone Town Council has scheduled a public information session on the proposed regulations for Wednesday, September 6, at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Council Chambers. The special public hearing is scheduled for Thursday, September 14, in the big courtroom at the Watauga County Courthouse.



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