

Three Projects Declared Hardship Cases, Exempt From Moratorium

By Karen Gould

Three Mackinac Island building projects were declared hardship cases by Mackinac Island City Council and granted a total of 7.5 Residential Equivalent Units (REUs). The decision was reached by council at its September 26 meeting and came at the recommendation of the Moratorium Committee that met the same afternoon.

A 180-day moratorium put in place in August froze new connections to the sewer system, except for hardship cases.

One REU was granted to Len and Sue Webster for their planned Hubbard's Annex home. Richard Coates was given 4.5 REUs for his employee housing addition at Green Shed Lane, and Robert Benser received two REUs for the con-

struction of two condominiums on Mission Street.

One REU is equal to the water use of a family of four, 2.8 hotel rooms, or a 250 square foot restaurant.

The city has 2.46 REUs remaining for the year.

"That would have been what was available with or without a moratorium," observed Alderman Mike Hart of the allocation. "Kind of makes the moratorium moot."

By definition of a hardship case, agreed City Attorney Tom Evashevski, Mr. Benser's planned construction project and Mr. Coates's development did not meet hardship criteria as determined by staff members.

A hardship case is defined as a person who made plans and incurred financial costs prior to

August 1, which is when the moratorium was enacted. Based on the belief that there was not a moratorium and commitments were made, then it would be a hardship. Until zoning approval had been granted, said Mr. Evashevski, that criteria would not be met.

The staff members who prepared the definition were Building inspector Dennis Dombroski, Mr. Evashevski, and Department of Public Works Director Bruce Zimmerman.

"For the Webster matter," Mr. Evashevski said, "staff did recommend treating that as a hardship because we are under a court order to move that along if they meet spelled out criteria."

Mr. Coates and Mr. Benser did not have zoning approval by August 1, although they were at a stage in the process, Mr. Evashevski explained to Council. Mr. Coates was granted zoning approval seven days after the moratorium was established. Mr. Benser made his application by August 1 for zoning approval, and while he had approval to build one of three proposed homes on his

Mission Street property, he did not have zoning approval for the remaining two structures by August 1.

The Moratorium Committee, however, said Mr. Evashevski, decided more flexibility was needed in determining hardship cases than what was recommended by the three staff members.

Council was advised by staff that no other projects would meet the hardship criteria.

At the committee level, Victor Callewaert and Armin Porter agreed to the hardship cases. Dan Wightman voted against the decision, questioning why a moratorium is necessary if exemptions to hardships are to be granted.

Only after being assured by staff that no other hardship cases are possible did Mr. Porter agree to the exemptions.

Mr. Callewaert argued that the point of the moratorium was not to stop all construction on the Island, rather to use the time to establish a plan for the coming years.

"We want to come to a conclusion," he said, "of what direction we are going in for the future. In my opinion, these

few REUs that we are using right now are in our limits, are within our means, and this should not detract from what we are trying to accomplish by the moratorium."

The city began rationing REUs in 2004 and restricts the number of new REUs to 15 a year, with at least three reserved for single-family homes. An REU, which costs \$5,587, is allocated after a building permit is granted.

The Moratorium Committee next meets Tuesday, October 16, at 3 p.m. on the second floor of Community Hall.

Library Building Will Be Cleaned

The city maintenance staff will clean spiderwebs from the outside of the Mackinac Island Public Library and will clean bugs from the lights, at the request of the Building and Grounds Committee, which met September 19. The work will get added to the schedule, said City Foreman Cub Horn, although his staff is down to three people.

"The library is not the only public building that needs work. We've cut the budget to the bone," said committee member Armand "Smi" Horn. "We shouldn't have, but we have to live with it."

Dennis Dombroski, city building inspector, who serves as an advisor to the group, agreed.

"If you look at the library, at Community Hall, the Court House, or especially the Stuart House," said Mr. Dombroski, "the library is in the best shape of any building we own."

Paint is peeling from the window frames on the side of the library facing the lake, said committee members, and they discussed painting them, although librarian Anne St. Onge said the library board is considering painting the entire building.

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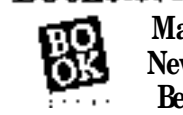
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