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Neighbors oppose land swap near beach

The town manager backs the plan to move motel parking and create a turnaround at Pine Point.

By EDWARD D. MURPHY, Staff Writer

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Depot Street is a small stretch of road, only a few hundred feet long before it dead-ends at the beach dunes of Pine Point in Scarborough.

But it's the hub of a disagreement over a proposed land swap involving property along the road. Some residents feel the deal between the town and a motel owner would be unfair.

The road runs in front of the Lighthouse Inn. Guests of the motel have to park across the street rather than in front of their units, because there's no room for spaces in front of the inn.

The land swap would change that situation, with Nick Truman, the owner of the motel, getting a strip of land in front of the inn for guest parking.

The town would get the strip of land on the opposite side of the road that Truman owns and where he has 28 parking spaces marked out, and it could create a turnaround for vehicles dropping off people wanting to walk to the beach.

The proposed land swap was up before the Scarborough Town Council this week, but a vote has been delayed until a public hearing and additional meeting can be held next month.

The Pine Point Residents Association opposes the land swap, arguing that Truman's motel ends up with more square feet out of the deal than the town. They also worry that the road will be shortened, limiting easy access to the beach.

Harold Hutchinson, a member of the association, said the accommodations are being made for a few visitors and a few months of the year, at the expense of those who enjoy access to the beach year-round.

"The property is there 12 months of the year, and these issues seem to be revolving around three months of activity," Hutchinson said. "Why lock it up when it's used by many?"

Truman thinks part of the opposition arises from hard feelings over a proposal he made four years ago to convert the 22-unit motel into six townhouse units.

Residents, he said, ultimately wanted him to scale back the number of units and put up a small park on the property, which he said wasn't feasible financially.

He eventually scrapped the plans.

Truman thinks the land swap is fair and won't limit anyone's access to the beach.

"Once it's all done it's going to be so nice, people will look back and wonder what all the fuss was about," he said.

Town Manager Tom Hall said the deal makes sense, and eliminating a road between the motel and its parking spaces will separate cars and pedestrians, making access to the beach safer.

It will also allow the town to improve the area's appearance, he said, because a fence between what is now the motel parking area and adjacent property will be removed.

"Right now, you're looking at a sea of asphalt and a 6-foot stockade fence," Hall said.

Hall said Truman would get slightly more land in the deal, but that's not the only factor worth considering in the swap.

"The town is able to get what it needs out of the deal, even with that," he said.

Residents are glad the process will merit a longer look by councilors, who could have voted on the proposal Wednesday.

John Thurlow, another member of the residents' association, said many in Pine Point believe that town officials have discounted their concerns over past issues, including development of a nine-lot subdivision next to the land involved in the swap and the expansion of a town pier nearby.

"We're trying to promote slowness of the process" so residents' concerns will be taken into account on the land swap, Thurlow said.

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