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Residents speak out on Storrs Lodges plan

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Chronicle Staff Writer MANSFIELD - Several residents, including some university professors, are expressing environmental concerns regarding a massive apartment complex planned for just outside the University of Connecticut's campus. Those worries came to the forefront at Thursday's Mansfield Inland Wetlands Agency meeting about a proposed 218-unit **Storrs Lodges** residential complex. The project has yet to be filed with the Mansfield Planning and Zoning Commission, as it is currently in the wetlands agency stage, with the most recent public hearing continued to November. The project will include 47 buildings and will host 692 residents. Assuming most residents will be UConn students, some of whom will be biking or walking to the nearby campus, only 554 parking spaces are planned. Some units will have two-bedroom apartments while others will have four-bedroom apartments. Approximately 22 acres of the 45.93-acre site would be developed with primary vehicular access from Hunting Lodge Road and emergency access from Northwood Road. The developer's application stated the project would disturb 4,402 square feet of wetlands. The two-hour public hearing began with Attorney David Sherwood, representing **Storrs Lodges** LLC, joined by David Zikas, from F.A. Hesketh & Associates Inc., saying the commission must consider "feasible and prudent alternatives," to the proposal and that alternatives they reviewed do not meet that standard. Specifically, Zikas said a hypothetical, 19-lot traditional single-family home subdivision with open space at that site, which the town currently allows under its current zoning regulations, would actually have a greater environmental impact. He said such a project would require the town to install and maintain a large stormwater control system and many house's backyards would be in wetlands, which would be problematic for those families. Mansfield resident Barbara Hurd said "I can't see how 19 home sites would have more impact," adding "how do you handle 600 drinking people out at night doing things in the woods that will go into the runoff too?" Zikas said a different, hypothetical proposal, with three separate high-rise buildings with townhouses, would have required a northern emergency access on Hunting Road Lodge going through yet another wetland. Such a proposal would involve a primary access road off Hunting Lodge Road (Residents, Page 4) (Continued from Page 1) and require a second emergency access off Northwood Road. UConn Ecology and Environmental Biology Professor John Silander spoke as an individual, stating he believes "95 percent of these (wetlands) will be altered or destroyed" as a result of the project, adding that the property has endangered species and vernal pools. "This current plan has high harm to natural resources, is irreversible, and will cause changes in local hydrology," he said. Silander also serves as a member of the town's conservation commission. Mansfield resident Amine Dahmani, project manager at the UConn Environmental Research Institute, spoke as an individual, and supports additional studies of the area since the project will "cause a lot of surface runoff ... (regarding) petroleum products associated with cars and its impact on water." While the developer's master plan from March incorrectly stated there would be 188 units, other documents including the developer's Thursday presentation confirmed there will be 218. However, those details are not relevant at this stage since the commission can only review the wetlands impact. Even if the agency issues the permit, the developer would need to get approval through the planning and zoning commission, which are the same people who serve on the wetlands agency. As of Sept. 12, the commission is in a nine-month moratorium on multi-family housing to allow the commission time to review and amend current housing

regulations. The commission will not be reviewing any applications until the moratorium ends. While known around town before the moratorium, **Storrs Lodges** is not grandfathered under the moratorium because a formal application has not been brought to the PZC. Inland wetlands agency Chairman Jo Ann Goodwin said this was the second public hearing and the hearing will continue to Nov. 2 at 6 p.m. in council chamber in Audrey P. Peck Municipal Building. She said it's possible the public hearing might continue again to Dec. 5. The hearing opened Sept. 6 lasting for about three hours, most of which consisted of a lengthy presentation from the developer. Those who would like to view public hearing videos can visit townhallstreams.com/locations/mansfield-ct and look under "previous" for Oct. 6 and Sept. 6.

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