

APA board could vote on Saranac Lake Marina expansion

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A view of Lower Saranac Lake from the waters off of the Saranac Lake Marina. Photo by Mike Lynch

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The Adirondack Park Agency collected more than 200 written comments on a proposal to expand and renovate the Saranac Lake Marina, and now the board could decide this week whether the project will go forward.

The [marina on Lower Saranac Lake is seeking a variance](#) from the APA's shoreline restrictions and a permit involving building on wetlands. If approved, the marina would expand its boat-holding capacity from 219 boats to 292 boats. It would also install covered dock slips, install a floating dock system and expand current services. The question is on the board's September meeting agenda this week.

In general, most comments supported renovations to the marina; even those submitting comments against the project were mostly for renovations. Some people are hoping the APA board will pump the brakes, however, concerned that approving a project of such scope could cause serious implications by setting precedent.

Adirondack Explorer filed a freedom of information law request and received the more than 200 written comments.

More than 130 were in favor of the marina's proposal. More than 60 were against. Several comments didn't take a very firm position.

Three of the Adirondack Park's leading environmental groups wrote against the marina's project, focused mostly on the APA's handling of the public comment period, public hearing and application presentation and less on the marina's proposal itself.

Peter Bauer, of Protect the Adirondacks, wrote how no information except for 29 pages of engineering planning documents were available for the public prior to a variance hearing for the marina. The documents APA attached on its website did not spell out exactly the number of boat increases, Bauer added.

Several submitted comments were resubmitted, records show, after freedom of information law requests were made for that information, or the marina's attorney had contacted the individual commenter.

Rocci Aguirre, deputy director of the Adirondack Council, said while the marina owners had done a boat traffic study, the council wanted to see a carrying capacity study of what the Saranac Lake system can handle.

David Gibson, of Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, voiced what a number of commenters wrote in to say — that the variance is “the wrong procedure for reviewing this and other marina projects. APA rulemaking for marinas is completely lacking. This variance should not be permitted to set a standard for marinas elsewhere in the Park. A full permit hearing is necessary to sort out the many issues related to this development.”

The Adirondack Council, Protect the Adirondacks and Adirondack Wild are all calling on the APA board to hold a public hearing on the entire project before approving it.

Scottie Adams, chairman of the Santa Clara Town Planning Board, wrote in with a warning.

"I would ask that you please keep in mind the precedent that will be set by the APA decision on this matter. The same developer has purchased Hickok's Marina in the Fish Creek area, located in the Town of Santa Clara. The marina is located in a high traffic area, between Fish Creek campsites and Upper Saranac Lake. I would imagine similar issues concerning this newly purchased marina will be brought before the APA in the future," Adams wrote.

Copied and pasted templates both for and against the marina were part of the comment array. Others ranged from short text messages to diatribes either against the APA and neighbors for holding up the project, or against the marina and its proposal.

Despite the questions of policy and procedure, most want the marina to grow. Like many, Ray Brook residents Chuck and Helen Cairns wrote in about their fondness for recreating in the area. The couple said they are in their 80s. After they retired to Ray Brook, they would often camp on the Lower Saranac Islands, using the marina to get there.

"We urge you in the strongest voice we can muster to preserve the viability of the Saranac Lake Marina," the Cairns wrote.

The APA board will also consider and possibly vote on the installation of a 5 mega-watt solar facility in Ticonderoga. The project is on a 36-acre site.

The APA will virtually [meet at 1 p.m. on Thursday](#). The regulatory programs committee is slated to discuss the solar and marina projects. The full board will [meet again starting 9:30 a.m. on Friday](#), when it is expected to vote on those projects. The meetings will take place over Webex, an online audio and video system. [Click here](#) to see the agenda and how to listen in to the meetings.