

By
Keith KINNAIRD<Br

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SAGLE - The Sagle Fire District is mulling its options regarding an embattled hillside housing development at Morton Slough.

The district's board of commissioners took input Wednesday on how to proceed with the Ledges Over Pend Oreille, a 33-lot subdivision which was approved by Bonner County commissioners on a split vote earlier this month.

The approval, however, sidestepped the matter of the International Fire Code, which is not officially part of the county's development code. Meanwhile, Sagle Fire officials have made it clear the district intends to enforce the fire code at the Ledges, a forested development with steep ground and only one way in or out.

Critics of the development maintain the Ledges' layout would put residents and firefighters in harm's way in the event of a fire.

"We believe it poses a potential danger to those who buy into the project and those of us who surround it," Ken Larson, spokesman for Morton Slough Matters, told fire commissioners.

Developer Rich Curtis attended the meeting, but did not address the board. He has previously emphasized that the project either meets or exceeds the county's land use standards and is being unfairly singled out. Homes would be constructed of fire-resistant materials and equipped with sprinklers, and the site would be outfitted with high-capacity water tanks.

Some of the potential options before the fire district include rejecting the project, compelling Curtis to redesign the it, pursuing litigation and deannexing the 320-acre site from the district's bounds.

District patron Robert Tyler told fire commissioners he would rather see money spent on firefighter training and equipment than on a lawsuit.

"The deannexation issue is a very radical move, but one I support," said Tyler, who pointed out that Ledges would benefit from the fire district even though the development has contributed nothing to it so far.

But kicking the Ledges out of the district could heighten the fire risk for neighboring properties, said landowner John Ennis, whose property is adjacent to the project. Ennis told commissioners that punching in a second access route into the development would go a long way toward improving fire safety at the site.

Commissioners took the matter under advisement and made tentative plans to conduct a site visit and bring the district's legal counsel into the discussion. Commissioner Klaus Winklemann said more time was needed to consider a decision and its implications.

"We shouldn't make this decision today," he said.

Curtis could not be reached following the meeting and did not return a call seeking comment.

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