

Community or Commodity?

Is Town a community or commodity? A community to be enjoyed by its residents, or a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder, which is it?

A very public battle over that question is being waged, with gusto, right now. The third and final round is Monday, the 25th, at Town Hall.

Two weeks ago Town Council was blindsided by a proposal to host a professional snowmobile race at the base of Snow King. Promoters want to take over Phil Baux Park, its parking lot and the baseball diamond to host a very noisy night-time event.

That's public property, owned by Town, but promoters are outraged. Town Council initially denied their request to use it. So at Monday's council meeting they brought in their lawyer, invited TV coverage, threatened a lawsuit and made sure there was a non-stop stream of supporters speaking out for the race.

Trouble is, it's the Holiday Season and neighbors don't want it. Residents think the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas is for family. They don't want the expected 10,000 race fans ruining their peaceful holidays.

Think of it as the March snowmobile Hill Climb championship, with all the road closures, beer sales and associated arrests, parking problems, snowmobile noise... smack dab in the middle of the holiday season. If you lived nearby, would you want that?

Those that live near Snow King put up with a lot. They endure summer music concerts, roller coasters, the Hill Climb, rodeos, and constant construction.

Courageously, Pete Muldoon, Jim Stanford, and Hailey Morton Levinson stood with the neighborhood at the first meeting. They said it wasn't the right event to host on December 8th and 9th. They voted no and it was seemingly over.

But after promoters made their second appeal at last Monday's meeting, a reconsideration was proposed and a revote ordered. The Travel and Tourism Board, spending lodging tax money, said the \$85,000 they were putting up to bring the event to Jackson was just what the doctor ordered.

Town planners have attached a whopping 60 conditions for any potential race approval. That expresses reservation.

Will town council stand with the neighborhood?

Referring to the community disruption and potential collateral damage the community might suffer, Mayor Muldoon said, "The costs outweigh the benefits."

Councilman Stanford pointed out it was Snow King's fault for planning and advertising the event even before they sought approval from the town. "This process should have been kicked off months ago and not laid at the lap of the council in the eleventh hour. That's the applicant's fault," he said.

It will all be resolved next Monday. Town Council will either stand with the good people that live in the neighborhood, or with the promoters spending lodging tax money.

The lodging tax made sense in the wake of the great recession. Maybe it's outlived its usefulness today? The local economy has made a robust recovery.

Are we a "community first and a resort second" or do we value the customer over the citizen? We'll soon know.