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Press Release From: Smallwood Aware Residents Team (SmART) & the Smallwood Civic Association

BESIDE Cabins Withdraws Plans for Subdivision & Campground in Bethel

Last night at a Bethel Town Board Meeting, Supervisor Dan Sturm confirmed a recent newspaper report that the Canadian company BESIDE Cabins announced it was withdrawing its plans to develop a controversial subdivision on 800 acres adjacent to the Hamlet of Smallwood, the most densely populated section of the town.

The development was slated to be built in the town's Forest Conservation District on an environmentally sensitive parcel on a hill directly above Smallwood's Mountain Lake. The plan included 102 single family homes, 57 of the large conventional type and another 45 smaller units, as part of a large commercial campground and recreation area also to be used for large gatherings. The project lacked community support and faced fierce local opposition from a newly formed citizen's group, Smallwood Aware Residents Team (SmART) and the Smallwood Civic Association (SWCA). In his statement to the community Supervisor Sturm stated, "I never thought I would be this excited for something that is not happening."

Upon hearing the news, Bill Moss, Smallwood Civic Association Membership Secretary remarked, "This is good news. SmART and the SWCA did good work in pointing out the flaws with the BESIDE proposal and the serious issues the development posed to our quality of life here in the hamlet, inclusive of the degradation of Mountain Lake. A sincere thank you to Association members who assisted, donated, and/or worked closely with SmART. Our advocacy and very serious concerns were heard by the Town of Bethel and Supervisor Sturm and we thank them."

The project stalled when it became clear after testing that the developer needed waivers for 50 of the 57 septic systems required for the larger homes. Clay Ruede, SmART Steering Committee member released a statement on social media stating, “SmART is pleased with the decision by BESIDE Cabins to pursue their plans for development elsewhere and thanks everyone who supported our advocacy and the proposition that the environmentally sensitive land at Hemp Meadow Estates was the wrong place for the wrong project in the wrong part of town. Our work fighting intrusive and harmful development that threatens Mountain Lake and the quality of life we currently enjoy in Smallwood is not done. There is another buyer for the land that we believe, ultimately, should have a permanent conservation easement. Furthermore, it’s regrettable that a well-known land preservation organization was also in the mix, commissioned an appraisal of the parcel, and was in the process of making an offer on the land. Despite the fact that the agent for the seller, Malek Properties knew this, the preservation group never had the chance to submit an offer for the property. This is an historic and unbelievably tragic missed opportunity. While we have achieved a fine win for our community, SmART (and its supporters) will continue working to protect Mountain Lake and its environs and deliver the message that even the BESIDE team agreed with in its gracious exit statement: the best use of the land would be to protect and conserve it.”

When asked about the notion of protecting both the Hemp Meadow Estates parcel and Smallwood, SmART Steering Committee member Sharon Silverman stated: "Put simply, Hemp Meadow Estates and the surrounding area — inclusive of the Hamlet of Smallwood and its lake and delicate ecosystem — is environmentally sensitive land and part of an important watershed, worthy of conservation. If the Hemp Meadow area is developed with even a limited degree of intensity, there will be significant adverse impacts on the hamlet of Smallwood and its lake. For this and reasons related to Smallwood’s population density and substandard road system, we believe it is advisable, necessary, and entirely viable that these 800 acres become part of a forever wild or some other kind of conservation easement."

Smallwood Civic Association President Jonathan Hyman commented, "The Smallwood Civic Association is committed to the long-term sustainability of Mountain Lake and its ecosystem. We are a lake community and without it we are just another development. We believe in the work SmART is engaged in and going forward, the Civic Association will be monitoring any new development proposals slated for Hemp Meadow Estates. The SWCA will pursue its ongoing work in water testing and examine other issues related to the health of our lake, its watershed, and ecosystem. We will remain engaged with our lake management firm, the Town of Bethel, the NY State DEC and other entities in order to better understand and secure the health of Mountain Lake. This work enables us to evaluate the detrimental effects of any proposed development on our lake and, indeed, our future as a lake community. Any effort at land preservation that provides a buffer for our lake and densely populated community is something the Civic Association supports."