

SP4103 Public Hearing
10/13/26
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Testimony of Coplin Plantation Board of Assessors

Regarding Subdivision Application SP4103

October 13, 2026

Good Evening Commissioners and Staff, and welcome to the Western Maine Mountains. We are pleased that this Public Hearing is taking place and hope that you find all the comments and input received tonight informative and helpful to your decision-making process.

My name is Robert Farrar. I am one of three members of the Coplin Plantation Board of Assessors, the Board of Elected Officials for our community. I have been asked to speak on behalf of the Board tonight. The Board has not taken a position to support or oppose the proposed project, but we do have concerns and recommendations we would like to share with you. I will be brief as these may have been previously brought to your attention.

First, Mountain Road leading to the project parcel is a steep, narrow gravel road with grades that would appear to be above what would be normally permitted to access a subdivision of this size, scope and traffic load. In spots, two normal sized vehicles would have trouble passing, particularly during the winter when the roadway narrows. We question whether sight-line distances from the project roadway onto Mountain Road are adequate and meet required standards. We are also concerned about emergency vehicle response and access during the winter months. Finally, this is not a loop road. The public road dead-ends just beyond the intersection with the entrance to the project roadway. ★ see back

Second, we are concerned about the amount of water runoff that will be created by the project. The area is naturally wet with both surface water and underground water present, especially during wet periods of the year and during heavy rainstorms. This additional runoff has the potential to negatively impact downslope wells, septic systems, driveways and roadways, especially Mountain Road. While the plan shows retention ponds to help

control runoff, we question whether they will be adequate and who will be responsible for maintaining them, once constructed.

Third, the project parcel would appear to have steep gradients, particularly within the proposed building envelope areas. This leads us to question the site suitability for water wells and subsurface disposal systems as there is no public water or sewer on site,

Fourth, the parcel sits at or near a ridgeline or mountain top with views of an adjacent ridgeline and mountain top, Cranberry Peak. Cranberry Peak is a spur hiking trail directly off the Appalachian Trail leading into the Village of Stratton. Is a scenic impact evaluation required and if so, has it been undertaken?

And finally, we are very concerned about the level of regulatory oversight that will be required should this project be approved, given the various developmental challenges that exist. To that end, we strongly recommend that an independent third party be hired, conduct regular inspections and be readily available to oversee all project work. We further recommend that they be vested with necessary authority to ensure full compliance with any and all approved plans and have the authority to immediately suspend or halt any work determined to be in non-compliance.

In conclusion, we appreciate the time that the Commission and staff have and will devote to reviewing this project. Coplin Plantation is a very small rural community, and we rely on the expertise of the LUPC and staff to fairly review and determine appropriate and responsible development that directly impacts us.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our concerns and provide comments.

★ Finally, we would request that if the project is approved, the developer be responsible for any damage caused to this simple gravel road by additional traffic and construction equipment.

Fire Department Review – Proposed Subdivision Development

Following our review of the proposed subdivision plans and our site walk, we have identified several concerns regarding fire protection, emergency vehicle access, and long-term road maintenance. We offer the following comments and recommendations to help ensure adequate emergency access and improve fire safety for future residents.

1. Road Width and Emergency Vehicle Access

According to the plans provided, the proposed roadway is 14 feet wide, with no designated passing areas. NFPA guidance recommends a minimum unobstructed roadway width of 20 feet for roads less than 500 feet in length and 26 feet for roads exceeding 500 feet. We recognize that these widths are recommendations rather than mandatory requirements; however, given that the proposed roadway is just over 1,000 feet long, we have significant concerns regarding adequate access for emergency vehicles.

A primary concern is the reduction in usable roadway width during the winter months as snowbanks accumulate along both sides of the road. With an already limited 14-foot width, snow accumulation would further restrict access and could prevent emergency vehicles from safely passing one another.

Because there is no nearby hydrant system, fire suppression operations would rely heavily on water shuttle operations using tanker trucks from mutual aid departments. These operations require safe and efficient movement of multiple pieces of full-size fire apparatus, traveling in both directions. The proposed road width would present challenges for two-way emergency vehicle traffic even under ideal summer conditions, with these challenges becoming more severe during winter weather.

Based on these operational concerns, we strongly recommend increasing the roadway width to at least 20 feet, with consideration given to a greater width where feasible. We also recommend incorporating strategically located widened passing areas or pull-offs to allow emergency vehicles to pass safely. These improvements would significantly enhance emergency access and operational efficiency throughout the year.

2. Fire Protection Water Supply

Over the years, we have responded to multiple structure fires in Hedgehog Village. These incidents have required substantial responses from mutual aid departments to establish and maintain an adequate water supply for fire suppression.

The proposed development presents additional challenges due to its dead-end roadway configuration. Fire apparatus and tanker trucks would need to travel in both directions along a restricted access road while supporting water shuttle operations. The nearest fire hydrant is approximately a one-mile drive from the proposed subdivision entrance, further complicating water supply operations.

Given these conditions, we strongly recommend incorporating underground fire protection water storage tanks into the development. Properly designed and strategically located storage tanks would provide a readily available water supply, reduce delays in establishing fire suppression operations, and lessen reliance on continuous tanker shuttle operations.

In addition to improving fire protection for the proposed homes, an appropriately designed water storage system may also have a positive impact on homeowners' insurance costs. We recommend that the developer coordinate with the local fire department and appropriate design professionals to determine the necessary storage capacity, location, access, and connection requirements.

3. Road Maintenance and Winter Operations

Coplin Plantation currently provides grading and snowplowing services for the existing mountain road. It is unclear whether the Plantation intends to assume responsibility for maintaining the new subdivision roadway or whether a homeowners' association (HOA) will be established to arrange and fund private road maintenance.

We recommend clarifying responsibility for road maintenance before the development is finalized. Reliable grading, snow removal, and sanding will be essential to maintaining safe and dependable access for fire, police, and emergency medical services throughout the year.

A formal maintenance plan should address winter snow removal, including the management and removal of snowbanks to preserve the available roadway width and ensure that emergency vehicles can safely access all homes. Without a reliable maintenance plan, winter conditions could significantly compromise emergency response capabilities.

4. Guardrails and Roadside Safety

During our site walk, we observed several sections where the proposed roadway appears to be bench-cut into the side of a relatively steep hillside. These locations may present a significant safety hazard if vehicles leave the roadway.

We recommend that the developer evaluate these areas and determine where guardrails or other appropriate roadside safety barriers may be necessary to protect motorists and prevent vehicles from going over the edge of the road. Particular attention should be given to sections with steep drop-offs, limited recovery areas, and restricted visibility.

5. Residential Fire Sprinkler Systems

Although residential fire sprinkler systems may not be required under the applicable state code for this development, we strongly encourage their installation in all proposed homes.

Residential sprinkler systems can significantly reduce the spread and severity of fires, helping protect occupants and limit property damage. Their benefits are particularly important in a development where limited roadway access and the distance from a reliable water supply may delay fire department operations.

Given the access and water supply challenges identified above, residential sprinkler systems would provide an additional and valuable layer of protection for future residents and their properties.

Conclusion

Our primary concerns regarding this proposed development are the limited roadway width, restricted emergency vehicle access, and the lack of a readily available water supply for fire suppression. These issues are compounded by the length and dead-end configuration of the proposed roadway, as well as the additional challenges associated with winter weather conditions.

Although the roadway widths referenced in NFPA guidance are recommendations rather than mandatory requirements, we believe the proposed 14-foot roadway presents significant operational challenges for emergency responders. We strongly encourage the developer and reviewing authorities to consider these recommendations and address the identified concerns during the planning and approval process.

Adequate road width, designated passing areas, a dependable fire protection water supply, reliable year-round road maintenance, appropriate roadside safety measures, and residential sprinkler systems would collectively improve emergency response capabilities and provide a safer environment for future residents.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on this project and welcome further discussion regarding these recommendations.

