

Eugenia campground owners will appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board

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(by Don Crosby)

The owners of the Hawthorn Cottages and Camping located on the shores of Lake Eugenia have decided to appeal a decision by Grey Highlands council to deny them the ability to operate 13 campsites in a trailer park.

On January 17, a final attempt by Jayne and Brian Legree to get approval for nine sites failed to get support from council.

On Jan. 3, council had approved in principle a compromise by Councillor Cathy Little for nine sites, and the bylaw was to be approved at the Jan. 17 council meeting. But when the time came for a vote at that meeting, council failed to support it.

After a great of soul-searching and legal advice, the Legrees decided to appeal council's decision to the Ontario Municipal Board. They said they want use of all 13 sites.

With the nine sites taken by seasonal campers, there would be no space available for campers coming in for a day or two. The Legrees maintain that they need the four transient sites for hikers, cyclists and other tourists passing through the area.

In an interview, the couple expressed frustration and disappointment over the long struggle to get the campground some legal standing. They said they didn't move to the area in 2012 with the purpose of picking a fight with their neighbours, several of whom are opposed to trailer park, including the Lake Eugenia Cottagers Association and the operators of Cedars Cottage Resort.

They were referring to their ordeal over their request to rezone the property, and the decision they made to leave their home in Mississauga and pursue a dream of owning a small resort in Grey Highlands on the shores of Lake Eugenia.

"We've always done what we were told," said Jayne Legree, listing the many requests made of them to upgrade the facility since the bought the place in 2012.

They said they were assured by their lawyer at the time of purchase that the zoning could easily be rectified. And they said their lawyer's opinion was confirmed by municipal staff when they met with them to discuss the situation.

But in the end, council turned down the reports and recommendations of these

officials and Grey Sauble Conservation Authority and voted against approving the non-conforming status of the campground saying that the municipality's zoning bylaw did not contain provisions covering trailer parks and campgrounds and approval would be setting a precedent, leaving the door open for others to seek approval for projects not covered by zoning policy.

The Legrees said they've invested up to \$500,000 in upgrades to the property, along with a \$10,000 upgrade to the hydro service.

They said they can trace the history of the campgrounds back to 1890, a time before the existence of Lake Eugenia, and there is history of camping at Hawthorns dating back to the 1950s.

Bryan Legree said the most recent owner operated it as a campground from 2004 until 2012 when it was purchased by the Legrees.

The Legrees said that for years the campground's classification was never in dispute, but that it changed when the former Artemesia Township was amalgamated to form the Municipality of Grey Highlands in 2000, creating this legal uncertainty.

The couple said they have received many emails and letters of support for their campground operation. They say over time, municipal staff, planners and the former municipal CAO, have all assured them that they were operating the facility in full compliance with applicable codes and the proper disposal of waste water and grey water from their property.

They have assured council that each of the 13 trailer sites has its own septic hold tank which is regularly pumped out by a local wastewater hauler. They also explained that the water supply to the campground is managed under the guidelines of the provincial government's small drinking water system, which requires monthly water quality tests by a third-party laboratory.

The Legrees enjoy a groundswell of support with a petition with about 1,500 signatures calling for the approval of their application that includes many prominent residents and well-known local families. Their cause has been supported by the campground's former owners.

No date has yet been set for an OMB hearing.

Thanks
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