

06/18/2018

Hello, Barry,

You asked me to go look at the new RV layout. My comments are attached below. I am not offended if you do not want to show them to the committee. You asked for my opinion, so here it is.

Beth

DIRECTOR'S NOTE:

Much of Beth's pros and cons are based on "RV generator noise." Beth may not realize that each site will have full electric and thus will NOT have generator noise. There could be, however, noise from RV air-conditioners. ~ Barry

BETH'S COMMENTS ON PRELIMINARY CAMPGROUND LAYOUT JUNE 18, 2018

I walked through the proposed new RV area with the layout map (dated April 6, 2018). I was able to locate most of the orange flagging which corresponded to the proposed 15 sites on the layout. On my copy, I labeled the sites 1-15, with Site #15 being the first site encountered as you drive towards maintenance buildings on the existing road, then turning left to follow the new one-way RV drive through the woods, and Site #1 being the last site encountered near the end of the new RV drive near the water building. (This is just my numbering for the purpose of these comments.)

These are my opinions.

At the Big Campfire Circle, you will hear RV generator noise and music from all of the RVs. You will hear conversation/people noise from Sites 1-9.

At the Big Campfire Circle, you will be able to see RVs parked at Sites 3, 5, 7. Site #5 is the closest, with the back of the RV being 47 feet from the nearest campfire bench. A young chestnut oak tree with the orange flagging on it is clearly visible from the benches. (Note: the RVs will all be backed into their sites.) The RVs at Sites #3 and #7 will be visible through the trees, even considering the relatively thick understory of trees and shrubs. These RVs will be much more visible in April and October with less understory.

Estimate of distances from RVs to closest bench:

Site #3: probably around 90 feet

Site #5: 47 feet

Site #7: 90 feet

At the small chapel in the woods uphill from the Big Campfire Circle, many of the RVs will be visible and able to be heard.

At Cave Shelter and Field, most of the RVs will be visible and be able to be heard.

At Heritage Lodge, people on the back patio would probably be able to hear RV noise, and perhaps see Site #1. Some guest groups have told me that when they are inside Heritage Lodge, there is not much noise from outside. As I think over my experiences camping at public and private campgrounds, I am trying to picture how this campground layout would be perceived. If I was RV-camping or tent camping at the 15 sites, I think the experience would be comparable to my other campground experiences: decent distance from bathhouse, adequate sense of "nature", nice spacing between campsites, ease of access (I like the plan to have all RVs back into sites.) However, if a group were using the Big Campfire Circle, playing music and making noise, I think the RV campers at those nearest sites would be disturbed.

Then I considered the pattern of use of camp buildings and spaces over my five years as guest services coordinator. Summer camp program need not be affected by the RV layout because we do not allow RV or tent campers during weeks of summer camp, except for between 6:30 pm Friday and 2:00 Sunday.

During the fall, winter, spring retreat season, I have seen many groups request and use the Big Campfire Circle. I believe these groups will be disappointed to find RVs parked so close to the Campfire Circle and will be disappointed to hear the RV noise while they are holding vespers and bonfires and music performing at the Campfire Circle. During Sounds of the Mountains, there is a night of storytelling held on Friday night. Based on

use of our old RV sites, I expect that these new RV sites will be in use during Sounds of the Mountains festival. I think those who go on that Friday night to hear stories around the fire will also be hearing RV noise. If I were helping guest groups plan their events by phone, I would definitely feel that I would need to explain that RVs could be heard and seen from the Campfire Circle.

Regarding economics of renting space at Camp Bethel, income from large multi-building retreat groups is likely to exceed rental income from the new RV sites. (I believe this to be true even though we plan to charge a more competitive rate for the new RV sites than we do for our simple Creekside RV sites.) The best guest groups from a budget perspective are the large groups who are pleased with Camp's facilities and consistently return year after year. If a large group expressed disappointment at the closeness of RVs to the Big Campfire Circle, I believe I would offer to close off those sites to accommodate the large group. And if the RV sites were rented first, I would make the prospective large group aware of the noise and view of the RVs, so that they know of this drawback before committing to renting space.

Also, there are only 3 weekends per year when I have consistently seen the Creekside RV sites fill up: Memorial Day weekend, Labor Day weekend, and Sounds of the Mountains. I simply do not get many requests for family camping during the year.

The small chapel in the woods is mostly only used by our summer camp program, so I do not think the RVs will diminish the experience of using the chapel. I also don't think users of Heritage and Retreat Center will be bothered much by the RVs. Folks who rent the Cave Shelter and field will lose some of the privacy afforded by that location, and there are groups who choose that space because they want to be away from the other people at camp. (Example would be some family reunions and some scout groups and some religious groups.) But the distance of the shelter to the RV sites seems similar to what I have seen at other campgrounds, so it does not seem unreasonable. But the RV sites do seem too close to the Big Campfire Circle and this is different from what I have experienced at other campgrounds. There are often amphitheatres and campfire sites at other campgrounds and they are not located so close to the RV sites.

So, in my objective opinion, the RV sites detract from the use of the Big Campfire Circle, and might be a factor for some large guest groups to decide against renting at Camp Bethel...or it would mean that we would have to close off use of RV sites to please our large guest groups. For my own personal opinion, I would not want to use a campfire circle so close to RVs because of the unpleasantness of RV noise, and the negative effect of the RVs on the aesthetics of the Big Campfire Circle. Our Big Campfire Circle is a really great place for peaceful gatherings and loud/fun smore activities. I dislike seeing it hampered by these RV sites.

Could we compromise and move Sites 3, 5, and 7? Especially #5? It looks like there is room for another site between 10 and 11, and another site between 9 and 10, and another site between 11 and 12.

I have tried to be objective about this, given that the long range plan mandated these RV sites be built. In my opinion, there are other needs at Camp Bethel which are far more important. From a financial perspective, I think it will be many many years before we recoup the money from RV rental fees to equal what will be spent on creating them.