

Barbara Rice
NYS Adirondack Park Agency
P.O. Box 99
1133 NYS Route 86
Ray Brook, NY 12977

April 13th, 2023

Dear Director Rice,

We are writing to you today to urge you to reject Eric Stackman's resort proposal in Jay, New York, in the Adirondack Park. The North Country is in the midst of an affordable housing crisis, and employees for the various seasonal attractions in the High Region (Whiteface, downtown Lake Placid, mountain trailheads and summits) already struggle to find any housing in the area, much less affordable housing. While Mr. Stackman's proposal holds the promise of bringing second home owners and increased tourism to Jay and the surrounding area, the reality is that increased property taxes and demand on a local economy which is already at its breaking point is not what local residents want or need. We strongly oppose the construction of this prices, rent being raised, and soaring home prices. Housing in the Adirondack park is no

different. Landlords can choose to either rent out their homes to short term rentals such as Airbnb or VRBO for higher daily/weekly prices than they can feasibly charge for rent, or they can choose to rent year-round at a fixed cost. The flexibility of short term rentals allows landlords to raise prices seasonally, such as more broadly in the summer when tourism is at its peak, or around specific holidays when people may want to visit the area (such as the Fourth of July or Labor Day). As a result of short term rentals, locals who live in the North Country year-round are forced to search far and wide for housing which allows them to sign a year round lease. According to North Country Public Radio, the median home price in the Adirondack Park has risen 54% in the past 5 years. Wages have only risen by 1.1%.

¹ NCPR News. (2023, February 13). Housing crisis in the north country. North Country Public

director of the Housing Assistance Program in Essex County, describes the problem simply: “We have people eligible, we have money available, but there are no units for people to buy.” catering to tourists and those seeking to rent for weeks or a few months, local residents are blocked out of what little housing there is.

Unique to the Adirondacks, there is another factor. Land is zoned differently in comparison to most of the United States. Because the Adirondack Park is protected by the New York State Constitution (in law), about half of the land is owned by the state, with the other half being privately owned. Most of the land that can be developed (such as Mr. Stackman’s parcel of low intensity designated land), already has been developed, making the remaining available for development that much more valuable. In September 2022, the Northern Adirondack Board of Realtors (which covers Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Hamilton and Warren counties) stated that housing affordability had reached a 33 year low² and home prices are also increasing: prior to 2020, the median cost of homes being sold in the North Country had never surpassed \$300,000. Now, the average house is selling for \$305,409 as of August³ 2022

Alongside the phenomenon of decreased affordability, school enrollment in Essex County is also shrinking because of a lack of housing. According to North Country Public Radio, Saranac Lake’s school district has shrunk by a third in the last two decades. Old Forge’s Town of Webb school district has shrunk by 40%. When considering the quality of life for residents of the Adirondacks, smaller school districts may offer less opportunities. Housing (or lack thereof) can have a great deal of impacts on schooling: student performance can decrease depending on mobility and housing quality, and new housing developments can have a financial impact on schools⁴. Frequent moves and stressful relocation can contribute to poor school performance, poor attendance, and poor social and emotional development. Lack of permanent, affordable

² Russell, E. (2021, June 30). The Adirondack housing crisis is pricing out local families and workers

housing forces families to move (sometimes frequently), potentially impacting their children's success in school.

In our dedicated research on this issue, from February to April of 2023 we sent a survey to about 100 respondents to the original APA Public Comments form that was released in 2021, when Mr. Stackman's development was first proposed to the public. Our survey yielded a 20% response rate, and of those responses, 84% of people were opposed to the development. When prompted with the question How do you think this project will affect local communities and/or other residents of the Adirondack Park?, one respondent who wished to remain anonymous replied, "[Stackman's development] will further commercialize the park and contribute to overdevelopment of wild spaces. This resort caters to wealthy owners, and will only exacerbate the overcrowding issues we're seeing throughout. This project, like most new developments in the park, does not seek to support full time local residents, but rather push them out." This sentiment was representative of other responses and carried through most other answers to this question, with many people concerned that a large lakeside commercial development would disrupt the culture, serenity, and affordability of life in the Adirondack Park.

Another prominent concern of survey respondents was the effect of development on local ecosystems. Mr. Stackman's property is located within several significant wildlife habitats, including central oak-pine forest, northern swamp, and pine-northern hardwood forest, and though the original project proposal only suggests removal of 4.4 acres of tree cover, degree of habitat fragmentation could affect local wildlife. The federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 has listed the northern long-eared bat as threatened, and has been observed in the area, and while disease is the main threat to long-eared bat populations, any additional stressors, such as habitat loss or fragmentation due to commercial development, could further exacerbate mortality.⁵ Mr. Stackman's property is also home to meadow horsetail, though the plant is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act provides no protections for plants found on private property. As such, expansive development in the area would likely damage an already fragile population of federally listed species.

We do recognize that Mr. Stackman's proposal is for private land that he purchased nearly 20 years ago, and the Adirondack Park Act designates private land use to be decided by

⁵ Craig, G. (2022, October 6). Developer is confident in proposed Jay's Adirondack Explorer. <https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/developer-is-confident-in-proposed-jays-resort>

⁶ US Fish & Wildlife Service. (2023). Northern long-eared bat. <https://www.fws.gov/species/northern-long-eared-bat-myotis-septentrionalis>

⁷ Craig, G. (2022, October 6). Developer is confident in proposed Jay's Adirondack Explorer.

the owner according to APA standards, and for the diversification of the Park's economy; however, when the developer chooses to prioritize luxuries and inaccessible price points over the wishes of locals, and over the "Forever Wild" mission of the Adirondack Park, approving such a project could set a precedent for the further development of the park, and the dangerous pricing-out of full time park residents. In the words of Adirondack Park resident and survey respondent Olivia, "The Adirondack Park deserves protection especially from unwanted commercialization such as this proposed development. The majestic mountains, roaring rivers, fertile

Mueller, E. J., & Tighe, J. R. (2007). Making the case for affordable housing: Connecting housing with health and education outcomes. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 21(4), 371–

385. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412207299653>

NCPR News. (2023, February 13). Housing crisis in the north country. North Country

Public Radio.

education on the APA permitting process via local newspapers, common spaces, and social media.

| Budget Item | Cost |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Space Rental | \$300 |
| Catering | \$100 |
| Publicizing Event (Fliers, Ads, etc) | \$100 |
| | Total = \$500 |