

Expanding Saratoga Lake recreation

By Joe Elder

As a way to diversify Saratoga's appeal and provide an alternative site for camping due to the large amount of beetle-kill in the forest, board member Greg Cooksey proposed a renovation project at Saratoga Lake at a planning commission meeting Tuesday.

Cooksey said he wanted to put the idea in front of the planning commission to open a dialogue about it.

"This is just a pure suggestion at this point," Cooksey said. "We don't have numbers on it, we don't know whether it is even feasible at this point."

The proposal includes plans to extend electricity and drinking water to the campsites, making room for more RVs and building a 60 to 70-person picnic pavilion along with two 10 to 15-person picnic shelters.

Cooksey also mentioned an amphitheater with a large outdoor stage that could be used for music, outdoor school plays and other local and regional events.

The multi-use recreational area would boost the local economy and provide another venue for local recreational opportunities, Cooksey said.

Town council liaison to the board Steve Wilcoxson questioned whether the recreational project at the lake would compete with locations within the town like Veterans Island and the Community Center.

"I think one of the things that helps draw people to our businesses and even to the little concerts at the Yard is the fact that it is in town and it's right in the community," Wilcoxson said.

Cooksey said he didn't think the recreational project at the lake would draw the same people as the venues in town. He listed Veterans Island as one of the town's most attractive features but noted its unpredictability.

"We might go 20 or 30 years without a flood, but we might not," Cooksey said.

Another concern raised by Wilcoxson was how the develop-

ment at the lake would be paid for since the town is already struggling to pay for upgrades at Veterans Island and Staff Sgt. Tyler Pickett Park.

The lake project would not ask the town for funding and would not compete for the same grants the town was seeking for its own improvement projects, Cooksey said.

Instead, the project would utilize donations of money, time, equipment and expertise from members of the community, and seek help from foundations around the state through grant proposals.

"It would have to be a community effort, otherwise you can't do it," Cooksey said.

Board member Rory Grubb suggested the creation of a master plan to prioritize the projects suggested at the lake.

"If you try to do it all at once, I don't think it'll ever get done, but if you take it step by step and whittle away at it over a number of years I think it could become a reality," Grubb said.