

## Residents around old Marysville Lake leery of religious group's campgrounds plan

Written by Marty Randall

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Members of the Scott County Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) held an unusually long hearing on October 14 so that those concerned about a Jeffersonville-based religious group's plans for development at the old Marysville Pay Lake property could voice their opinions.

Joseph Mullen is the construction manager for Voice of God Recordings Inc., the religious group which wants to develop the area into a campground and overnight facility for its members and its youth. Mullen and Daniel Evans, Voice of God public relations officer, presented those plans before the BZA and some 20 people that evening. BZA members present included chairman Gary Green, Sandee Owens, Dale Hobbs and Don Wilkerson. Also present was Area Plan Commission Director Jamie Knowles.

The group wanted a Conditional Use Variance (CUV) to allow the development of a Christian retreat at the lake, located on South Pleasant Ridge Road in Lexington Township. Mullen said Voice of God is a missionary group which operates worldwide to enrich people with the Christian experience as well as provide counseling and guidance. Voice of God is also in the recording and publishing business. The group's website offers more information on the business and church activities.

Voice of God envisions a retreat offering its youth hiking, fishing, swimming and boating. Mullen said a combination restroom/shower facility would be constructed for campers near the old bait shop, which will be replaced with a small pole barn for storage of equipment. A small chapel will also be built, he added.

Currently, only a campground is planned for the property, but Mullen said eventually Voice of God would like to construct a few cabins around the lake to accommodate eight to ten people each around the lake. Those plans would only advance as money became available, he said.

At most, he anticipated between 50 and 75 participants with adult chaperons coming to the lake for day outings on weekends three to five times a year. Only one to two campouts will be scheduled, Mullen said. "This will be for our youth group, for kids in the Jeffersonville area," he related. "It's all pretty low key, low use."

When Evans got up to speak, he immediately addressed what he described as "...a lot of stories we've heard. This is not a retreat for troubled teens. Our headquarters, our church, is in Jeffersonville on Charlestown Pike. You're welcome to come and visit and see what we do and meet with our leaders."

The public was then allowed to pose questions. One nearby resident said she was concerned about teenagers being allowed to camp there. "I don't think there'd be enough supervision. We are concerned with possible trespassing by youth," she stated. She also expressed concern about disturbance of a spillway from the lake being detrimental to wildlife.

Other questions were posed about adult supervision of young visitors, electrical availability, traffic such activities would cause and drainage.

Joseph D. Noble said the lake's dam has been leaking for several years and he wondered if Voice of God had planned to fix it. His family owns 80 acres adjacent to the lake, so he was also worried about noise, dust and trash. Another neighbor reported a "...serious trash problem (caused by visitors to the lake) in the past along our roads."

Mullen said the Indiana Department of Natural Resources has already inspected the dam. "It's not about to collapse. It will be repaired," he promised, Evans adding, "If we hadn't bought this property, the problem would probably never get fixed."

Documentation of that IDNR visit was requested by Knowles for his files.

Mullen and Evans said the road around the lake will be improved and made one-way. Access to the Gladden Cemetery will not be hampered in any way, they said. Restrooms will be

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built according to Indiana State Board of Health requirements. A septic system will be installed that is professionally designed.

Maximum capacity at the facility should be around 100. "There could possibly be more than that during the day, but our restroom facility isn't going to be that big, so that's going to limit how many can be there at one time," Evans stated.

The church's youth "...is like a regular church group. We're open to all denominations. We are a federally-recognized non-profit religious organization," he emphasized.

Eleven standards are set for a CUV. This type of variance is unusual because it stays in effect as long as the organization, business, mobile home or the like remains in operation or occupied under its original conditions. Once the need for the CUV ends, the CUV expires, explained Knowles. Any deviation from the original application will require that a new variance be requested.

As the BZA considered the standards, Wilkerson commented that he'd like to see the application tabled until the BZA's November 18 meeting. "I've watched the audience and I know there are still some people who would like to talk about (the plans) before we make our decision. I've got questions in my own mind, and I'm not sure I'm ready to vote," he told his fellow board members.

With that, the motion was approved 4-0 and advised of the next meeting time and date. Green also cautioned the audience and other members of the public to not approach BZA members about the application. All questions should be directed to Knowles, he said.

The BZA will next meet on November 18 at 6 p.m. in the basement meeting room of the Courthouse.