Written by Lauren Ohnesorge
Tuesday, 12 June 2007 08:51

Arguments got heated last night at Seven Devils Town Hall as citizens gathered to argue for and against proposed eminent domain action on the former Hawksnest Golf Course.

The owners, the Cottom family, had intended to use the property to build additions to the ski resort. The town has opposed such actions in the past.

In the meantime, property owners have complained that the former course has become an eyesore and its closure has lowered property values. The Cottoms even started a petition, signed by almost 200 residents, opposing the measure, fearing a municipal golf course would raise taxes. Lenny Cottom says there's more to owning a golf course than the town realizes. He alleged the town does not know how to operate a golf course, and has no idea how expensive it will be to repair and run the one at Hawksnest.

He's not the only one opposed. It seemed to be a fifty-fifty split at a meeting so crowded that over a dozen residents had to resort to standing.

Justin Grimes had a lot to say on behalf of the property owners. So much in fact, that after 16 minutes, residents demanded he step away from the lectern.

(Click here for a copy of Grimes' full statement.)

During his speech he mentioned several concerns reciprocated by residents. Should eminent domain be used to takeover a golf course, or strictly for schools, roads and train tracks? Grimes alleged that only .02% of the Seven Devils population used the golf course, a claim that was later refuted by several of the citizens for proposed eminent domain. Grimes claimed the golf course was a financial burden and more energy should be directed at promotion and expansion of the successful ski resort. Grimes went on to point out that Seven Devils is a very small community and that the board of adjustment, occupied by several council members, voted down Hawksnest's expansion plans. Grimes even went so far as to suggest an ulterior motive could

have fueled the decision. Those for proposed eminent domain had a **petition** of their own. In it, they alleged the closure reduced the summer recreational acreage by 89 percent and significantly reduced property values in the town. One suggestion was for a group of residents to form a syndicate and purchase the property from the Cottoms at fair market value. This idea intrigued Mayor Bob Dobson, who requested further information. The hearing left the Town Council with a lot to think about.