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Sugar Loaf owner responds to blight enforcement threat

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Vandalism has taken its toll on the now dangerous former Sugar Loaf resort, where doors stand open, windows are shattered and roofs have collapsed.

Record-Eagle photos/Patti Brandt Burgess



CEDAR — COVID-19 is not a good enough reason for delays in demolition of the former Sugar Loaf ski resort, now a dangerous target for vandals.

So say Cleveland Township officials who are moving forward on enforcement of the township's blight ordinance.

Township supervisor Tim Stein recently received a letter from Jeff Katofsky, the owner of Sweet Bread LLC, the company that is developing a new resort at the site.

The letter was "a lot of fluff," Stein said.

"There was no mention about getting the demolition permit," Stein said. "There was no mention about getting quotes for demolition costs. There was no mention about getting any timeline as to when any action was going to take place. These are all the key issues they are supposed to be looking at."

Katofsky's letter was in response to action taken by the Cleveland Township Board at its July meeting to establish the steps for injunctive action by the court system and to set a fine for non-compliance.

The township's next board meeting will be held at 7 p.m. Aug. 11.

Sweet Bread has not followed through on a timeline it set out in April that had demolition starting June 1 and finishing by fall, with the new resort opening in December 2024.

Katofsky writes that his company has been forthcoming regarding plans and updates on the project and that the continued threat of enforcement is not productive or necessary.

Delays are due to the tremendous turmoil caused by the pandemic, he wrote, which has affected timing, planning and financial resources.

Stein disagrees.

"We're all dealing with COVID," Stein said. "We have construction taking place throughout the state. Our state has not been shut down as of late."

Houses and roads are being built and buildings being torn down and the argument that may have held weight at the beginning of the pandemic is no longer valid, Stein said.

"Its validity has waned at this point," he said.

Katofsky also wrote that he is working on issues such as removal and disposal of hazardous materials, and the capacity of local infrastructure to handle the large amount of debris that will need to be hauled away.

“You cannot just take a bulldozer, knock down a building and throw everything in the trash. There are rules — which we intend to follow,” Katofsky wrote.

But Stein said demolition is being done all over the state.

“That’s what you have demolition contracts for,” Stein said.

Demolition costs are estimated at \$1.2 million, according to a quote the township received from Team Elmers.

Katofsky wrote that the company intends to move forward with demolition and has been working with contractors on a proposal.

Chet Janik, Leelanau County administrator, said Rick Barreca, construction manager, called him about six weeks ago saying he would apply for a demolition permit. That has not been done, Janik said.

Katofsky did not respond to an email from the Record-Eagle. Barreca responded, but was not available to talk before deadline.

Katofsky purchased the property in 2016 and since then has taken down some of the ski lifts and removed three underground fuel tanks.

He has said he plans to invest \$134 million to get a new resort up and running.

Sweet Bread submitted a Brownfield application asking for up to \$6.5 million in demolition and remediation costs.

The application was approved, but the company never submitted a second, more detailed application as required by the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority.

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