

Supervisors greenlight Summerhaven plans

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Details for Summerhaven's redevelopment - including a condominium-hotel and a property tax increase for flood control - were approved Tuesday by Pima County supervisors.

After the board votes, one of the hotel developers said the combined lodge-restaurant-condominium will try to promote ecotourism in harmony with the mountain.

Environmentalists sent a cautionary note, saying they **wondered if the new development and tram could cause Mount Lemmon to be "loved to death."** While they didn't oppose the hotel complex, one environmentalist said ecologists will have to ask how many trams and highways the mountain can stand.

The lodge-restaurant and a Mount Lemmon Community Center are scheduled to open around Memorial Day weekend 2006. The community center is being financed by county bonds approved last year.

The 2-cent property tax increase, effective for only the 2005-06 fiscal year, will pay for \$1 million worth of culverts and other flood-control improvements to protect the community center, area homes and a three-quarter-mile stretch of Sabino Canyon Parkway.

Without discussion, the board also unanimously approved these related measures:

- * Conducting a **\$100,000 feasibility study of a tramway to Mount Lemmon from the Catalina area on the mountain's west side.**
- * Spending \$320,000 to clear burned trees and other debris from county land left standing from the 2003 Aspen Fire.
- * Hiring RS Engineering Inc. for \$181,812 to provide consulting services for various public improvements and Swaim Associates Ltd. for \$148,777 to design the county's new Mount Lemmon Community Center.

The new lodge will have 54 overnight units and condominiums and a restaurant. It will be designed to meet environmental standards of the U.S. Green Building Council, supported by the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Association of Home Builders, the development's partner said. The lodge will be built of salvaged trees from the Aspen Fire, will use efficient toilets and dishwashers to reduce water consumption and will harvest rainwater for landscaping.

Replacing the six-unit Alpine Inn that burned in the 2003 fire, the new hotel will cause an increase in the number of people coming to Summerhaven but will be able to accommodate them in a much more environmentally acceptable way, said John Jones, one of four partners in Summerhaven Land and Investment LLC. The six-acre project, including shops, may take seven to 10 years to build.

The hotel will be OK if it conveys to its guests the region's biologic values and conservation issues, said environmentalist Matt Skroch "Then it would be giving back to the mountain. If it's going to be another hotel serving the whims of out-of-towners, why do we want that?"

Skroch, of the Sky Island Alliance, also questioned the tram because the Mount Lemmon area is already accessible.

"We have a state park on the west side of the mountains, a heavily used tram in Sabino Canyon and an **upgraded federal highway that reaches the entire town on top of the mountain,**" said Skroch, the group's executive director. "What people appreciate about Mount Lemmon is that it's a beautiful forest. It supports a diverse ecosystem of birds and trees, provides shelter in midsummer, and we need to preserve these characteristics we love today."

Arlen Colton, the county's planning director, said Mount Lemmon will never be flooded with people or be a huge destination resort because the area has limited land for development.

"If a large-scale project was economically viable up there, it would have already happened before the fire," Colton said.

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