

A Question Directed To:

Pat Thomsen – Parks Canada Executive Director – Pacific and Mountain Parks

Does the Field Unit Superintendent have the authority to overrule land use designations?

I am referring to Block 39 as described in Section 4.3 of the 2000 Waterton Community Plan.

A significant segment of the Waterton community is questioning the Superintendent's overruling of the Recreational Reserve designation in order to use said property for institutional purposes.

The Answer

Thank you for your question regarding the Waterton Community Plan, specifically Section 4.3 related to Recreational Reserve.

A community plan is an important guiding document for management decisions. Given the life of the plan, changing government priorities or circumstances can necessitate an adjustment in approach if certain provisions are no longer applicable. Where a different approach is implemented it must always be consistent with the overall management objectives for the community and the national park, and fully compliant with the Canada National Parks Act and other relevant legislation and regulations. A decision to deviate from a community plan would not be taken without full consideration of the issue, and a thorough vetting of the approach within Parks Canada. In some cases, public consultation may be determined to be a prudent course of action before a final decision is made.

A definition for Recreational Reserve in the community plan is found on page 59 (Appendix 1 -- Land-Use District Map) and on page 73 (Section 9 of Appendix 2 Waterton Community Land Use Directive).

The definition in both instances identifies the permitted uses for Recreational Reserve as:

- interpretive theatres
- outdoor recreational services
- playgrounds
- public parks
- public washrooms

The definition also explicitly permits as a discretionary use development that supports recreational and cultural uses.

The definition of a development as defined on page 64 of the community plan includes:

- a building, or an addition to, or replacement, or major renovations or repair of a building and the construction or placing in, on or under land;

- a change of use of land or a building or an act done in relation to land or a building that results in or is likely to result in a change in the use of the land or building, or;
- a change in the intensity of use of land or a building or an act done in relation to land or a building that results in or is likely to result in a change in the intensity of use of the land or building.

It is my assumption that your question related to the decision to locate the new Waterton Lakes National Park visitor centre in the townsite. A visitor centre that welcomes Canadians and visitors from around the world to one of Canada's pre-eminent national parks, and provides interpretive opportunities (displays, exhibits, interpretive programming including films, talks, theatre) so that visitors can learn about and experience the history of the park, its cultural and environmental significance, its international status as a World Heritage Site and as the world's first International Peace Park, while at the same time providing visitors necessary information to help them select how best they can experience and enjoy the Park through the multitude of outdoor recreational and other opportunities available throughout the year is consistent with the definition of Recreational Reserve in the Community Plan.

The townsite location provides an unparalleled platform to present and celebrate the Park's ecological, cultural and historic significance. Given that all Park visitors come to the townsite, this location will maximise the ability for Parks Canada to connect directly, perhaps even multiple times during a single visit, with the greatest number of visitors through welcome, orientation and the full range of interpretive programming, learning and recreational opportunities possible throughout the day at a visitor centre located at the hub of park activities. No other location provides this singular opportunity.

Sincerely.

Pat Thomsen
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