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Dear Commissioners:

As of this morning 391 people have signed an on-line petition concerning the bridge to "Dockstaeder Island" on the north shore of Holt Drive in Bigfork. The bridge was re-permitted by the county commission on January 2014. (The original permit was issued in 2011.) The permit number is FLP-11-02. I initiated the petition because, as a neighbor to the property, people were coming to me and asking, "What the heck is going on!?" It was obvious that people were highly concerned. As you know the bridge has been in the press as well.

I have with me this morning a copy of the petition that I will leave with this letter.

The petition asks the county commissioners to deny any permit amendment, to rescind the original permit, and to have the bridge removed, claiming that the original permit was issued in error because the Planning Office classified the bridge as 'not a road'.

The bridge when completed will be over 600 feet long, 16 feet wide, constructed of steel and concrete, and used for vehicular traffic. The bridge will, in fact, be a road. A private road. The county Lakeshore Protection Regulations specify that neither a road nor a driveway may cross the Lakeshore Protection Zone. It is clear from the materials, size and intended purpose of the bridge that the bridge is in fact a "road", and that it will ultimately serve as a "driveway".

The landowner commenced work on the bridge this spring. However, on April 22, the county issued a stop work order on the bridge subject to an amendment to the permit because the bridge exceeded the permitted length of 481 feet. The landowner had planned to seek an amendment shortly thereafter. However, the application for the amendment was withdrawn when the planning office discovered that the bridge no longer fell within a single parcel of property, which was a condition of the original permit.

As a road, we think that the Planning Office should not have recommended a permit, and the commissioners should not have approved the permit.

The issue never went before the county Planning Board even though state statutes clearly says that significant proposals on Montana's lakes need to be evaluated by the county planning board. The bridge is significant both environmentally, visually, and socially.

75-7-201. Policy. The legislature finds and declares that the natural lakes of Montana are high in scenic and resource values and that the conservation and protection of these lakes is important to the continued value of lakeshore property as well as to the state's residents and visitors who use and enjoy the lakes.

75-7-207. Regulations for issuance of permits....(3) The local governing body may provide a summary procedure to permit work which it finds has a minimal or insignificant impact on a lakeshore.

75-7-211. Consultation with local planning board.... the governing body shall seek the recommendation of the planning board as to the compliance of the proposed work with the criteria for the issuance of a permit.

Flathead Lake is undoubtedly Montana's premier lake and probably one of the largest economic engines in the Valley. Water and visual quality are two of its outstanding characteristics that the public values. It is almost inconceivable that the Planning Office and the County Commission would not have forwarded the bridge proposal to the Planning Board as it affected both visual and environmental quality as covered in the statutes.

Today I ask that the Flathead County Commission take a step back and take another look at the bridge and the permit. I ask that you place this matter on your agenda to vote on whether to put this issue before the planning board for a substantial review. We think the Planning Board should be directed to study and evaluate the bridge proposal as well as the existing permit, and then forward its recommendation to the commissioners for your consideration.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Dave Hadden

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