

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

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## Contra Costa supervisors order Golden Isle razed

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After almost 40 years sheltering water skiers and Delta vacationers, the private Golden Isle resort is facing destruction.

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday to deny the Golden Gate Water Ski Club's request to keep 28 cabins and travel trailers and an equal number of docks.

The club has owned the island since 1966 and its members built up the island in violation of county zoning regulations and without building, plumbing, mechanical, electrical, environmental health and flood plain permits, according to Carlos Baltodano, the county's chief building inspector.

The board voted to deny the club's request after hearing roughly three hours of sometimes emotional testimony from many of the club's members, its lawyer and several county staffers involved in a two-year investigation of the island.

"The fundamental issue here is land use designations and zoning. There has been a lot of time for that issue to be resolved and it has not," said Supervisor Mary Piepho of Discovery Bay, within whose district the island sits.

Piepho said she also lives in the Delta and built her house and boat dock with the required permits.

Also, the county has been busy for the past few years trying to clean up other Delta waterways and has ordered people living on nearby islands to tear down dozens of homes built without permits and in violation of zoning rules.

If the county made an exception for Golden Isle, it would likely open itself up for lawsuits from the other islanders, Piepho said.

The ski club's lawyer, Braiden Chadwick, countered that the Golden Isle situation is unique and shouldn't be judged with the same criteria as the other islands.

The island and the county first started trying to work out their differences in 1970, when the Planning Department announced that ski club members were violating county zoning rules. By 1979, the conflict remained unsettled and the club agreed to a county suggestion that it withdraw a rezoning request and form a committee to work out a compromise, Chadwick said.

After that, the county seemed to forget about Golden Isle and no committee was ever formed. The county essentially tricked the club into withdrawing its zoning request, Chadwick claimed.

It wasn't until 2003 that building inspectors re-discovered the club while investigating problems on nearby Salisbury Island.

Despite the years of conflict with Contra Costa, Golden Isle's summertime inhabitants still want to sit down with county staff and work out a plan to reduce the number of units and bring the rest up to code.

"These problems are solvable. They can be fixed," he said. "The club is not asking for anything Herculean from the county. They're asking for time, they're asking for cooperation."

Several islanders got up to plead their case to the board, suggesting that if the remote, five-acre island reverts to its original uninhabited state, it would become a haven for weekend partiers and other riffraff who have sullied the Delta with public drunkenness and garbage.

The club also denies that its septic systems endanger the local waters.

It's a well-built, well-maintained, crime-free family retreat that the county had winked at for years, said club member Bob Abbadie.

"We were told, go away. Don't bother us and we won't bother you," Abbadie said.

The ski club denies, too, its members are using the land illegally.

The supervisors were unconvinced, however, and the club now has 90 days from the time the order is mailed out to tear down its buildings and docks and barge the debris off the island.

Still, this is not likely the end of the struggle to keep the island neighborhood intact. Chadwick said the county should expect a lawsuit soon.