

# County approves RV extension at Hoback

Attorney: 'This is our community's Christmas story.'

By Emily Mieure

County commissioners voted unanimously Tuesday morning to extend the wastewater facility deadline at the Hoback RV Park, allowing tenants to continue using a failing septic system through May, should their landlords let them.

The vote comes more than two weeks after RV park residents asked the Teton County Board of County Commissioners to intervene. Some elected officials said their votes might not make a difference.

"This really is in the private sector, and there is not much else we as the county commissioners can do," Commissioner Greg Epstein said.

In November, managing property owner Crowley Capital asked some Hoback RV Park residents to prepare to vacate the property by New Year's Eve. The landlord said it was the only way to correct water and sewer violations being enforced by Teton County and the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality.

Because of land regulations Crowley Capital said a new septic system had to be installed to replace the current one, which is in violation. The new one is much smaller and can't support all of the current residents. That means only a handful of people who live in a permanent structure on one end of the property and a couple trailers can connect to it. Everyone else has to leave.

The notice was met with outcry from residents. Some have lived at the RV park for more than 20 years and expected more than a month's notice when it was time to move. While some residents have begun preparing to move others have expressed concerns about moving during the winter and in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. Community members have supported the residents by signing an online petition and donating to a GoFundMe.

In response, Crowley Capital later negotiated, telling residents they could stay at the property through May. But Crowley Capital stipulated that they would need to disconnect from water and sewer and contract with Macy's Services for individual

utility services.

To balance the extra cost of residents paying for individual services Crowley said they would lower rent so tenants would have cash to use for the pumping needed to get them through the winter.

"This plan by Crowley isn't feasible," resident Inanna Reistad said at a county meeting last week.

Resident Mary Talisman, 76, has no place to go and her trailer doesn't have a water tank for individual utility services.

"I am at the end of my rope," Talisman told commissioners earlier this month. "If I cannot make this work I will have to move out of Jackson. This is very important to me."

Commissioners heard more public comment Monday and Tuesday.

Attorney Steve Duerr has taken up the residents' case.

"Crowley is Scrooge," Duerr said. "Mary [Talisman] is Tiny Tim. This is our community's Christmas story. Please have compassion."

Duerr said he's representing the RV park residents and is willing to file a temporary restraining order in

the 9th Judicial District Court to stop Crowley Capital from disconnecting tenants from their utilities over the holidays.

After the vote Tuesday Duerr said hopefully that won't be nec-

*"Crowley is Scrooge."*

— Steve Duerr  
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essary.

"We thank the commissioners for holding a special meeting to help the RV residents through Christmas," Duerr said. "I am confident that the owner will work with the DEQ to come into alignment with the leadership of Teton County to help these residents."

Duerr said the RV park residents are relieved but know this isn't the end of the fight.

"They are grateful but also cynical," he said.

At Tuesday's meeting Crowley's lawyer Matt Kim-Miller said his clients are trying to comply with county and state environmental orders.

"To fix the environmental non-compliance we need to switch over the new system which has a reduced amount of residents," he said. "When Crowley Capital purchased this property in August of 2019 this was not known as an issue."

Kim-Miller said anything Crowley decides to do is subject to DEQ approval.

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## RV PARK

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“There is not a way for the owner to continue to, at the tenants’ request, break the law,” he said. “We aren’t going to do that.”

Kim-Miller said Crowley is willing to allow the tenants to stay through May if they convert to dry sites.

“That will stop the noncompliance and that’s the overall issue we’re dealing with,” he said.

He said they’ve reached out to DEQ to see what their options are. For now, the trailers can stay hooked up to the old system. But Kim-Miller said that will be reevaluated in early January. Multiple calls to Kim-Miller to further clarify what action Crowley might take after the new year were not returned.

Clare Stumpf, of Shelter JH, said commissioners should have explored what further options they had rather than passing one motion they admit has no teeth.

“We are disappointed that the commissioners did not exercise the full weight of their powers to come to a creative solution to keep Hoback RV Park tenants in their homes,” she said. “To be considered responsible community members and good neighbors, Crowley Capital investors could use the violation extension the BCC granted them to ensure their tenants are safe throughout the winter.”

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