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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR 7A

Is Sullivan County getting 'Greenwashed?'

To the editor:

That's the question residents of Smallwood are asking since BESIDE Habitat, a Quebec-based developer, proposed building 102 new, year-round homes in our crowded lake community, to create an "experience-driven hub where like-minded folk share a sense of community" (quoting their website.)

Talk of "hubs" and "experiences" tells the community that's already here very little about what might be coming. At a December town planning meeting, Habitat's lawyer referred to "pods" - their word for a 250 square-foot home - which the company intends for "year-round camping".

Except it's not really camping, it's living in a winterized studio with a wood stove, a propane heater and no running water (in a community with no town sewage system and a volunteer fire department). The company also proposes to build 57 "cabins", really one-family homes, each with its own septic, and drilled well, for sale or "short term" rentals. Bethel's outdated Comprehensive Plan doesn't define "short term" but expect more traffic on our narrow, sidewalk-less roads.

As a journalist, I know that savvy branding like BESIDE's can greenwash grimy products. Habitat's Vice President Alix Ouellet politely declined my request for more information. Little has been written about the company's one existing development in Quebec.

What we know is that while living in nature not spoiling it is a big part of the Canadian company's brand, the plan they've submitted proposes pumping roughly 20 gallons of water from the local aquifer every minute and generating roughly 25,000 gallons of wastewater daily.

That adds up to tens of thousands of gallons of sewage heading downhill to Smallwood's swimming lake and the Hemp Meadow wetlands, and a fragile lake community opened to high-density housing.

And that's an "experience" many of us would rather skip.

Laura Flanders
Smallwood