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New Jersey watchdog group criticizes Pinelands Commission

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MONROE TWP. The Pinelands Preservation Alliance, a watchdog group for the state's Pinelands Commission, have decried the commission, saying it ignored its own Comprehensive Management Plan.

According to State of the Pinelands 2009, an annual report put out by the PPA, the state commission certified an update to the township's master plan that encourages bringing sewer to a rural development area Diamond Lakes. This is strictly prohibited by the Pinelands CMP regulations, said the PPA.

"The residents there tell me there is not a problem," said Theresa Lettman, of the PPA. "We felt that the Pinelands Commission should not have certified the ordinance."

Right now, Diamond Lakes is not serviced with sewer, but with septic tanks. Mayor Michael Gabbianelli said he is worried about Diamond Lakes.

"We want water and sewer to be expanded," Gabbianelli said.

The PPA, however, said the update presents no factual information that a health emergency exists in that area.

Gabbianelli, who attended recent meetings to talk about some of the changes the township was not in favor of, said the township's master plan will not have any amendments to it.

In the PPA's annual report, the alliance suggests that Monroe Township is bringing up the issue of sewer to use Diamond Lakes as an excuse to sewer a much larger area along U.S. Route 322.

Gabbianelli said that the township doesn't have the money to do anything more right now.

"We are struggling to keep our heads above water just like everyone else," he said.

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