

Snowmass council OKs huge ski-base development

By The Associated Press

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Snowmass Village - The town council today unanimously approved a \$400 million base development that opponents say isn't justified by skier numbers and will require millions of dollars in taxpayer-financed road and other improvements.

The Aspen Skiing Co. says the development, including a gondola, is needed at the Snowmass ski area to compete with Vail and other major resorts.

"This is an important milestone but not the end of the journey," said Jim Crown, Aspen Skiing Co. managing partner. He said it could take six years or more to complete the project.

The resort is operated by the ski company but Intrawest, the Canadian ski industry and tourism lodging giant, is building the project.

Former Snowmass Village Mayor Jeff Tippett predicted opponents will be able to get a referendum opposing it on the ballot.

Longtime resident Rebecca Sparks said she hopes the lengthy construction process won't turn the resort town into "a noisy, dirty, busy, too busy, place to live."

Plans call for 640,000 square feet of residential space, including 246 hotel-style units, 349 condos and 10 luxury townhouses. Also planned is 64,000 square feet of commercial space.

The plan, first proposed by Intrawest in partnership with the Aspen Skiing in January 2001, has been under study by the council and its planners for 10 months.

"It's been a long journey to get where we are today and I think it's been a good one," Town Councilman Doug Mercatoris said.

Michael O'Connor, vice president of the project for Intrawest, said groundbreaking could start next spring.

"This is the hardest development process I've ever been through. It's required a more detailed review and more requirements than at Copper and Keystone," O'Connor said of two other projects he worked on for Intrawest.

Summit County commissioners last month rejected Intrawest's plan to double the size of development at Copper Mountain, saying the company needed to offer more to the community.

Tippet said the Snowmass project is too big and will take customers away from existing businesses. He said Intrawest never demonstrated that there would be enough business growth to justify the project.

"I'm very discouraged with the fact that the council appeared to be pawns of the developer, regardless of how long it took to get through the process," said Pitkin County Commissioner Jack Hatfield, a Snowmass Village resident.