

Winter Park may tighten law on lakes

Permit would be needed
to clear brush on shore

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OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — Lakeshore property owners will need a permit to clear more than 30 feet of shoreline if the city passes a law to strengthen protection of lakes.

Residents can discuss the proposed changes at a June 9 public hearing before the city commission. The rules are patterned after Orange County's and are compatible with state Department of Natural Resources requirements, said city planner Jeff Briggs.

Briggs, who drafted the proposal, said it still offers lakeshore owners the right to clear a good portion of their property. For example, the 30 feet is in addition to what can be cleared at a boathouse, dock or gazebo.

"A property owner could previously, according to city but not state DER regulations, remove all the aquatic vegetation as well as strip all the lake-shore vegetation or sod and put in a beach. That will not be allowed under the new rules," Briggs said.

The proposed change is an example of the city's increasing concern about its lakes. It has commissioned studies by Rollins College to study the water quality of the chain of lakes and the engineering firm of Professional Engineering Consultants Inc. to recommend actions to improve the lakes.

The new regulations have been discussed for two years and, city officials said, care was taken to allow property owners some flexibility.

To get a permit, an applicant would have to pay a \$50 fee and convince both the lakes and waterways board and the city commission that removing more than 30 feet of shoreline vegetation would not harm the lake.

Briggs said a property owner could remove some types of plants if they are replaced with another kind of aquatic vegetation.

"For newcomers to lakeside living, who have paid hundreds of thousands for that privilege ... it is often a shock for them to find that their lakefront is shared with alligators and poisonous snakes. So a lot of the clearing is to ward off those kinds of pests and open up their lakefront to a more usable recreation area," Briggs said.

Commissioner Peter Gottfried Tuesday suggested several changes he probably will try to include in the regulations. They include giving building inspectors, lake workers and police officers the power to cite people they catch violating the law.

Gottfried also wants the city to educate the public about the benefits of having plants in lakes. Also, residents who have stripped their shoreline of vegetation could be given help and advice in replanting it, he suggested.

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