

Clock ticking on deadline for Greylock Glen “eco-tourism” campground opportunity; part of town’s \$53-million lodge, amphitheater and education center plan; Harry Potter fictional link see as boost

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Proponents of a bid to jump start a \$53-million cultural and eco-tourism education and entertainment center alongside the Appalachian Trail and Massachusetts’ highest-peak -- and largest public park – have a new deadline to focus on – Dec. 15.

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That’s when responses are now due to a [“request for proposals”](#) (RFP) released by the Town of Adams for the first phase of the 1,063-acre, Greylock Glen project, which abuts the 12,500-acre Mount Greylock State Reservation and sits just to the east of Mount Greylock’s 3,491-foot summit. ([DOWNLOAD RFP](#)) / ([VIEW SITE PHOTOS](#))

The town’s RFP document invites public or private developers for a [140-site campground](#) that is proposed to feature rustic, wood-burning cabins, yurts and platform “eco-shelters” along side traditional campsites. An economic analysis predicts the campground operation could be netting \$384,000 a year by 2023. The original response deadline was Sept. 29 but the town extended it after receiving no responses.

In a cover note, Jeffrey M. Snoonian, chairman of the Adams selectmen, terms the overall Greylock Glen project “one of the most significant” for the Greylock region. It would be kicked off by the campsite development. [Other components](#) include an 11,000-square-foot publicly owned environmental education center and cross-country ski-touring center, a private, \$20.5-million, 170-room lodge and conference center and a 2,500-seat performing-arts amphitheater.

“The town is committed to ‘green’ and sustainable development principles in construction, building materials, use of alternative energy sources and technology,” the RFP reads.

[A market-analysis study](#) by C.E. Johnson Consulting Inc. of Chicago, a real-estate and hospitality consulting firm submitted to the town July 5 terms the overall \$53-million project “economically feasible” with the potential to be what it calls a “game changer” for the town of Adams that has a high level of community support. It says “Harry Potter” author J.K. Rowling’s declaration of Mount Greylock as the locus of a fictional North American witchcraft school will have a “positive impact” on the Glen proposal.

The Chicago-based consultants said the site is an “outstanding location” near cultural amenities and where market need for additional lodging facilities is projected. It also says the plan will appeal to younger, active visitors.

The latest proposal is the result of a multi-year design collaboration with four nonprofits -- the Massachusetts Audubon Society, the Appalachian Mountain Club, the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art.

There are at least 20 competitive public and private campgrounds within 30 miles – many of which are near capacity in summer months, [an economic consultant hired by the town found](#). But the consultant, Rachel J. Roginsky of Boston-based Pinnacle Advisory Group, wrote March 8 that the offerings at Greylock Glen will be “unique and more upscale . . . a high-end product which would appeal to the most discerning campers who expect a high level of amenities.”

The RFP says the town “has determined that there is a strong demand for alternatives such as cabins, yurts and eco-shelters in the region.” It proposes the campsites would allow small pull-in trailers, but no RVs or utility hookups.

“Within convenient driving distance from both Boston and New York, the appeal of the Berkshires is a restful, idyllic getaway for tourists seeking rich cultural attractions, numerous outdoor recreational activities, picturesque towns, and farm-fresh dining,” wrote economic consultant Pinnacle, adding: “National Geographic named the Berkshires as No. 7 on a list of ‘World’s Best Places.’ ”

The RFP document goes to significant lengths to document assistance to potential developers:

- It says the town and the state “may be able to assist with financing for the project (e.g., tax-exempt bonds for non-profits, loans and loan participations).” It also offers design and construction help from the town.
- It describes two “shovel-ready” sites for the campground development on a total of about 23 acres, in which town water, sewer and utilities are already in place and paid for, along with upgraded access roads.
- A successful bidder, if one emerges after December 15, could negotiate a lease of up to 25 years on the campground acreage, and would have up to 18 months from signing a contract to begin operations.
- It suggests the Berkshire Visitors Bureau could help with marketing support and advertising and the students of McCann Technical High School in North Adams might learn carpentry and other skills by helping build some of the campground facilities.

Train and art museums, Greylock Mill noted

The economic-analysis consultant’s report estimates the campground could generate between \$248,000 and \$384,000 per year in net income on revenues rising from \$1.0 million to \$1.4 million between 2019 and 2023. It also cites proposed projects in analyzing the potential for Greylock Glen campground:

There are several new proposed cultural amenities planned for the Adams area including a contemporary art museum, an “extreme” model train and architecture museum, and the redevelopment of Greylock Mill. Thomas Krens, the former director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, is behind the proposed 160,000-square-foot global contemporary art museum to be located near the Harriman & West Airport and is also leading the proposed development of the “extreme” model train exhibit modeled after Hamburg, Germany’s highly visited Miniatur Wunderland. Greylock Mill (also named Cariddi Mill) was acquired in 2015 with plans to redevelop the 240,000-square-foot complex to include retail, manufacturing, restaurant and hotel operations. The new owner is applying for a brownfields covenant to aid in the redevelopment of the massive structure.

History of failed skiing, golf and housing developments

The history of Greylock Glen – an expanse of sloping forests and human-cleared, rolling open spaces – is varied. For more than a century, it was privately logged, and then farmed through the 1960s. In the 1970s, the Greylock Glen was the site of developer’s proposed casino and then aborted construction of a [downhill](#)

[ski area](#); a golf course was built and never opened. Some foundations of an envisioned 350-room hotel remain.

To head off such intense projects, the state in 1985 purchased the site from a Holyoke bank after foreclosure. It initially backed a 385-acre, 1,275-unit second-home housing development. But the Heritage Development Group Inc. plan ran into major opposition from environmentalists – and a poor economy – and ultimately was ditched after a [damaging 1991 state inspector general's report](#).

By 2004 [a new vision](#) for lighter-weight development of an environmental recreation and education center emerged, including [a \\$2.7-million skiing and hiking trail system](#). In 2014, the state gave the town of Adams [a 99-year lease](#) on the parcel and asked the town to become its master developer, limiting buildings and improvements (other than trails) to just 56 acres. The rest of the 1,063-acre site is designed permanent conservation land, and now covered by a law signed Sept. 19 by Gov. Charlie Baker giving it so-called [Article 97 protection](#).

Town-hired market analysis finds \$53M project “feasible” and in “outstanding location”

[The market-analysis study](#) by C.E. Johnson Consulting Inc. of Chicago, a real-estate and hospitality consulting firm submitted to the town July 5 terms the \$53-million project “economically feasible” in an “outstanding location” with the potential to be what it calls a “game changer” for the town of Adams that has a high level of community support. It says “Harry Potter” author J.K. Rowling’s declaration of Mount Greylock as the locus of a fictional North American witchcraft school will have a “positive impact” on the Glen proposal.

It compares the Glen overall proposal to outdoor-oriented lodging facilities in Hancock, Mass., Bainbridge Island, Wash., Gorham, N.H., Nebraska City, Neb., Pescadero, Calif., Leavenworth, Wash., and Lakeville, Conn.

Recent hotel developments and the expansion of MassMoCA show people want to invest in the Berkshires, says the 63-page Chicago consultant’s report. Outdoor recreation is gaining momentum among the younger population, it adds.

Harry Potter author connected cited

It adds: “At the time of undertaking this study, a new fictional story was released by [Harry Potter author] J.K. Rowling centered upon the [fictional] Ilvermory School of Witchcraft and Wizardry founded in the 17th Century at the peak of Mount Greylock. The story will form part of the back story for an upcoming movie slated to be released in November 2016. The potential publicity that the movie will attract presents new and unique ways of marketing Greylock Glen Resort and is anticipated to have a positive influence on the project.”

“We believe that the proposed building program is economically viable,” said the Chicago consultant, adding: “The higher risk components are the Amphitheater and the Lodge, but there are strategies that exist to phase these in and/or make them more modest.” Annual projections are for 29,000 visitors to the Nordic ski center, 33,309 visitors to the campgrounds and 38,250 visitors on the trail network.

The Chicago-based consultants said their interviews of local government, civic and business leaders “revealed a high level of support for the proposed Greylock Glen.” Their report added: “There was a general consensus that the proposed mix of facilities responds to market needs and desires and strikes a balance between environmental protection and the potential for economic development.” They termed the Glen a “game changer” for the town of Adams, setting it up as a “recreation hub” of a tourist economy.

“Overall the proposed project is of a scale and quality that will change the image of Adams and significantly enhance the inventory of recreational amenities throughout the northern Berkshires area,”

the consultants wrote, adding: “The balance between environmental protection and economic growth that is expected by the project will create an invaluable amenity for the local and regional markets.”

Positive factors cited asserted the consultant:

- Location of the resort project is cited as “outstanding, being within close proximity of a number of major population centers and other major regional draws including Mount Greylock, MassMoCA, downtown Adams, the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail, and eventually the ‘Hoosac Valley Service’.”
- Strong levels of demand have been identified by county economic development officials for additional lodging and meeting space, particularly in the northern Berkshires, the consultant says.
- The consultant says planning, and state and local permitting, for the project are essentially complete. The first phase of utilities and road improvement is complete, with this site readiness substantially improving the level of project certainty for private developer partners as it minimizes the risk of delays and added costs.
- The project is said to have “strong local and regional support, as well as the support of the Commonwealth and state-wide environmental organizations. It responds to the desire for economic growth, while being respectful of the importance of environmental protection.”
- Greylock Glen Resort should appeal to the younger, more active visitor type, who is increasingly attracted to the northern Berkshires’ offerings (relative to central and southern Berkshire County), according to the Chicago-based consultant.
- The Town is marketing itself as the “recreation hub of the Berkshires” which will have a positive impact on the project and economic growth of the area.
- The project “integrates well with, and complements, existing cultural attractions within the region, particularly MASS MoCA, Williamstown Theatre Festival, and the Clark Art Museum, among others.”

RELATED LINKS:

- [A short history of the Glen project by Ray Gargan](#) (2014)
- [Johnson Consultants Glen Feasibility Study](#), July 5, 2016

Bill Densmore is a Williamstown, Mass.-based writer and entrepreneur. During the 1980s and early 1990s he wrote extensively about the Greylock Glen project as co-publisher of The Advocate newsweeklies. A shorter version of this report was published in [The Berkshire Eagle](#) on Thurs., Oct. 6, 2016.