

## Launching a Park Takes Forethought, Planning

*Woodall's Campground Management - From My View - November 2002*

It sounds easy doesn't it? After all, it isn't rocket science! Just draw in a few lines where you want sites, roadways, the office and all the amenities, and you're done. Right? After all, the tough park is for the engineers to work out. You know all that calculation stuff - everything from the water pipe size to the electric voltage drops.

Unfortunately that is how some folks entering the industry feel about it. Let me tell you about an experience of one individual who recently requested my assistance. It is important to know that this individual is a developer. He looked at the future park as an investment, so he would not be running the park himself but hiring someone to do it for him. He had no experience in the industry and doesn't even own an RV.

After he purchased the land, he hired an engineering firm to design the park. Although the firm had never designed a park before, the design looks pretty good on paper. Then he ran across my web page and purchased one of my books. After reading it, he at least had the foresight to see that designing a park properly for the 21st century might not be rocket science, but it just wasn't that easy either.

Scanning through the pages of my book and looking at the design in hand, he realized that "this plan just wasn't gonna work." At that point he called and said, "I need help!"

Had he contacted someone who knew the industry and the requirements of today's RVers first, he might have approached the project differently:

He might have purchased more than five acres - especially since this was an investment from which he intended to make a return and not just a sideline.

He might have had someone who knew the industry provide a design that did not have a heavy percentage of small back-in sites.

He might have had a design that had pull-through sites longer than 50 feet.

He might have realized that the 86 sites on his current plan would not support nearly 7,000 square feet of buildings.

But he did not! So now what? He already has the property. What will he do with it besides pay taxes on it while he figures out what to do with it?

In response to his request for help, I have done a redesign trying to utilize what I could of the original design while making the sites useable, although narrower than I normally would have, and reducing the square footage of proposed buildings. The new design will of necessity have fewer sites since “you can’t put ten pounds of soft peaches in a five pound bag.”

The original design had 86 sites and this is what he did his “penciling” on to determine his own feasibility for the project. At what level of occupancy did he calculate his income and expenses in the startup years? Can he get a satisfactory return on his investment? I would not bet on it.

So designing a park is not rocket science, but there is far more to it than meets the eyes of any newcomer to the industry or even an engineer without experience in RV park design.

Here are some of the things that should be considered in designing an RV park:

Can the sites be built in a North/South direction so that the hottest sun of the day (from the West) hits the utility side of the RV and not the patio side? This allows for the cooler morning sun to come up on the patio and awning side.

From which way do the prevailing winds come so as to protect the awnings?

Can the cost of construction and maintenance be reduced by the use of some one-way internal roads?

Should the sites have one or two sewer inlets to accommodate different configurations of sewer outlets on the RV?

If two locations of sewer inlets are planned, should they be just on the pull-through sites or perhaps the back-in sites as well?

Where is the best place for the electric and water so it does not impede the deployment of the various locations of slideouts?

Should this modern park use the old gym type restrooms or more private ones with shower dressing rooms or maybe even the newer family compartments?

If using family compartment types of restrooms, should this park be bold and install both a tub and shower in some of them for ladies who prefer baths or have smaller children?

Is more than one set of restrooms required?

Should the park provide instant phone connections at the sites? .

Depending upon the location and configuration of the sites, are walkways to the central facilities necessary?

Where do we locate the tent area, if we are having one?

Should there be more than just water at the tent area?

Does water need to be at all tent sites?

What is my point in this story, you might ask? It is this: If you are planning to build an RV facility from which you intend to make a living, it might be wise to gather some information about the industry before you set out to have it designed. Even after you have done that, you may find it wise to seek out someone who knows the desires of today's RVers and who can either do the design or work with your engineering firm to provide guidance. While some engineering firms may resist such assistance, it is your right as the client to require such assistance or you may wish to look elsewhere for a firm that is not so arrogant.

This next week I am to be part of a conference call between a developer and his engineer to facilitate my working with the engineering firm in the development of a new RV facility. Most good firms without experience in RV park design will actually appreciate your efforts to direct them in an area where they have little or no expertise.

My second point: Even if you are a seasoned RV park owner and are considering an expansion or upgrade of your facility, do not make the mistake of duplicating what you already have until you have considered the latest information regarding the desires of 21st century RV owners and users. It is not uncommon in our industry to see parks expended with the same old inconvenient sites and poor planning. Don't allow your guests to question your concern for their convenience in your planning.

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