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Federer in hot water over boathouse plan

Former Swiss tennis star Roger Federer has fallen foul of public access campaigners with plans to build a boathouse on the shores of Lake Zurich.

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The Rives Publiques group, which defends the rights of public access to lake shores, has lodged an objection with the canton of St Gallen against the boathouse that Roger Federer is planning to build on his property. Another objection is also pending with the city of Rapperswil-Jona.

The canton's investigations will take around two months. But if the boathouse is approved, Rives Publiques fears it will set a precedent for the whole of Switzerland.

Victor von Wartburg is standing in a boat and points to poles on shore of Lake Zurich. They show where tennis legend Roger Federer is planning to build a boathouse. Behind them, several buildings are currently under construction.

'Dangerous precedent'

"I have nothing against Roger Federer or against other people who live near the shore," says Victor von Wartburg. "But they must not take the shore away from the people."

Von Wartburg is president of the association Rives Publiques, which was founded in 2003 and campaigns for free access to Swiss lakes and waterways.

The fear of Rives Publiques is that if the boathouse is approved, this could set a precedent for the whole of Switzerland. "Then many people would say: 'If Roger Federer got it, then I want it too.' Then the banks would be built up everywhere," he said.

Bridge path

Raphael Hartmann from the St Gallen Department of Construction and Environment confirmed that the objection had been received. He was not surprised: "There was already an objection against the planning application. We

expected that the canton would also receive an objection against the concession application.”

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The main issue now is whether the boathouse is permitted in the water zone. This clarification will take around two months.

The city of Rapperswil-Jona is also now waiting for this decision. The city has pending objections that will be influenced by the decision from the cantonal capital.

Voters in the municipality of Rorschacherberg on Lake Constance approved a lakeside path in 2019. To ensure that the path does not lead through the villa gardens, the municipality is planning a path in the lake. This will go over an “island” that will be filled in. Two foot bridges will form the connection to the mainland.

A path in the lake – would that be a solution for Rives Publiques? President Victor von Wartburg dismisses the idea: “Lakeside paths built up do not comply with the hiking trail law. So that is not a solution – or at least a very bad one.”