

**SUFFIELD PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
February 22, 2016**

Present: Mark Winne
Ginny Bromage
James Henderson
Mark O'Hara
Gina Pastula, Alternate
Brendan Malone, Alternate

Absent: Jacek Bucior
Patrick Keane
Jeff Peak, Alternate

Also Present: Bill Hawkins, AICP, Town Planner
Gerald Turbet, Town Engineer
Eleanor Binns, Administrative Secretary

The proceedings of this meeting were voice recorded.

I. ROLL CALL

Chairman Winne called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. He then asked Ms. Binns to take a silent roll call. In the absence of Mr. Bucior and Mr. Keane, the chairman appointed Mr. Malone and Ms. Pastula to serve as full members for the meeting.

Ms. Bromage then read the legal notice into the record.

II. INFORMAL DISCUSSION

Beaudry Construction proposed 9-Lot Flexible Residential Development (FRD) subdivision at the corner of East Street and Thrall Avenue - Map 77H-45-239.

Christian Alford of Alford Associates introduced the builder J.R. Beaudry and described the property that is approximately 10.5 acres in the R-25 zone with no identified wetlands. The plan is to use the FRD regulations which require 50% open space but allows a reduction of the lot size to 18,200 square feet. The design shows a cul-de-sac road with the entrance onto Thrall Avenue with most of the open space abutting East Street. The cul-de-sac would have a green in the middle that would be managed by a homeowners association. Mr. Malone cautioned that the line of site onto Thrall Avenue might need to be addressed when an application is submitted. Mr. Winne stated that this project seemed to be a good fit for the FRD regulations.

III. PUBLIC HEARING

File# 2016-1: Request for a Special Permit for Commercial Greenhouses at 268 Poole Road, Maps 24 & 29, Block 26, Lots 91 & 39. Applicant - Four Season Farm, LLC.

Jay Ussery of J.R. Russo & Associates prepared the plans for this project and gave the presentation. He introduced Tim Coon, the design engineer for the project and Joe Geremia of Four Season Farm, LLC.

He gave a brief description of the 94 acre property which is bordered by Hale Street and Poole Road which is currently owned and operated by the Baker family. Hale Street is not accessible to the property without a substantial crossing of Stony Brook which is not part of the plan. The property is in the R-45 residential zone. Currently approximately 80 acres is being used for a combination of planting beds and hoop houses to grow container plants. The property is served by sewer and three phase power from Eversource. They have a capacity letter from the WPCA for this project. The plan is to bring in a natural gas pipe line from Mountain Road which will enable the residents of Poole Road and Remington Street to tap into the pipe line if they so choose.

This application is for an 11.79 acre state of the art commercial greenhouse which will grow tomatoes hydroponically. There will be a support barn constructed and the plan is for the existing tobacco barn on the north side of the proposed driveway to stay in place. Mr. Ussery also gave an overview of the drainage system. The anticipated traffic will be approximately 30-40 employees during the September to June growing season and three to five trucks per day. He also referred to the brochure submitted by Four Season Farm that describes the operation and gives an overview of the project. Mr. Ussery described the proposed screening as required by the regulations.

Commission member Mark O'Hara joined the meeting at 7:25 pm.

Tim Coon distributed pictures of the greenhouse that is planned and described the closed system that is used in the greenhouse for watering the plants. There would be a silo about 50 feet in diameter and 66 feet in height to hold water that would be used for heating the facility. This is similar to the silos that are currently being used at Geremia Farm in Wallingford and would be an earth tone color. A video was shown demonstrating the automated curtains that would be used to retain heat and prevent light pollution from the greenhouses.

Mr. Ussery explained that rain water or roof run off could not be used in this project because they need a consistent source of water and the nutrients need to be regulated. He also noted that 85% of the area under the greenhouse will have an open floor which complies with the regulation.

Presently 80 acres are now being used for hoop houses or planting beds. In contrast, this first phase is for 11.79 acres with plans to have 40-50 total acres of greenhouse over five phases. The remainder of the property will be planted with meadow grass which will stabilize the area, improve the drainage and be conducive to wild life. He pointed out that the application is in line with the town's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) promoting agricultural development.

This plan will result in a reduction in peak flows and there will be no discharge of any chemicals to the outside and all fertilizers and chemicals will be USDA approved.

Mr. Henderson questioned trucks maneuvering the bridge on Remington Street. Mr. Turbet explained that there is a project coming up to replace that bridge that will be wider and straighter. Also, the trucks can take another route if the bridge proves to be problematic but it was noted that trucks currently use the bridge.

Mr. Winne asked about the water usage and Mr. Ussery stated that there would be less water usage than currently with the Baker nursery. There will be two new wells for the greenhouse with projected usage of water to be about 25,000 gallons per day.

Mr. Hawkins then read his report into the record.

He noted that commercial greenhouses are an allowed use in the R-45 zone. Section V.L. of the Zoning Regulations provide the criteria for these uses which includes conserving property values, having a negligible impact to traffic in the immediate area, make necessary limits to protect the immediate neighborhood, and consistency with the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). He reviewed the utilities, parking & site circulation, lighting, screening, setbacks and coverage, and the water tower noting the section of the regulations that allow a structure to exceed the height requirements of the zone.

In summary he noted that this location is well suited for the proposed project. The property is fairly secluded from residential uses with the closest house being over 250 feet away and screening is proposed to buffer the project where it would be visible from existing homes to protect the immediate neighborhood. Also, given that the historic use of the property has been for nursery stock, including several acres worth of hoop houses, the proposed use while more sophisticated in terms of technology and with larger buildings is similar in nature to the former nursery. Mr. Hawkins proposed three considerations if the application is approved.

- Elevation views of the buildings shall be submitted as part of the application.
- The water tower is approved to exceed the height requirements of the R-45 zone at 66 feet tall. This approval is granted under Section III.E.1 of the Zoning Regulations. The color of the tower should be an earth tone (i.e. green, brown, tan, and gray).
- Should the barn on the north side of the driveway be removed, additional plantings shall be required to screen the greenhouse from abutting properties.

Mr. Turbet then read his report into the record. He noted that the traffic impact would be minimal considering the current nursery usage. The site access and the drainage meet the requirements of the regulations. He agreed with the drainage analysis submitted by the applicant and noted that this project will not result in adverse drainage or erosion impacts. He recommended that the following notes be added to the plans:

- Paved driveway and parking area
- Identify the loading area

Chairman Winne then opened up the hearing to anyone speaking for, against, or having general comments on the application.

Speaking in favor:

Kevin Sullivan, 1005 North Street - Indicated that this will be a state of the art agricultural facility which is needed in the State to encourage the continuation of farming. It will be great for the Suffield Agri-Science program at the high school and will expand the tax base. He also pointed out that the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) no longer allows run off and rain water to be reused.

Tom Frenaye, 489 Warnertown Road - Stated that he is in support of the project and noted that he was originally concerned about the lights inside the greenhouse and how it would affect radio frequencies. He thanked the applicant for being forthcoming with the type of lights they plan on using and he is not as concerned about interference. He also noted that this is not a typical farm operation and would be more of an industrial project. He suggested that the commission might want to address this type of industrial farming and possibly limit the areas of town that these projects are allowed in the future.

Speaking in opposition:

Andrew Fish, 410 Taintor Street - Noted that his farm abuts this property and is preserved. He was concerned that they may not be meeting all USDA, NRCS and DEEP regulations. He is concerned about water usage, noise pollution.

Andrew Whelan, 89 Poole Road - Expressed concern about the road being torn up for the installation of the gas line.

Joanne Rhoades, 224 Poole Road - Has concerns about the water tower and an increase in traffic.

Deborah Holland, 240 Prospect Street - Is very concerned that this is a much larger scale building compared to the hoop houses and planting beds that currently exist because this is a 12 acre greenhouse that will be 28 feet tall. Their property looks down on the site and it will have a significant impact on their property.

James Rutt, 240 Prospect Street - Stated that presently they look over open fields and this is a 500,000 square foot building that will be 28 feet tall.

Scott Guilmartin, 759 Hale Street - Supports the concept but is concerned about the large size of the water tower. He wondered if the water tower could be wider and shorter. He stated that there is plenty of subsurface water in this area and that should not be a concern.

Andrew Whelan, 89 Poole Road - Is concerned about the screening because of the slow growth of the trees that will be used.

Andrew Fish, 410 Taintor Street - Also concerned about the time it will take for the trees used for a buffer to mature. He is concerned about overnight noise.

Richard Pysz, 288 Prospect Street - Is planning on building on his lot and is concerned about the noise and the possible impact on his well and the lighting.

Joanne Rhoades, 224 Poole Road - Was concerned about the effect on the airport and planes.

Mr. Ussery addressed some of the questions raised:

All the equipment will be contained in the building which will be insulated and will not generate noise. The DEEP will regulate the water usage for wells drawing over 50,000 gallons per day and an application will be submitted if they exceed this threshold. The North Central District Health department will have to permit the wells they plan on installing.

This application is for the first phase and for subsequent phases they would have to submit a new application. The future phases would require one more water silo for a total of two and the second silo would be built next to the first tower.

He suggested that they would consider additional screening adjacent to the end of the greenhouse although it is not required to try and improve or buffer view from Prospect Street.

Mr. Geremia will go back to the design engineer to see if it is possible to reduce the height of the water tower.

The gas line project will be done by Eversource with the least disruption possible. They do not intend to tear up the road. The line would likely be installed in the road shoulder in the town right-of-way.

Mr. Ussery pointed out that the Conservation Commission has already approved this application as they are the regulatory agency with jurisdiction over wetland issues.

Joe Szczapa 709 Hale Street - Had concerns about fertilizer storage.

Mr. Rutt, 240 Prospect Street - Asked about subsequent phases and was advised that the second phase would require a new application and they anticipate that would be 3 or 4 years away.

With nothing further the chairman asked for a motion on closing the hearing.

Ms. Bromage made a motion to close the public hearing. Ms. Pastula seconded the motion which passed unanimously 6-0-0.

File # 2015-10: Request for a text amendment to add a new section V.X. Large Scale Ground Mounted Solar Photovoltaic Installations to the Zoning Regulations. Applicant- Zoning and Planning Commission

This text amendment public hearing was continued from the January meeting so that the town planner could review some of the comments from the Commission. The proposed amendment was not changed from last month's submission.

The proposed text amendment would address large scale arrays greater than 250 kilowatts up to 1MW on properties of at least 5 acres in the R-45, R-90, PDIP and I zones by way of a special permit/site plan review.

Mr. Hawkins does not have new information with regard to the town's ability to tax these facilities. He stated he will be meeting with the Assessor and the Economic Development Commission prior to the March regular meeting and suggested the public hearing get continued.

Mr. O'Hara moved to continue the hearing to the March 21st meeting. Ms. Bromage seconded the motion which passed 6-0-0.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

File# 2016-1: Request for a Special Permit for Commercial Greenhouses at 268 Poole Rd., Map 24 & 29, Block 26, Lot 91 & 39. Applicant - Four Season Farm, LLC.

Mr. O'Hara noted that the application meets the regulations and felt the commission does not have grounds to reject it but would like the applicant to consider reducing the size of the water tower. He also suggested that additional plantings should be shown on the plans to help screen the neighboring properties.

It was noted that since Suffield does not have a noise ordinance, any noise concerns would have to be addressed by another agency, perhaps DEEP.

Mr. O'Hara moved to approve the application with the conditions enumerated in Mr. Hawkins and Mr. Turbet's reports with the addition of screening on the east side of the greenhouse and a request for the applicant to reduce the height of the water tower to the minimum height necessary to function property. Ms. Pastula seconded the motion which passed 6-0-0.

Discussion of current Commission Bylaws

There was discussion about the current bylaws, particularly with regard to allowing recording of the meeting by individuals. More research is needed to be sure that Freedom of Information regulations are adhered to. Mr. Hawkins will research this for the next meeting.

V. NEW BUSINESS

File# 2016-2: Request for 13 lot subdivision located at 785 Mapleton Avenue. Map 51H, Block 42, Lot 23. Applicant Briarwood Homes, Inc.

Mr. O'Hara moved to accept the application and set the hearing date for March 21, 2016. Mr. Malone seconded the motion which passed 6-0-0.

VI. REPORTS

Chairman - None

Town Planner – Mr. Hawkins noted that he recently had two situations that came up with regard to creating a rear lot for agricultural uses. The question became whether a special permit should be required for a rear lot created for agricultural use and not residential development. Discussion ensued and the commission was not inclined to change the regulation at this time.

VII. MINUTES

Mr. Malone made a motion to approve the January 25, 2016 meeting minutes as submitted. The motion was seconded by Ms. Bromage and approved unanimously, 6-0-0.

VIII. CORRESPONDENCE – NONE

IX. ADJOURNEMENT

With nothing further to come before the commission, Ms. Bromage made a motion to adjourn at 10:00 pm; seconded by Mr. O’Hara. The motion carried unanimously 6-0-0.

Submitted,

Ginny Bromage, Secretary

cc: Assessor, Building Official, Conservation Commission, Economic Development Director, Selectmen, Town Clerk, Town Engineer, Zoning Enforcement Officer, Commission Counsel