

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

Regular Meeting

The Lyme Planning & Zoning Commission held a meeting on December 12, 2016 at 7:30 p.m. at the Lyme Town Hall, 480 Hamburg Road, Lyme, CT, 06371.

MEMBERS PRESENT: David Tiffany Chairman, Steve Mattson, Ross Byrne, Hunter Ward, Phyllis Ross, Bill Koch, Bernie Gigliotti ZEO, and Patsy Turner Secretary.

Regular Meeting

Discussion of the direction that the Commission wants to take regarding regulation changes in support of farming and the setting of a timeline for moving this effort forward.

Gigliotti: The commission received draft regulations from Killingworth and Deep River; the information was sent to give the commission an idea of what other towns are doing in the region. A draft is before the commission with examples of regulation changes which was created by the subcommittee.

P. Ross: The draft has some area that can be discussed, which are in brackets. Many different towns' regulations have been reviewed; the more we learned the more confusing it became. Lyme is for agriculture. The focus at this meeting should be on the sections which are for stands and stores. Agriculture has to be sustainable, different things will have to be allowed, seen, and done. Guidelines for smaller and larger farmers can be created.

R. Byrne: The wording of the regulations is the key. The acreage of a farm makes a difference as to whether it should have a permanent stand or not.

Tiffany: There is a balance between flexibility for the Zoning Enforcement Officer and having a regulation in black & white.

Gigliotti: Regulations can be drafted to say what the commission wants and allow the ZEO the authority to make decisions.

P. Ross: A waiver can be in place to help with difficulties that may arise with distances and placement of farm stands; obstacles that would cause the applicant to not meet the requirements.

Gigliotti: If the language is put in the regulations correctly than there would be a lot of latitude; the town's attorney would need to review the final document.

Tiffany to commission members: How does everyone feel about full board review verses ZEO review?

P. Ross: When a regulation is created some thought has to go into it as to who will be the interpreter of the word.

Gigliotti: An example of this is a site plan review; a site plan does not have to come before the commission unless the ZEO deems it necessary. Where did the numbers being suggested for setbacks and square footage come about? (100 sq. ft. structure and 10 ft. setback)

P. Ross: The numbers came for previous discussions.

R. Byrne: Some of the changes came from the Regional Agricultural Letter.

Ward: For safety reasons the town will not want structures on their property.

Mattson: The main issues with setbacks are road maintenance and snow removal.

Gigliotti: The setback should be 30 feet from the center line; some roads are too narrow for the 30 feet.

Mattson: The measurement should be from the property line not the road; the structure would be off town property.

R. Byrne: That could possibly push the structure too far away from the road to be visible.

Mattson: Concessions need to be made to help the farmers.

R. Byrne: Sales relies on advertising; the farmers need signs to advertise.

Mattson: Are farm sales commercial or non-commercial?

P. Ross: A store would be considered commercial; accessory uses that enable a farm to be sustainable, there may be a different term which describes a farm with sales.

Tiffany: The reality is that a farm is a commercial enterprise.

P. Ross to Gigliotti: The State Regulations recognize the right-to-farm and commercial activities are allowed on farms.

Gigliotti: That is not being disagreed.

Koch: Is there a demand for farm stands?

Gigliotti: There are not that many farms in town which are requesting farm stands. In the past when Ashlawn Farms was just starting out they were denied a farm stand; the bean roasting was move into the barn. The farm on Beaver Brook Road (Bailey) had a farm stand near the road but now it's within the property.

P. Ross: Bailey's farm does their growing in hoop houses; the growing can continue all year round.

R. Byrne: The neighbors need to be protected from smaller sized farms.

Tiffany: Hoop houses can be unattractive.

Ward: There may be other towns that have limitations that can be followed for hoop houses.

Gigliotti: There are other towns in the state where hoop houses are prevalent in residential areas.

Ward: Hoop houses are more efficient for growing.

Gigliotti: Screening could be a requirement in conjunction with hoop houses. Does the commission want these types of things to be permitted uses with administrative review by ZEO or will each one need special permit?

R. Byrne: The existing farms need to be protected; there are issues with sustainability.

P. Ross: Medicinally Marijuana growing can be applied for; that is something we need to be prepared to handle. This meeting should be focusing on farm stand and farm stores.

Gigliotti: A farm needs the ability to have farm stands and farm stores to be sustainable.

Tiffany: Signage size may be an issue for farms.

R. Byrne: Advertising is extremely important in promoting sales; larger temporary signs could be considered.

Gigliotti: There are farms in town that do not use signs but still bring the customers into their farms.

Mattson: A hundred square foot farm stand will not be a lively hood; farm stores will need signs. There need to be more specific regulations in place for farm stores.

Gigliotti read the current regulation for 3 square foot sign; temporary signs do not require a permit (definition of temporary sign was also read).

Koch: Lyme is a non-commercial town; there is no need to promote farm stands.

Anyone who starts a farm can build a farm store and start selling anywhere in town?

P. Ross: That is unknown.

Gigliotti: There is a farm in town which wants to have a portion of their barn as a farm store and for the co-op they run.

Koch: Will farm stands and farm stores compete with Farmer's Markets? The town is rural. Can the products be sold somewhere else other than the farm?

P. Ross: More profit can be made on one's own property.

Gigliotti: A Farmer's Market is seasonal and will not help with sales all year long.

Tiffany: Lyme's Plan of Conservation and Development and the public's view of farms is big open spaces, one big farm not lots of little farms, preserving large farms that exist.

R. Byrne: The Regional Agricultural Commission is thinking small farms.

Koch: Little farms is not the issue, it is the commercial aspect of farms.

Gigliotti: They are growing products and should have the ability to sell what they grow.

P. Ross: The farm on Beaver Brook Road is close to having the ability to sell 12 months of the year. There is a farm in East Lyme which grows and sells all year round.

P. Ross: The commission seems uncomfortable with the commercial aspect of a farm; for a farm to be sustainable there needs to be some commercial aspect.

R. Byrne: The farm in East Lyme is commercialized but doesn't seem to have an impact on neighbors.

Mattson: The issue is commercial vs. residential; you would be assisting one family in town to make money with the potential to be detrimental to other families in town.

Space and screening allows there to be no nuisance factor.

Tiffany: Lyme may not be ready to go in the direction of lots of little farms; we received pushback from a well running operation in town (the vineyard), very beautiful setting with very little impact.

P. Ross: Some farms in town have sold their development rights to the State; most of the money goes to pay off debt. The farmland cannot be sold to a developer. What will happen if the farm becomes unsustainable?

Gigliotti: There is a farm on Rt. 156 for sale and almost everyone who has inquired on the property has wanted to farm the land for commercial aspects.

Koch: There could be a central location in town for the sale of items grown or raised on farms; maybe the Grange?

Mattson: The farmers need an avenue to sell, could there be a place for there to be little overhead expenses?

Tiffany: Farming is expensive and it is a big problem; there just never seems to be enough money.

R. Byrne: There may be better farming practices that will produce sustainability.

Tiffany: There are programs which can be applied for that make a farm more viable but may change the character of the farm. In the past there were more retail areas in town.

R. Byrne: The number of farm stores and farm stands can be limited by acreage.

P. Ross: With farms of 10 acres or more some activities have been proposed; Café's, restaurants, and Ice Cream stores, farm produces products with a percentage that can be brought into the farm.

R. Byrne: Allowing supplemental items to be brought in makes the farmer more sustainable.

P. Ross: Can the commission focus on farm stands and farm stores then come back with comments and changes?

R. Byrne: Please take the time to look at other towns and what they are doing with farming. There are different degrees of help needed.

Tiffany: Being open-minded to activities which produce income; some examples, honey, corn mazes, leasing of pastures, sale of manure.....there are too many to list. The regulations will need to be open ended to some extent.

R. Byrne: The term, but not limited to....

Tiffany to the commission members: Study the information before you and get feedback to the subcommittee before our next meeting.

R. Byrne: Feedback is wanted.

Gigliotti: This is a time consuming and difficult task, but the information before the commission is wonderful and details are great, the hard work is appreciated.

Old Business N/A

New Business

Raymond Farm

Gigliotti: There was an ad in the paper advertising the farm as a 3 lot subdivision. Where it originated will be investigated.

Review and Approval of the Lyme Planning and Zoning 2017 Meeting Schedule.

Ward motioned to approve the schedule as present, Mattson seconded, and the motion was carried by all members present.

APPROVAL OF OUTSTANDING MINUTES

A motion was entertained to approve the minutes of the November 2016 Meeting. Tiffany moved the motion and P. Ross seconded the approval; the minutes were passed.

Adjournment

The Planning and Zoning Commission meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.
Respectfully submitted,

Patsy Turner, Secretary