

SUFFIELD PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
August 21, 2023

Present: Mark Winne, Chairman
Erin Golembiewski, Vice Chairman
Ginny Bromage, Secretary
Christine Sinopoli
Tracy Hespelt
Jeff Girard, Alternate
Ross Wilcox, Alternate
Jacob Byrnes, Alternate

Absent: Leon Litvak

Also Present: Bill Hawkins, AICP, Director of Planning & Development
Colin Moll, First Selectman
Ellie Binns, Administrative Assistant

I. ROLL CALL

Chairman Winne called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM as a hybrid meeting with five members in attendance and three members participating remotely on the video/teleconference call. In the absence of Mr. Litvak, Mr. Winne appointed Mr. Byrnes as a voting member for the meeting.

Ms. Bromage read the legal notice for the public hearing.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

III. PUBLIC HEARING

File 2023-4 – Request for a special permit to hold private events at Hilltop Farm under Section V.X. of the Zoning Regulations, 1616 Mapleton Avenue, Map 82H, Block 53, Lot 4B. Applicant- The Friends of the Farm at Hilltop.

Howard Orr, President of the Friends of the Farm at Hilltop (FOFAH) gave a history of the work that has been done over the past 21 years since FOFAH was formed as a non-profit organization to restore the property. He described the improvements to the property over the years making it available to the residents and that the property also draws people from out of town. He explained that FOFAH has no paid staff and much of the work is done by volunteers with funds raised from private donations and grants. Along with the details of the buildings and renovations, Mr. Orr stated that the barn and homestead are on the National Register of Historic Places. He noted that the buildings have been brought up to current building, fire, and health code standards and that FOFAH has a track record of holding successful events over the years. They are seeking the special permit to hold a maximum of twelve private events per year to raise revenue that will help maintain and restore the property.

Mr. Hawkins then read his report dated August 17, 2023 into the record stating that the application meets the criteria set forth in the regulation for setbacks, parking, and hours of

operation. Prior to applying for this permit the group has used the temporary permit process to hold non-profit educational and fundraising events and this practice will continue. Mr. Hawkins stated that if the special permit is approved, FOFAH would have the ability to hold up to twelve private events in addition to the non-profit educational/fundraising events they currently hold.

Commission members discussed setting a term for the approval so that FOFAH can come back and review the permit with the commission.

Mr. Winne then opened the hearing for public comment.

Don Miner, 1855 Mapleton Avenue spoke in favor of the application, stating the events at the property have had a positive impact on the area.

David Berube, 60 Deep Brook Harbor voiced his support noting the pride of ownership the group has and the great comradery of the volunteer organization.

Jennifer Sacco, 1680 Mapleton Avenue, noted that her property directly abuts Hilltop and is closest to the property. She voiced her full support for the application.

Katherine Jodrey and Nathan Christoph, 1624 Mapleton Avenue live on the property and spoke highly of the events and the people that come to Hilltop to participate.

There were letters in support from past FOFAH president Laura Dillman and board members Bill and Eileen Moncrief that stressed the history and accomplishments of the organization.

With no other comments from the public or the Commission, Mr. Winne asked for a motion to close the public hearing.

Ms. Bromage moved to close the public hearing on File #2023-4. The motion was seconded by Ms. Golembiewski and passed unanimously 6-0-0.

File 2023-5 – Request for a text amendment to Section IX. Signage, of the Zoning Regulations to permit digital message board signs. Applicant – Economic Development Commission.

Gayle Demko, Chairman of the Economic Development Commission (EDC) presented the application. She emphasized the need for digital signs to connect the town and communicate more effectively with current and updated information. She noted that the Police Commission Fire Department and the Board of Education are in support of the signs. She suggested that the existing sign bases at the schools and police station could be used with the new digital signs and showed renderings of the possible design. She discussed the poor condition of the existing signs at the schools and police department as well as the array of signs in Town for events that are not easy to read. Ms. Demko said that organizations in town have difficulty disseminating information about their events.

Commission members raised concerns about who would be controlling the messages that are displayed, information overload from all of the forms of communication available today, as well

as driving distraction and safety. There were further questions about whether multiple signs would have the same or different messages, price, and maintenance requirements for the signs. Ms. Demko said that the goal would be to have seven signs across Town. The estimated cost is \$35-40,000.00 per sign depending on whether it is a single or double-faced sign. Ms. Hespelt looked up the life expectancy of these signs which is 100,000 hours of use or approximately 10-years. She also noted that the Board of Selectman has recently passed a social media policy that would be applied to the content of the signs.

Mr. Hawkins then read his report into the record, which gave a summary of the current sign regulations. The proposed application would amend the regulations to allow animated, flashing, rotating, sequential lighting or intermittent illumination signs, but only when associated with municipal or public safety functions. Mr. Hawkins also read an email received from the Commission's counsel, Carl Landolina cautioning the commission on this proposed amendment.

Mr. Winne then opened the hearing for public comment.

Brian Frye, 43 Wisteria Lane spoke as a member of the Board of Education in support of the signs, but would like to see them as static internally lit signs. He noted that the First Selectman, School Superintendent, and Principals could regulate the content.

John McGuire, 25 Oliver Trail spoke in favor of the amendment, noting that many people in the over 55 development where he lives do not use the Town website or social media and he felt the signs would be a good source of information. He also stated that as a member of the EDC he hears from local businesses that signage is a main concern.

Kacy Colston, 489 Warnertown Road spoke in support to help non-profit organizations promote their events.

Susan Welch, 34 Windbrook Drive, spoke in support of exploring the topic further noting the uniform messaging and the emergency management aspect.

Tom Frenaye, 489 Warnertown Road was in support because of the necessity of getting messages out, particularly in emergency situations.

Mr. Winne noted that the Commission had received letters in support from the Police Commission, the Suffield Fire Department, Board of Education, and First Selectman.

Commission members felt that they would like more information on the topic and would like to consult further with commission counsel and with the town attorney about the social media policy.

With no other comments forthcoming from the public or the Commission, Mr. Winne asked for a motion to continue the public hearing.

Ms. Bromage moved to continue the public hearing on File #2023-5 to the September 18th meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Golembiewski and passed unanimously 6-0-0.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

File 2023-4 – Request for a special permit to hold private events at Hilltop Farm under Section V.X. of the Zoning Regulations, 1616 Mapleton Avenue, Map 82H, Lot 53, Block 4B. Applicant- The Friends of the Farm at Hilltop.

Ms. Bromage moved to approve File 2023-4 with the conditions that the number of events be limited to twelve per year and that the hours of operation for the events be limited to 9AM to 11PM. The permit will be for a three (3) year term. The motion was seconded by Ms. Golembiewski and passed unanimously 6-0-0.

V. NEW BUSINESS

File 2023-6 – Request from Polly-Rob, LLC for a text amendment to the Zoning Regulations Section IV.D.3. (Residential Zones) to add composting facilities as a special permit use and to amend Section IV.L.1.u. (Prohibited Uses, Solid Waste Facilities) to add language permitting composting facilities. Applicant – Polly-Rob LLC.

Ms. Bromage made a motion to accept File 2023-6 and set the public hearing for the September 18th regular meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Golembiewski and approved unanimously 6-0-0.

File # 63-2009G: Request for special permit renewal for an earth removal operation located on Phelps Road, Map 5, Block 9, Lots 46A & 48. Applicant – Murray A. Phelps III.

Ms. Bromage made a motion to accept File 63-2009G and set the public hearing for the September 18th regular meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Golembiewski and approved unanimously 6-0-0.

VI. REPORTS

Chairman – None

Director of Planning & Development – Mr. Hawkins distributed a summary of the proposed text amendments to the regulations related to changes required by PA 21-29. He discussed the possible changes for parking standards and use of the word “character”. The Commission agreed that all of the proposed text amendments they had been reviewing should be detailed in a text amendment application for acceptance at the September meeting.

VII. MINUTES

Ms. Bromage moved to approve the minutes of the July 13, 2023 special joint meeting with the Affordable Housing Committee. The motion was seconded by Ms. Golembiewski and approved 6-0-0. Ms. Bromage moved to approve the amended minutes of the July 17, 2023 regular meeting to include the statement “Ms. Bromage read the legal notice for the public hearing.” The motion was seconded by Ms. Golembiewski and approved 5-0-1 with Mr. Byrnes abstaining as he was not at the meeting.

VIII. CORRESPONDENCE – None**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

With nothing further to come before the commission, Ms. Bromage made a motion to adjourn at 9:20 PM. The motion was seconded by Mr. Golembiewski and approved 6-0-0.

Submitted,

Ginny Bromage, Secretary

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