

Westfield Zoning Board of Adjustment Minutes
February 20, 2019 – Public Hearing for site plan review
6:00 pm – Westfield Town Office

Zoning Board of Adjustment Members Present: Brian Dunn, Yvan LaPlume, Loren Petzoldt (vice chair,) Pat Sagui (chair), Ellen Fox (secretary)

Members of the Public: LaDonna Dunn, Marion Muller-Powell, Jan Degre, Emily Austin, Debra Breault, Bill Millar, Karen O'Donnell, Richard Degre, Jacques Couture, Yves Daigle, Tom Schrock, and Raymond LeMay.

Call Meeting to Order: Pat Sagui called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm. Pat explained that the members of the Zoning Board of Adjustment have taken the oaths and documented this prior to the meeting

Everyone in attendance introduced themselves by name. Pat gave an overview of the procedural flow of the meeting and passed around a site plan submitted with the application. She stated the reason for the meeting, that the application for a zoning permit had been referred to the Board of Adjustment (Board) due to ambiguity in the zoning bylaws and so the procedure is for the Zoning Administrator to refer the matter to the Board.

The applicant, Marion Muller-Powell provided an explanation of the history of her ownership of the property at 1195 Loop Rd, Westfield. She explained that she purchased the farm in 2006 with the intention of establishing a horse breeding operation which did not materialize. She has cared for and maintained the property for appearance and safety. She continued to be interested in the farm, especially in preserving the barn and began to envision a new purpose for the barn as a wedding and special event venue. Her research has shown that there are 20 wedding barns within a 2 hour drive from Westfield and so this is an established viable use for a barn. In addition, there is a large segment of the millennial population holding weddings on ranches, farms, and in barns according to "the Knot" website. Marion mentioned that since the auction house on Route 100 is now Mike's electric, there is not currently a large building as a community gathering spot, and the barn would serve as an event space for the community as well.

Marion plans for no changes in the landscape or architecture. Parking would be added on the north side of the out buildings where there has previously been a parking area in years past, and there is additional parking directly adjacent to the barn. Interior changes to the barn would include any requirements for safety or fire code.

Pat asked about the calculation to estimate the parking area needed per car for the proposed venue. Marion responded that she had used a standard parking space similar to a place like Walmart to estimate the dimensions. Pat asked how many cars could be held there. Marion responded that the parking area on the preliminary sketch would hold around 60 cars, though the space could be much bigger to hold more cars as needed.

Ellen asked what the capacity is for guests and how many guests would attend an event. Marion estimated that an event would accommodate 100-200 guests.

Pat asked about the number of events and the seasonality of events.

Marion would be pleased if she had 12 events in a season running from June-September. Pat asked what time of day events would occur. Marion stated that the time of day would vary and rental of the space for events may be in the mid-day or evening and likely no later than midnight. She stated that most weddings last about five hours.

Yvan asked about events being inside, and the possibility of noise. Marion responded that the events will be inside the barn for the most part, containing much of the noise. Also, she pointed out that all her neighbors are in attendance and will have the opportunity to voice their concerns.

Ellen asked about use of the outdoor space at the property and how Marion anticipates that guests would use the outdoor space and have access to the river. Marion responded that she does not have a clear idea of how the outdoor space would be used, though she imagines that some will take photographs outdoors and some may have an outdoor ceremony, however the primary activity of the event will be inside the barn.

Ellen asked about any steps Marion has taken to measure the pre-existing traffic at the intersection of Loop and Cemetery Roads and how the amount and timing of traffic would be affected by the proposed change of use. Marion responded that she has observed the milk truck and school bus in the morning, and shared anecdotal information that there is very little traffic on Loop Rd, only residents basically, though she has not researched traffic.

Loren mentioned that the property would need to attain approvals from all the appropriate state agencies for fire safety. Marion described an initial visit with Assistant State Fire Marshal Tim Angell this past October as positive. Marion also shared her interactions with state agencies for wastewater permitting and Act 250. Marion shared that she has a list of state personnel, and Marion also described some of her interactions around the planning of a wastewater system for the site.

Pat pointed out the sites marked on the site plan as “acceptable for performance based mound sewer system” and inquired about any engineering work done at the site. Marion responded that she has ideas about a potential wastewater system that would not be approved by Act 250. Pat asked for further clarification on the notation of the site plan and Marion responded that the site plan was just preliminary testing and a professional site plan would be submitted when it is developed.

Pat opened the meeting for comments from the audience to the Board.

Richard Degre commented that the parking area can easily be expanded, and the barn lower parking area is a concrete pad. He stated that he held 10 weddings at his place last summer with 150 or 175 cars and they saw no problems or complaints. He supports the ability of the barn to host community events.

Bill Millar commented that he appreciates Marion’s upkeep of the barn and he also does not foresee any traffic issue based on experience with weddings at Degree’s. He doesn’t foresee a problem with noise. He states that the Kennison’s chloride application on the road keeps the dust down effectively. He comments that twelve or fifteen events do not pose a significant impact and will help the economy in Westfield.

Yves Daigle voiced support for preserving the barn and that the State of Vermont supports this effort. He inquired if Marion had applied for a grant for this work. Marion responded that she has independently funded restoration of the barn. Yves stated that he supports what Marion has proposed and believes it is good for the Town of Westfield.

Jacques Couture commented that he supports what Marion has proposed and believes it is important to support small business in Westfield.

Raymond LeMay, selectboard member from Town of Troy, commented that he also supports the proposal, especially since the Town of Troy lacks any event venue. Marion points out that part of the property in question is within the Town of Troy.

Marion requested that the permit application language be amended to include "event venue" rather than "wedding venue." Pat Sagui clarified that "event venue" would include weddings and so the language on the application would be amended to read "Event venue."

Ellen invited Marion to submit a copy of her written opening remarks about the proposal for the meeting record. Marion agreed. LaDonna provided a copy to be submitted and is appended to these minutes.

Pat made a clarifying statement that the permitted use would be for the whole property not just the barn. Richard added that 90% of the weddings he has hosted used the river and barn as an area to take photographs. Pat confirmed that the permit is for the whole property.

Loren made a motion for the Board to enter deliberative session to consider the permit application for an event venue at 1195 Loop Rd. Yvan seconded the motion and the Board entered deliberative session at 6:55.

Ellen made a motion to exit deliberative session. Loren seconded the motion, and the Board exited deliberative session at 7:23.

Loren made a motion 1) to approve the site plan, 2) to instruct the Zoning Administrator to approve the permit for an event venue as a permitted use under commercial accommodation, and 3) to clarify in writing to the applicant that because the property is within the area of special flood hazard, an additional conditional use permit would be required according to Section 318 of the Westfield Zoning Bylaw for any future development.

Brian seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Brian made a motion to adjourn. Loren seconded. Unanimous approval, and the meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Ellen Fox