Present: Chair Barry Berson, Secretary: Commissioner Byron Lester, Commission Kevin Hussain, Commissioner Daniel Mara, Commissioner Michelle Adams and Commissioner Stephen Millette were all present at this meeting.

Alternates: Commissioner Katie Blint (voted)

Absent: Commissioner Dwight Bolton, Sr., and Commissioner Michael Oliver

Also Present: Ms. Jennifer Rodriguez, Director of Planning & Economic Development.,

1) Call to Order: Commissioner Berson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

A quorum was established with 6 members, and 1 alternates.

Commissioner Lester made a motion to re-opened the public hearing for the Petition by Aaron J. Romano for a proposed Zoning Regulation text amendment to allow for the expansion of farm activities to include agritourism, and Commissioner Millette seconded the motion. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

2) Public Hearings (Continued):

a. Petition by Aaron J. Romano for a proposed Zoning Regulation text amendment to allow for the expansion of farm activities to include agritourism.

Mr. Aaron Romano located at 55 Woodland Avenue, Bloomfield, was the petitioner. Mr. Roman sent a 116 page proposed agricultural regulation and agritourism text amendment via email to Ms. Rodriguez and the TPZ Commission.

Mr. Romano stated he had discussions with the neighbors in the area, and he listed their concerns. One concern was putting a minimum acreage requirement of six to seven acres on the agritourism regulations. The regulations seem to encompass the sale of alcohol, however, he stated those were separate permit processes that the state required. And a different state agency would supervise the sale of alcohol because those regulations were separate. Regulations for fire pits were another concern. Mr. Romano spoke to the Fire Marshal, and he approved the verbiage. Fire pits would be approved by the Fire Marshal. Also, specific decibel levels were another concern which were too restrictive and subjective. The farm is held responsible, and the police could be called to the scene. The police could also ask that the music be lowed.

Ms. Rodriguez received an abundance of emails and phone calls from the public concerning this matter. She had them all compiled into one PDF for the Commission’s review. In addition, Ms. Rodriguez submitted revisions to her April 28, 2022 memo to the Commission. Ms. Rodriguez memorandum dated May 19, 2022, contained the additional revisions. She read the May 19, 2022, memorandum to the Commission.

The TPZ Commission also received a letter dated April 29, 2022 from CRCOG, located at 241 Main Street, Hartford, CT, which included a report on zoning referral Z-2022-49, a proposed zoning amendment pertaining to agritourism uses on farm properties. The letter was from Ms. Jennifer Bartiss-Earley, Chairman, Ms. Brendan Malone, Vice Chairman, and Mr. Christopher Henchey, Transportation Planner of Regional Planning Commission. They stated receipt was acknowledged of the above mentioned referral. Notice of the proposal was transmitted to the Policy and Planning Division of CRCOG under the provisions of Section 8-3b of the Connection General Statues, as amended. The staff of CRCOG reviewed the zoning referral and finds no apparent conflict with regional plans and policies or the concerns of neighboring towns. They letter constitutes final CRCOG action on the referral.

Public Questions: (For the record, these were a few questions and comments, the material was too lengthy to include in the minutes, especially the letter’s received via email from the public).

Ms. Elizabeth Klein located at 25 High Wood Road, Bloomfield, had asked had the Town identified all of the properties that the regulations would cover? The properties were identified during the presentation, there were 16 farms in Bloomfield. Ms. Klein encouraged the Commission to research in-depth because the process should be longer for the approval of vague regulations. She was also concerned about the noise impact on the surrounding areas.

Mr. Sydney Schumann located at 8 High Ledge Road, Bloomfield, stated he spoke with people living in the High Hill Road neighborhood, and it appears everyone was in favor of the concept of agritourism. However they did have concerns that were experienced during the AuerFarm events. Mr. Schumann asked on what basis was the decision reached to permit music up until 10:00 p.m., at night? Chair Berson informed him that no decision had been made concerning that matter.

Ms. Jennie Kelly located at 31 High Hill Road, Bloomfield, spoke at this meeting, and also sent a letter via email to Ms. Rodriguez and the TPZ Commission concerning this matter. She sent another letter for this meeting which was to be added to her letter dated April 28, 2022, which was forwarded to Ms. Rodriguez and the TPZ Commission via email. Ms. Kelly May letter expressed support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Clare Kindell located at 27 High Hill Road, Bloomfield, asked would the zoning change ensuring financial viability of the farms. Chair Berson informed Ms. Kindell the Commission could not make a decision based
on financial viability, and he explained. Ms. Kindell also directed questions to Mr. Romano, she asked about the largest number of people (200) and the alcohol license. She was concerned if he could eliminate the 365 days of impact it may have on the neighborhood. Mr. Romano informed her that he’s flexible, and he would work with them. She was also concerned about winery, brewing on property and other questions, Mr. Romano answered satisfactorily. Ms. Clare Kindell and Mr. Mark Kindel had questions about the POCD.

Mr. Kevin Gough located at 5 Bear Ridge Drive, Bloomfield, was concerned with the approval of an agritourism regulations without first approving an agricultural zone. Ms. Rodriguez stated it’s a permitted use, floating zone or spot zoning the regulations would apply to those properties. Mr. Gough recommended the establishment of an agricultural zone before introducing an agritourism zone text amendment.

Commission Questions:

Commissioner Millette was concerned with park ground, over night lodging, and camping. Mr. Romano explained HIP which makes a farm economically viable by having certain numbers of campsites available or a campsite available for fee. The other concern was in conjunction with the events, and people being unable to drive home. Commissioner Millette asked would he consider a limit based on the size of acreage and location to neighbors? Mr. Romano stated it was reasonable.

Commissioner Blint directed her question to Ms. Rodriguez, she asked how frequently were special permits approved for events, and could this present regulations significantly affected the number of permits town staff would need to approve? Ms. Rodriguez stated she met with the zoning officer concerning this matter. She stated they printed a number of temporary types of permit application from other towns and reviewed them, but they do not have a permit process for special events at the present time, and she explained.

Commissioner Mara had a number of questions about drafting, he stated all of these activities are accessory or incidental uses associated with a primary farm use. The limit has been defined on the primary farm use that would qualify income of $2,500 or expenses of $2,500. He asked was the $2,500 annually or a one time thing? Mr. Romano stated it was annually, and he explained. Commissioner Mara asked was he able to find other zoning regulations in the State of Connecticut with such a low threshold. Mr. Romano answered no and he explained.

Commissioner Mara asked did Mr. Romano find in the State of Connecticut using debt as a threshold, and Mr. Romano stated he did not do the research. Commissioner Mara informed him these things are usually predicated on income from farming activities. Commissioner Mara was concerned that the threshold for farming performance was extremely low, and one could call themselves a farm with a minuscule farming performance. They could have a winery, brewery performance venue, distillery farm store, limited farm store, and restaurant. Commissioner Mara continued his questions, he was also interested in why was the Cease-and-Desist issued on this property. And Commissioner Mara mentioned a site plan approval. Mr. Romano answered all questions satisfactorily. In conclusion, Commissioner Mara was in favor of the concept but he stated it needed additional work in regards to the proposed regulations.

Commissioner Lester asked Mr. Romano to explain campsit control and management? Mr. Romano explained in-depth satisfactorily.

Commissioner Hussain asked about over night lodging, and he asked was that language in the Granby regulations? Mr. Ramano stated he inserted the language, Granby has separate regulations, one is the agritourism language he inserted verbatim to theirs, and he explained the over night lodging. Commissioner Hussain asked was the farm a 501(c)3? And Ms. Rodriguez answered stating she wasn’t sure about the 501 (c)3.

Public Comments:

Mr. David Koop located at 164 Balbrae Drive, Bloomfield sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. Philip Schenck, 16 Wyndcliffe Park, Bloomfield, sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. Zachary Duda worked for the 4-H Club at AuerFarm, and he supported the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Mary Eberle located at 205 Duncaster Rd., Bloomfield, Chair of AuerFarm sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. Seth Klein located at 35 High Hill Rd., Bloomfield, also sent an email with his concerns listed in changing the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Erica Fearn, Director of AuerFarm expressed her support for the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.
Ms. Linda Goodman located at 35 High Hill Rd., Bloomfield, opposed the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. Julio Carraquillo III located at 32 Foothills Way, Bloomfield sent an email expressing his support for the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Patricia Clark located at 230 Duncaster Rd., Bloomfield sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Roberta Oliver sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Judith Nelso sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Tamara Hickman sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. Mike Rohrback sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. Lucas Karazmazinas sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. James Thompson, Jr., Superintendent of Bloomfield Public School sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. Donald F. Harris Jr., sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Jeanne Roberts sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Ruthanne Marchetti, Vice President of the Wintonbury Historical Society, located at 669 Bloomfield Ave., Bloomfield also sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. Dennis Hubbs and Ms. Donna Hubbs located at D & D Travel Services, LLC, 16 Brooke Street, Bloomfield, sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Davina Fogel sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Brenda Watson located at 13 Warbler Circle, Bloomfield, sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. David ViVenzio located at 193 Talcottville Rd., Vernon, CT, sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Carlene D. Bush located in West Hartford, CT sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. Garrett Phelan located at 37 High Hill Rd., Bloomfield, sent an email in opposition of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. Mark DiBella, Office Manager of the 4-H Education Center at Auerfarm, sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Mr. Tod Kallenbach, Vice President of Dornenburg Kallenbach Advertising, 16 Southwood Drive, Bloomfield, sent an email in support of the proposed zoning regulation text amendment.

Ms. Clare Kindell and Mr. Mark Kindell rejected the regulation after receiving more information.

Mr. Kevin Gough located at 5 Bear Ridge Drive, Bloomfield, was concerned with the approval of an agritourism regulations without first approving an agricultural zone. Mr. Gough recommended the establishment of an agricultural zone before introducing an agritourism zone text amendment.

Commission Comments:

Commissioner Hussain expressed support for the proposed zoning regulation text amendment, but he encouraged a closer review and revisions of the regulations. He requested Mr. Romano submit revisions to the Commission for their review, and discussion. He recommended the petition be tabled until the next meeting.

Commissioner Blint wasn’t comfortable with the created material, she recommended reviewing other Towns agritourism regulations.

Commissioner Adams recommended selecting neighbors in the area for comments or create a task force.

Commissioner Lester recommended tabling it until the next meeting, because it needs more work.

Commissioner Mara recommended tabling it until the next meeting. He expressed his support for the proposed zoning regulation text amendment, the concept is good, but there are problems with the proposed regulations. Commissioner Mara stated he can not support these regulations, revision them and resubmit them.
Commissioner Millette stated it’s a good starting point, review it closely and make modifications.

Chair Berson echo same, asked to continue public hearing and table it until the May 26, 2022, TPZ Commission meeting.

Commissioner Lester made a motion to keep the public hearing open and table the Petition by Aaron J. Romano for a proposed Zoning Regulation text amendment to allow for the expansion of farm activities to include agritourism until the May 26, 2022, TPZ Commission Meeting. Commissioner Millette seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to approve the motion.

2) Staff Updates:

Ms. Rodriguez forwarded the memorandum to the Commission via email.

10. Adjournment:

Commissioner Adams made a motion to adjourn, and Commissioner Lester seconded the motion. The Commission voted unanimously to adjourn at 10:01 p.m.

NEXT MEETING: May 26, 2022