

Public statement at April 7, 2021 DRB Hearing on Schaefer Conditional Use Application

Katherine Branch and Michael Collier, 776 West Street. Thank you for the chance to tell you about our concerns.

This proposal does not fall within the Low Density Residential district definition which states that “Commercial uses within this area will continue to be primarily home-based businesses”.

The Town Plan says that home-based businesses and home occupations should “preserve the neighbors’ quality of life” but 150 parking spaces means 300 partygoers or more and the accompanying noise and disruption would not preserve quality of life. Adverse undue impacts, disruption and commercial truck traffic will take place over 4 to 5 days, and will include putting up equipment, port-a-potties, and tents; catering setup and break-down; and trash removal and clean-up. West Street is used heavily by walkers like us, joggers, cyclists and even skateboarders and the large trucks unfamiliar with the poor sightlines will create an unsafe situation.

Noise from parties travels far. This past summer, late afternoon concerts, with about 40-50 attendees, took place about a mile from our house, the same distance away as the planned event venue. We could hear the music a mile away. Because of the refraction of sound waves, sounds transmit much further at night, when people are trying to sleep. Small afternoon concerts that promote Town-wide community are fine, but this proposal isn’t.

Fire is a safety concern. Two and a half weeks ago, a large wildfire broke out below West Street and raced through acres of grass, brush and trees. Many fire trucks came, and even more frightening, my husband clearly heard them shouting “Save West Street, let the fire go to the Lemon Fair River.” After the fire trucks left, the fire re-ignited and we called 911. Without proper surveillance by fire experts, it seems that smoking, open candles or carelessness by partygoers could result in a dangerous mix of dry fields and fire.

Another safety concern is the closeness of Vermont Fish and Wildlife lands and the proximity between hunters who are knowledgeable and respectful about the land and hunting regulations, and out-of-town partygoers who might not be. Between deer, duck, coot, Canada geese, turkey, archery and/or shotgun seasons, the periods of May 1-31st and October 1-December 15th are when parties and hunting could overlap. This seems unwise.

The Applicants say they have a “mission to care for this structure.” About eight boats are usually stored in this barn (though two of these boats were removed five days ago, on April 3rd). Since no zoning permit was issued for adaptive reuse of boat storage, we don’t know whether it is a commercial venture; but it could be quite profitable since indoor boat storage runs about \$30 per foot length for a 20 to 30 foot boat. Boat storage is less harmful to the barn and less disruptive to the community than a party venue.

This proposal does not “protect the rights of neighboring property owners from substantial undue impacts,” as required under the definition of Section 407, Home Based Businesses. There appear to be no valid reasons, or benefits to the Town, in over-riding the existing Cornwall zoning regulations to allow this Conditional Use which would set an incorrect precedent.