

Town of Winchester
Planning Board
Minutes
5-2-22

Meeting opened: 7:00pm.

Members present: Rich Pratt, Colby Ebbighausen, Jenny Rhodes, Dean Beaman (Chair), Herb Stephens (SR) and Jordan Sharra (V. Chair). Alternates Gus Ruth and Robert Browne are present.

Public: Carol Whippie, Keith Whippie, Stephen Whippie, Ed Whippie, Richard & Marion Whippie, Chief Kellom, Eric Kredict and his attorney Steve Bonnette, Cindy Tedford, Cherie Rowe, Pat Smith & Bill Devino, and about 10 others. Margaret Sharra is the Land Use Administrator.

First order of business: The board reviews the minutes of 4/4/22 for approval. J. Rhodes moves to approve, J. Sharra seconds. The vote is 7 yes.

Second order of business: The board reviews an application for site plan requesting to operate a 20 tent site campground. D. Beaman reminds the board they need to vote whether on not this application is a DRI. **R. Pratt moves this application is not a DRI, K. Scoville seconds. The vote is 7 yes.**

The LUA reads the notice of public hearing for the application of Stephen Whippie to operate a 20 tent site campground at 85 Stone Mtn Road map 9 lot 34. All members had received the application and supporting materials prior to the meeting. They also received a copy of a letter that was distributed in the neighborhood where residents could send in their statement of opposition to the application. The board also received a copy today from attorney Bonnette a memorandum stating their concerns/opposition relating to this application. The board is also in receipt of letters to be read into the record. All notice were posted and mailed and returned.

J. Rhodes moves to accept the application as complete and move into a public hearing. H. Stephens seconds. The vote is 7 yes.

For those in the audience who wish to speak there are index cards on the table for residents to fill out to organize the speakers.

Carol & Kevan Whippie are the owners of the property and R. Pratt confirms with them (Kevan by phone) they approve of this application. Yes, they do. They had signed the application.

Stephen Whippie, son of Keith, nephew of Kevan and grandson of Richard presents the application. This project is to promote a wholesome camping experience. The family has been gathering on this property for years. D. Beaman confirms the application only relates to lot 34 and does not involve any other lot.

Stephen says yes. The lot size is 31 acres. K. Scoville asks how much land will be used for the campground? They estimate .15 acre. Board members question that small amount. Stephen is calculating the total square footage of the tent sites. There are no other amenities at the campground.

D. Beaman asks about the rules for the campground. Stephen doesn't have them with him. He says they include quiet times of 10pm, fire restrictions and other instructions on camping. They supply the tents and equipment including lanterns and solar lights. They will construct the designated fire pits.

J. Rhodes asks if the rules are online? Steven says they follow Airbnb rules. She asks if there are property managers, someone to confirm compliance with rules. Yes, there are three. She then asks that since they were already doing this, is that why you are here? Stephen says they were testing the concept last year. They now know this will work and want to do it the right way.

J. Sharra asks what is the occupancy per site? Stephen says it is not set yet but expect 2-4 people and 2 vehicles. She adds that an SUV can hold many people and such the campsite could hold many persons.

R. Pratt thinks each campsite should be limited and then a max the entire campground. He asks if they have set their fire safety rules. No, not yet but working on them today.

R. Pratt asks about water. Water will be supplied to the campers upon entering.

J. Sharra asks if there a well on the property. Yes, there is a private well at the homestead.

J. Rhodes, advocate of firearms, asks about the past discharge of firearms on the property as referred to in Steve Bonnette's letter. Stephen is not aware of this in the past, but they will strictly prohibit firearms at the campground. Carol Whippie adds that the family often hears gun shots but it not them its people on the powerlines.

D. Beaman asks about events. Stephen explains there is a large field in the woods and he was thinking to rent it to groups of 25 for a wedding or something. Stephen says they are also rented it to the Scouts in the past. If they were to continue doing that, the new camping would be limited.

H. Stephens asks about toilet facilities. Stephen explains each tent site will have a portable toilet in a privacy tent. The tanks on these will be dumped by the staff into a large tank to be pumped out in the future.

R. Pratt, clarifies that this then is not a state approved septic system? No, it isn't. R. Pratt is confused, they will need a dumping station or pumping service.

J. Rhodes asks about trash. There will be a dumpster on site. D. Beaman asks if it will be bear proof? K. Scoville asks if the campsite be secure from bears? Steven explains each site will have secure storage containers outside of each tent.

K. Scoville asks if camping will be seasonal, April-Nov? Yes, may consider winter camping in the future.

D. Beaman express his concerns about mud season on Stone Mtn Road.

J. Rhodes asks about the private road. The existing roads may be widened and will be expanded to the individual campsites. Due to confusion of terminology, it is determined none of the road discussion relates to Stone Mtn Road. There are interior roads of the campground.

D. Beaman asks about advertising for ATV's/Dirt bikes. Ed Whippie explains the ad is not for usage at the campground but for folks who come to ride or race in town, they can camp there. D. Beaman confirms there will be no ATV/dirt bike usage. Yes, that correct.

J. Rhodes asks if there will be any change to the landscape of the property? No.

Chan asks if the land is in Current Use. Carol Whippie says yes. She is aware that the land of the 20 tent sites will be removed. R. Pratt and the LUA talk current use penalties and what they speculate will be taken out. This is not really a PB issue. The LUA says when property in use or improved for the venture it will be taken out of current use. The owners need to check with Avitar. Carol asks about the existing campground roads. If they are used in the operation of the campground then probably will be taken out of CU.

There is a question again on occupancy. Stephen comments about 12 people per site or 200 max in the campground. Board members note that the numbers have changed significantly since the beginning of the meeting and express concern.

D. Beaman ask about staffing of the campground. Stephen says some will be there 24/7. There will be no unattended guests.

The LUA, as zoning administrator, asks for clarity on events. Are they events or gatherings? She explains that if they are renting the field for events such as a wedding for 100 or so people then there is a problem. Zoning does not permit this activity without a special exception. If you are proposing gatherings such as some of the campers meeting in the field to hold a birthday party for a camper and lets say there 25 people, that is a gathering and that would be included in this application. The point is, if you are renting out the field separate of the camping, your need an additional approval from the ZBA. A big concern with that is Stone Mtn Road is very narrow and may not be able to hold that kind of traffic.

K. Scofield ask if this is only listed on Airbnb? Airbnb rates you rate the facility. She loves the idea but does not want a "tent city". K. Scoville wants to be assured this will not be a "tent city" and not long-term living areas. E. Whippie states there will only be limited stays.

H. Stephens asks if the tents are already there? Stephen Whippie, yes and each site will have an outdoor shower and toilet.

D. Beaman asks Chief Kellom to come and speak about fire safety. He gives D. Beaman a list of requirements He explains the different categories of open fires and how they will need a permit. Even though it is a state permit, the campground is inspected and the yearly permit is issued by the town FD. D. Beaman asks if there are other concerns. The Chief explains that is tents are erected 400sqft or larger in size and 50 or more people, a building permit is required and it must be inspected by him.

J. Rhodes ask him about fireworks. He says a permit must be obtained 15 days prior to set off. This for the general public and the landowner must sign the permit app.

R. Pratt confirms it is the campground owner's responsibility to know when there is high fire danger and fires are not to be lit. Chief Kellom says that is correct.

The Chief explains the fire site, how the site is dug out, sandy soil, a containment object, distance from tents and trees/brush, and no burning of trash. D. Beaman confirms the FD does random visits to campgrounds.

The Chief says 10ft wide roadways are sufficient with the trimming of overhead limbs for emergency services.

Public comment:

Steve Bonnette representing Stone Mtn LLC states he is more confused now than when he reviewed the site plan application. The site plan is more of an aerial view without details of setbacks, wetland locations, abutters and specific sites for tents. This is not a formal site plan, it is more conceptual. It is clearly lacking specifics.

R. Pratt agrees there needs to be clearer info and suggests the board continue the hearing to 2 weeks. Mr. Bonnette reads a comment from Whippie Woods website; "Laughter and music all night long". This is a problem and there needs to be a list of rules. The number of people isn't clear. The Rabbit Hollow Road residents do not want 100's of people going up and down the road all night. This has not been clearly thought out. The board needs to be clear in what they are reviewing. There is insufficient information on water and septic, capacity, management and rules. There will need to be numerous restrictions if this were to be approved. Right now it is not clear what could be approved.

Bill Devano of 320 Forest Lake Road says he will be directly affected by the traffic. He noticed more traffic on Rabbit Hollow Road last summer. The neighborhood has not been treated well by the young Whippies. He would feel different about this project if the name was different.

Cherie Rowe thinks there should be an AED there, proof of insurance and all workers know CPR. R. Pratt doesn't believe this can be required. The insurance company may require it. Cherie, asks how are we not going to be bothered when they have not respected those closest to them? The property owners are not responsible. R. Pratt states that Carol & Kevan Whippie are responsible as property owners.

K. Scoville says there must be clear cut rules. This will help reassure the residents.

R. Pratt agrees the rules protect all involved.

Chris Kridet of 145 Stone Mtn Road. His property is on the other side of the powerlines that abut the Whippie property. He found out late last summer about the camping being done. He contacted the Whippies neighborly and told them they need to get approval from the town for a campground. Then the incident in October with the fireworks and firearms discharge (Target shooting). He asked them to tone down their website. He said the Whippies refused to compromise. He questions if these 2 small samples of incidents is not a good show of what's to come. Chris also comments there is a watercourse

through the property and would like to know the setbacks of the sites from it. He says he tried to be a good neighbor but is worried about the plan and execution.

Robert Browne, non-acting alternate who resides at 145 Stone Mtn Road, has been friends with the Whippies for 11 years. He was present for the incident with firearms on Oct 23rd. it went on for 2 hours. He saw the shooters go into the campground when they stopped shooting.

Bill McGrath of Headlands Road believes this is a premature application. He questions the lot sizes as required by statute, RSA 216. Steven Whippie says the tent spaces are at least 600sqft and the tents are 315 sqft. This information is in the packet submitted. Bill also says RSA 216 governs outdoor fire pits. D. Beaman tells Bill he already got the info from the Fire Chief.

The LUA reads the letters received in the mail and tonight regarding this application.

Opposition letters were received by:

Cheryl Rowe, Pat Smith & Bill Devano, Cindy Tedford, Kevin Brostek, Pam Dixon, Lani Dixon, and Craig Lapoint.

There are no other comments from the public at this time. D. Beaman suggests continuing the hearing for two weeks so the Whippies can get the information the board is asking about. J. Sharra would like a site visit. The board agrees to 5:30pm on May 16th for the site visit. The LUA explains the rules of site visits; no discussion on the merits of the application. Can ask basic questions such as location of a tent site. The public has a right to attend the site visit. There is some discussion on this. The owners agree to the visit. Steve Bonnette reiterates protocol of site visits, no discussion with either applicant or residents. The Whippies will have a site set up with a toilet and a shower.

R. Pratt moves to continue the hearing to 5/16/22 and to conduct a site visit prior to at 5:30, H. Stephens seconds. The vote is 7 yes. 8:55pm.

Discussion: The list of additional information is as follows- Rules of the campground, a clearer site plans with locations and setbacks, water & septic rules and compliance of from the state, occupancy limits of sites and of the campground & the length of stays. The board also requests the Highway Super, and the Fire & Police Chiefs to attend.

Third order of business:

The board reviews a request of a lot merger submitted by Barry Bordner for Map lot 28, lots 6,8,&10.

There is only a building on lot 10, the others are vacant and are abutting. **J. Sharra moves to approve, H. Stephens seconds. The vote is 7 yes.**

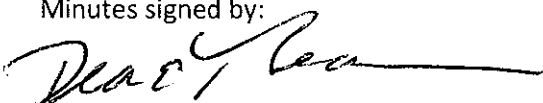
J. Sharra moves to adjourn, R. Pratt seconds. The vote is 7 yes. 9:04pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted:

Margaret Sharra, LUA

Minutes approved by the board on: 5/16/22

Minutes signed by:


Dean Beaman, Chair