

SITE VISIT-WONDERWELL MOUNTAIN REFUGE

APPLICATION FOR SPECIAL EXCEPTION

10:30am to 11:45am

These are to be considered draft minutes only until approved by the board at their next meeting

Members Present: Bryan O' Day, Gene Hayes, Justin Hastings, Susan Chiarella, and alternate serving as board member, Jim Bednar

Others Present: Members of the Public: Susan Isbell, little Hastings; Applicants/Visit Guides: Jim Kirby and Lama Samten.

Susan Chiarella advised the board that any questions directed to the applicants should be of the nature that adds to clarification of information submitted on their application. Conversation and or questions from the public is not appropriate for site visits and the board should make every attempt to stick together on the walk.

The board was invited to review the plan presented at the last meeting which was held jointly with the Planning Board on November 20th, 2014. Jim Kirby elaborated on the plan stating that the tent sites noted on the plan are not meant to be location specific but rather a number (8) submitted to DES. He stated that the preference is to have tent sites around the lawn perimeter and tree line. Jim Bednar asked for clarification on the proposed parking area. The applicant intends to submit a driveway permit to the town and State if needed. Susan Chiarella asked if the tent sites proposed were for 2/4/8 or more man tents and wondered if DES limits or would limit the number of people allowed on each site. Jim Kirby stated that historically tents were two man tents. She asked if pets would be or presently are permitted. Lama Samten replied that service animals would be allowed. There are staff members who have pets and that is permitted.

Gene Hayes inquired about the age of the septic system as noted on the plan and Jim Kirby said that he believes it dates from about 1998. Jim Kirby stated that someone from the State had been out this past week to inspect it and as far as he know it was adequate.

Discussion arose about the numbers of people the septic could serve and it was noted information of that type had been previously provided in preliminary hearing(s) to the Planning Board. Susan Chiarella requested that information be provided to the Zoning Board as well and available at its next meeting. She will ask Sue Abair to obtain any information, in hard form, presented in the preliminary meetings and bring it to the next meeting.

The Board and applicants proceeded to walk through the interior being shown the "great room" first then climbing stairs to the "guest" rooms. Susan Chiarella asked how many people can sleep in the facility as guest rooms have beds of different sizes. Lama Samten said that occupancy is limited to 40 and that number includes, Spiritual Director, Lama Willa Miller and all staff, including herself. The facility has a total of 15 bathrooms many of which are attached to the guest rooms. There is one major dormitory room which appeared to house about 8 people with large bath attached.

The Board continued exploring rooms such as the kitchen, community rooms, dining rooms, staff rooms, a counseling room and basement areas viewing nearly all of the facility. There is a commuting kitchen staff who prepares meals. Fire alarms and CO2 alarms were noted and applicants stated that they are hard wired into an alarm system which is presently serviced by Capitol Alarm. Several oil burning furnaces were noted in the basement as well as an electric box for a Generac Generator which is serviced by several propane tanks outside the building.

Susan Chiarella inquired about the organization and its 501(c)(3) status. Lama Samten stated that the Natural Dharma Fellowship has had 501(c)(3) non-profit status for approximately 15 years.

Susan Chiarella asked the board to let her know of any specific details they felt needed to be noted in the minutes.

The group headed outside and Jim Kirby delineated where the proposed parking area was going to be as well as noting the proposed new "exit" only driveway. It was noted that any construction is subject to setback regulations. He explained that the "exit" only proposed driveway is supposed to help those leaving the premises exit without their line of sight being blocked by the existing pillars of the other two driveway "entrances" and/or any sight blockage of ground/shrubbery growth. Susan Chiarella inquired as the expected maximum number of vehicles exiting at any one time. Jim Kirby stated that the bulk of traffic would be on Sundays when a community session takes place. He explained that most people coming for longer than day programs would enter at various times and would not all leave at once. The abutters impacted by the "exit" only driveway are the two homes across the street, one of which is presently vacant and one of which is owned by the Gilberts, who was an abutter present at the last hearing. The property next door to the left (facing out to the road) appeared to have several outbuildings on it which would shield any residence.

The visit concluded with a short visit to the barn which Jim Kirby explained sits on an unstable foundation. The applicant's plan is to rebuild it at some point on the same footprint.

The board expressed gratitude to Jim Kirby and Lama Samten for allowing them the time to view the property and all adjourned at approximately 11:45am.

Respectfully submitted:

Susan L. Chairella, Chairman

Town of Springfield Zoning Board