

Statement in Support of Proposed Amendments to §§ 3.2.3, 3.2(5)9f),3.4i, Addition of
New Definitions in § 19 and New § 3.11

INTRODUCTION:

“Farms and farmland remain cornerstones of many Connecticut communities, linking the past to the future through a landscape of fields and pastures, stone walls and weathered barns shaped by generations of hard-working farm families. This landscape, cherished by so many, is often taken for granted. Some of its benefits are obvious – the bounty of fresh fruits and vegetables in the spring and summer months; pumpkins, chrysanthemums and Christmas trees in the fall and winter; and milk and dairy products year-round. Other benefits are less obvious – the local revenue and jobs that farms provide, the recreational and tourism opportunities they create, the wildlife habitat and other environmental benefits they offer. Some benefits are easily quantified; many are not. The benefit that may be most valued by Connecticut residents – the ephemeral “quality of life” that farms help provide – unfortunately sometimes is only recognized after it’s too late and the last farm in town has disappeared.”

Planning for Agriculture: A Guide for Connecticut Municipalities. A Publication of American Farmland Trust and Connecticut Conference of Municipalities.

The Applicant proposes text amendments to the Madison Zoning Regulations in order to allow farms in Madison the opportunity to showcase their farm and farm products and activities, introduce the general public to the farm, demonstrate farming practices and techniques, and host community-oriented events that provide marketing opportunities to the farm and help diversify farmers' incomes in a way that is low-impact on the land and neighboring property owners. In short, the true goal of the proposed amendments is to help preserve, protect and promote Madison's farms and farmland.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED AMENDMENTS:

The proposed amendments are as follows:

- §19: Provides definitions of “agriculturally related uses,” “non-agriculturally related uses,” “farm,” “farm store” and “farmstay.”
- §3: Allows for “agriculturally related uses” as of right.
- §3.2(5)9f): Allow for keeping of chickens and other poultry on a farm limited to 100 per acre.
- §3.4i: Allows for “non-agriculturally related uses,” “farm stores,” and “farmstays” by Special Exception.
- New §3.11: Provides (1) Special Use Regulations for “non-agriculturally related uses,” “farm stores,” and “farmstays;” (2) limitations on farmstays; and (3) a signage allowance for farms.

The distinction between “agriculturally related uses” and “non-agriculturally related uses” is important. The insertion of a definition of agriculturally related uses is intended to expand the events and activities that are incidental to farming and typically occur on farms. These activities include corn mazes, pick-your-own, educational programs and demonstrations of farming activities, farm cooking demonstrations, farm –to-table

dinners with limited and seasonal menu items, hay and tractor rides, farm tours, petting zoos and other similar uses. Non-agriculturally related uses include uses and events that are part of a farm's total offerings but are not necessarily incidental to agriculture. Such uses and events include weddings, banquets and similar gatherings where the majority of food served at the event is made with ingredients grown or raised by the host farmer. The proposed regulations allow for agriculturally related uses to be permitted as of right, and non-agriculturally uses to be permitted only by special exception, and subject to special use regulations contained in a new §3.11.

A farmer that wishes to conduct non-agriculturally related uses on his or her farm is required to apply to the Commission for a special exception and as part of the application; the farmer must submit an operational plan detailing the number, type and duration of events that are anticipated during the calendar year. Additionally, an updated plan must be submitted by January 31 of each year. The Zoning Enforcement Officer shall have limited authority to permit a modification of an organizational plan but only to a limited extent (20%). Non-agricultural events are limited to certain hours, and all parking is required to be on site, unless otherwise permitted by the Commission.

If a farmer wants to operate a farm store, the proposed regulations limit the size of the store to 1000 square feet for farms less than 15 acres, and 1500 square feet for farms in excess of 15 acres. Additional limitations require: (a) one parking space per 250 square feet of farm store floor area; (b) at least 60% of the products offered for sale must be from the farm or produced from products and materials from the farm; and (c) any farm store must be located no closer than 100 feet from any side or rear property line.

The proposed new §3.11 also provides limitations for farmstays. Farmstays are limited to eight (8) guestrooms on any particular farm and must be for temporary accommodation of guests only.

CONSISTENCY WITH MADISON'S PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT AND EXISTING REGULATORY SCHEME.

In submitting this Application, we have reviewed the current Plan of Conservation and Development, the current Zoning Regulations, regulations enacted by other municipalities, and other sources including the publication quoted above in the Introduction. Connecticut General Statutes (CGS) §8-3 requires that in deciding on a proposed change to the Regulations "the commission shall take into consideration the plan of conservation and development, prepared pursuant to section 8-23, and shall state on the record its findings on consistency of the proposed...change..." Madison's Plan of Conservation and Development not only recognizes the undisputable fact that farms and farming are a key foundation of Madison's history (POCD, P.5), but it expressly provides that "[u]ndeveloped land (such as farms and forests) helps to maintain community character (POCD, p.22)." The maintenance and preservation of farms and farming in Madison (1) enhances community character and quality of life by preserving scenic and historic resources, (2) minimizes character detractors, (3) supports community pride and spirit, (4) provides for open space, and (5) enhances walking opportunities. Moreover, the maintenance and preservation of farms and farming will help guide development of other areas in town, protect natural resources and encourage sustainable practices. All of the foregoing are principles and/or

recommendations of the Madison Plan of Conservation and Development. Accordingly, the proposed amendments, and the purpose and intent of the same, are clearly consistent with the Plan of Conservation and Development.

The proposed regulation amendments are also consistent with the Town's existing regulatory scheme. The existing regulations: (1) allow for commercial agriculture in residence districts as a matter of right (§ 3.2(3)); (2) allow for storage of equipment and supplies when used for agriculture (§ 3.2(5)e); and (3) allow, by Special Exception, the sale and display of produce and other products of a farm (§ 3.4i). Additionally, in rural residential districts, the current regulations (1) allow for farm stands as of right, and (2) allow, by Special Exception, the use of property for stables, livery or boarding, as well as commercial greenhouses (§5.4). The proposed text amendments seek only to expand, develop and meaningfully control the agricultural uses already contemplated in our existing regulations.

THE PETITIONER:

The Petitioner, Field House Farm, LLC, is a family run farm located at 623 Green Hill Road, Madison. Its principal is Stephanie Lesnik. Utilizing the grounds of a 1720 farm house, Mrs. Lesnik has created a sustainable farm operation consisting of a large produce garden, chickens, heritage turkeys, Shetland and Hampshire sheep, Alpine goats, pigs, a llama, and a donkey. Field House Farm practices humane and responsible farming and animal care. It offers USDA processed beef and pork products as well as custom processed whole chickens. It also maintains a Farmer's Pledge status with the Northeast Organic Farming Association.

The mission of Field House Farm includes the education of our community regarding its food sources, as well as accountability regarding how food, animals, and our environment are treated. Field House Farm conducts many programs for children and adults to teach them the important differences found in local and naturally raised products. Being an active participant in processing and harvesting one's food helps us recognize and respect the effort and sacrifice needed to raise quality organic food for our local community.

It is the hope and intention of Field House Farm and Stephanie Lesnik that the proposed regulation amendments will enable the continued pursuit of their mission. Moreover, the proposed amendments will enable the growth and development of new agricultural programs, events, activities and attractions for Madison's residents and visitors.