

CITY OF TORRINGTON

Land Use Office
Jeremy Leifert, AICP, City Planner
140 Main Street • City Hall
E-mail: jeremy.leifert@torringtonct.org



Phone: (860) 489-2221
Fax: (860) 496-5928
Torrington, CT 06790-5245
City of Torrington website: www.torringtonct.org

To: Planning & Zoning Commission
From: Jeremy Leifert, AICP, City Planner JL
Date: December 21, 2022
Subject: Proposed Zoning Regulation Amendments – Special Events; Revise Section 3.1, 21.00 and add new section 6.13 – Special Events

In late 2021 and early 2022, Mayor Carbone was approached by several owners of larger residential parcels within the City to inquire about the possibility of allowing limited commercial operations on their properties. This includes agritourism uses for owners of farmland as well as other types of limited commercial uses such as weddings, concerts, fairs and similar uses. Following discussions with the residents as well as Mayor Carbone and Rista Malanca, Economic Development Director, the City retained Val Ferro of Good Earth Advisors as a consulting planner to evaluate the feasibility and challenges of adopting regulations governing special events. In 2021 and early 2022, residents owning larger parcels of land met with the Mayor and staff about the lack of general flexibility in City ordinances and zoning regulations to conduct events to supplement their income on larger parcels to offset costs of owning large parcels. In general, City staff and consultants agreed that a mechanism to relieve development pressure on larger lots was worthwhile to explore. Basic concerns discussed and proposed in these draft regulations were:

- How would the proposed events be reviewed – special exception? Site plan? Administrative permits? *In discussion at the September 21, 2022 PZC meeting, the commission consensus was to require all applications for special events by special exception.*
- Restrictions on the number and duration of events? *It was agreed that there should be some sensible limits on the number and duration of events at any one property to keep the uses “accessory” and not a full commercial endeavor. Flexibility was added to allow the commission to allow longer or more frequent events in special circumstances.*
- Possible limits on the size of property? *A five-acre minimum has been proposed.*
- Limits on agricultural events or open to any events? *Any events meeting the proposed definition of a “special event” in the proposed regulation. These include other uses outside of agritourism.*
- What types of traffic and circulation issues may arise for specific events? *All applications will require a parking and traffic plan and comments from police traffic and engineering departments.*
- What would the City require on a site plan for an event? *General site plan requirements of section 8.4.3 of the regulations plus specific application requirements proposed in this draft regulation.*

- What measures should be taken to protect nearby property owners from noise, traffic etc from the events? *Information on amplified sound is required and may be restricted in hours of operation. Traffic and parking plans are required to be submitted with applications. Abutting property notifications and public hearings will be required as part of a special exception application.*
- What measures should be taken to protect and restore the event sites, particularly those that may have sensitive resources on the site? *When appropriate, restoration plans are required to be submitted as part of the plans and applications.*
- What type of outside review would be required for applications (police traffic, public health, fire, engineering, etc.)? *As normally required for all site plan and special exception applications, the applications and plans will be distributed to all departments for comment.*

The planning office compiled input from Good Earth Advisors, comments from the Mayor's Office and Economic Development Director and general concerns of property owners, and drafted a proposed regulation for adoption into the existing City Zoning Regulations. The major regulation topics in the proposed regulation are:

1. A minimum requirement of five acres of land to apply for a special event
2. All approvals for events by special exception
3. The definition of a special event, and what events are exempt from the regulations
4. Regulations specifying the frequency (no more than 6 per year) length (no more than 3 days) and hours of operation; ability of commission to modify frequency and length for certain events such as seasonal or holiday
5. Added basic requirements for food service, alcohol and retail sales
6. Added restrictions on outdoor amplified sound
7. Requirements for specific information to be provided on site plans
8. Durations of site plan approvals and requirements for re-approval

As City Planner, I support the reasonable accessory use of residential properties for special events with proper controls on the activities so that they remain "accessory" and not detrimental to the neighborhoods in which they are located. This use is a valid mechanism to supplement the income of property owners to relieve pressure to divide and sell property, and implements reasonable controls for Planning and Zoning Commission review. It is not the intent of the proposed regulations to allow for the establishment of full commercial businesses that are contrary to the primary allowed uses in the zoning regulations.

The proposed amendments are generally supported by the City Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). Section 6 of the plan encourages the preservation of community character, scenic resources, historic resources and farmland preservation. This regulation furthers the goals of the plan by providing for long term protection of properties from development pressure.

In my opinion after discussing with the Mayor, the Economic Development Director, and consulting planner, I believe the proposed regulation for special events to be a sensible option for property owners to generate a limited source of income under zoning controls to maintain and

use their large lots in perpetuity, while not allowing for changes the overall use of the land. I would recommend adoption of the proposed text amendments with an effective date being the day after the date of publication of the approval.

END OF MEMO