

July 16, 2017

Dear Chairman Goodwin,

We write to you today per your request made at the last Planning & Zoning meeting for a bullet point list of suggestions from the abutting neighbors concerning Grace Farms and their pending renewed application.

First off, we sincerely appreciate all that you are doing to help Grace Farms become better neighbors. And while we recognize that Grace Farms has much to offer to the world, we as neighbors should not be forced to forgo our privacy, security and the enjoyment of our property in exchange.

2012: What we were told then

Please see the attached letter we submitted to P&Z in 2012 (before Grace's current permit was granted), where we voiced our concerns about what Grace Farms was planning then. We wrote then in part:

"We understand that churches are used for a variety of functions outside of normal religious services - both Jennifer & I grew up in a church environment and our family belongs to a local church here in New Canaan. However, we were surprised to learn of the scope of the functions that Grace Farms intends to use their property for. Sharon described to us its usage akin a "community center" or a "park" the entire town can use and benefit from. In addition, we were surprised to hear the property would also be used as a philanthropic foundation, a research center, supportive of the arts, social justice causes, and various charities. They intend to hold lectures and seminars for the benefit of New Canaan and the surrounding communities' residents. In addition, Sharon described to us that the public would always be welcome on the grounds and would have full access of the proposed amenities such as the library and gym."

That was nearly 5 years ago. To hear Sharon Prince and Grace Farms now say they are "surprised" by what Grace Farms has become is a little hard for us to swallow, seeing as we have first-hand proof to the contrary. Grace Farms misled the town and continues to behave as if the rules don't apply to them.

Our list of suggestions

We support the list of conditions that Jennifer Holme and David Markatos have submitted. In addition, please find below a list of items that concerns us which, if rectified, would help us support Grace Farms in the future.

Privacy

- We want permanent solutions to the screening of our property from the thousands of people who peer into our backyard annually. This will return to us our privacy, security and the enjoyment we seek from our property.

- We have met with Grace Farms several times on this issue, and ultimately had to reject their proposed solutions as unacceptable for the reasons we submitted in previous letters.
- Grace Farms has acknowledged our property will be a challenge to screen. However, that does not make it acceptable for no action to be taken.
- To this day, Grace Farms has never planted a single tree for our benefit.
- We support their proposal before Inland Wetlands Commission to plant trees near our property. We don't believe it is a sincere effort, as it will take a lifetime for the trees to mature, but we want and deserve some type of screening. *(See attached image to better understand how ineffective this proposed screening solution is as it stands.)*

Buffer Zone

- We support the idea of a 250 foot buffer zone from our property line.
 - This will help us to not feel the constant threat of what Grace Farms will do next.
 - Grace Farm's original walking trail was less than 50 feet from our property line, a bench was installed 150 feet from us, and a footbridge 175 from us. All of these features just drew people closer and closer to us.

Walking Trails

- We believe the only fair and permanent solution is to keep the walking trails east of the stream closed.
 - We are grateful that Steve Palmer temporarily closed these trails, and have realized in their absence what a difference it is has made in our lives.
- We believe a solid fence along the outer edge of any trail that runs along the stream will prevent people from passing into this buffer zone.
- We are rational people. We were aghast the first time people on Grace Farm's trail waved at us on our property. We then made time to walk the trail ourselves to see how much of our property could actually be seen before objecting. We were very upset to see that everything we hold dear: the entire back of our house, driveway, backyard, and patio – every place our children play – are all completely exposed to the thousands of people who frequent Grace Farms. Keeping the trail east of the stream closed provides us privacy from the proximity of strangers. The people on the trail are not our neighbors nor should they be afforded the ability to peer into our lives, making us feel like animals in a zoo.

- Our neighbors (Tim Curt/Dona Bissonnette) have proposed moving the trail away from their property, which we support. However we take issue with their proposal that the trail comes directly down the hill from the gym towards our property.

Lighting

- We seek permanent lighting solutions, not ones that rely on us to enforce.
- We also believe their lighting plan needs to be clear and straightforward. No interior lights at dusk year round, for example.
- We propose trees to break up our view of it that, at the very least, dot their meadow so we don't have to rely on human compliance.
- Special attention needs to be paid to the timeframe of October 15-June 15 when our trees have lost their leaves and we no longer have any screening.
- Grace Farm's building is a massive glass structure that looms over our horizon and, at times, glows all night long. It is akin to overlooking a shopping mall with it's movie theater, restaurant, gift shop, gym, parties, etc. None of this is expected nor acceptable in residential four acre zoning in New Canaan.

Public Park

- Grace Farms should not be a public park. It should be limited to people who are registered ahead of time, for specific events being held there.
- We do not feel safe having their expansive property open to the general public. It detracts from our family's sense of well-being.

Principal Use

- We believe that a single principal use (whatever that may be) should be selected for Grace Farms.
- It should be made clear what the property is being used for and by whom.

Enforcement

- We support the hiring of an independent monitor who can regulate activities at Grace Farms as well as handle any neighbors' concerns that arise.
 - We have already lived for years without any enforcement whatsoever at Grace Farms.
 - Grace Farms has a history of not working with the neighbors as well as not being open and honest with neighbors or the town.
 - Our concerns will continue indefinitely.
 - *Examples:*

- We are already concerned about the location and noise-level from the SANAA designed playground Grace Farms reps have excitedly told us about.
- We are also concerned about such things as the addition of the therapy donkeys (“...and there will even be therapeutic donkeys in one of the paddocks...” <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/oct/09/grace-farms-americas-miraculous-new-centre-for-arts-and-faith>)
- At the current rate there will quickly be something at Grace Farms to attract everyone and anyone to our quiet residential corner of New Canaan. As their immediate future plans indicate, these additions will only continue to grow and attract more and more people. What will that mean for the neighbors in the future?

Outdoor Sound Amplification

- We believe there should be no outdoor sound amplification (loudspeakers, microphones, etc.) whatsoever.
- In choosing a residential neighborhood as their location, it is easy to understand that our peace and enjoyment is already disrupted by loud voices from visitors to Grace Farms.
- Allowing outdoor events so large that they need a microphone to be heard will mean the neighbors will certainly hear it as well.

Property Value

- Common sense and the neighbor's expert (Nora King) lead us to believe that we will ultimately pay a financial price when it comes time to sell our house. This is unacceptable. We urge you to keep activities at Grace Farms at a level potential buyers would also find acceptable.

Moratorium

- We call for a lengthy moratorium on any future Grace Farm's requests out of respect for everyone involved.

We purchased our house and have put a considerable amount of time and resources into making it our home in which to raise our family and spend our lives. We would like to support and welcome Grace Farms as neighbors, but that cannot require us to sacrifice our safety, privacy and the enjoyment of our own property.

Sincerely,

Jennifer & Mike Buczkiewicz
1258 Smith Ridge Road