

## NewsBank InfoWeb

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New Canaan Advertiser, The (CT)  
November 29, 2007

Section: News  
Page: A001

Topics:

### Index Terms:

story

### Grace Church can move to Windsome Farm

Author: *Kimberly Nevas; Reporter*

Article Text:

After four months of discussion on traffic patterns, parking, wetlands and property values, the Planning & Zoning Commission cleared the way for Grace Community Church to make a home at the former site of Windsome Farm, but by a close margin and under several conditions. In a 5-4 vote at Town Hall Tuesday night, the commission granted the church's application to re-subdivide the former 74-acre Luke's Wood Road horse farm in two lots. The church's second application sought a special permit to build a campus in two phases, but only the first phase was approved.

"We want to know it's working right, before we approve Phase II," commissioner George Wendell said.

Greg Zehner, associate pastor of Grace Community Church, said in an e-mail that the congregation was excited about the special permit approval, and seeks good relations with neighbors of the Windsome Farm property. "Our desire is to serve the community as Christ served the church. As such, all of us involved understand the issues raised by the neighbors, and will be considerate of these concerns as we move forward," Pastor Zehner said. "We are greatly looking forward to the time when construction is complete--the doors will be open to everyone." See GRACE on Page 10

Continued from Page 1 During Phase I, the church will renovate existing buildings and add multi-purpose space, which is to include a temporary sanctuary, and build a 200-car parking facility.

The second phase was to involve the construction of a permanent, 1,200-seat sanctuary, and expanded parking.

Grace Community Church, which currently meets at Saxe Middle School, filed the permit applications in August. After two public hearings, the attorney for the church announced the closure of public submission and discussion September, though many area residents said they weren't given enough time to counter the technical points of the proposal.

Acknowledging the concerns of neighbors, some of whom fought the proposals in public hearings, and later through ads and editorial pages after discussion was ended, P&Z attached a number of restrictions to the special permit.

"The commission was concerned that public safety be maintained in the least restrictive manner and also provide recognition of private rights of the owner to use the property," P&Z Chairman Laszlo Papp said.

Any school at the church must be engaged in religious education, the commission decided, citing concerns about overuse of the property, which is located in a residential area.

"This means they can't rent it out to some private school program," Mr. Papp said. "Any other uses such as sports events or others not specifically connected with religious services should have a special permit from the commission."

The church will be required to hire a police officer to direct traffic at the property's entrance during Sunday services or other major gatherings. A maintenance plan for the entire site must be submitted, Mr. Papp said, and the church is expected to conform to State environmental requirements, in light of adjacent wetlands.

The special permit passed 8-1, with Roger Rothballer casting the lone dissenting vote.

"I've been worried since our last meeting by the absence of an independent traffic study," he said.

"I still feel uncomfortable, we don't have really good data about traffic."

Although the church commissioned a traffic engineer to produce a report, questions surrounding his methodology and data quality remained unanswered after public discussion was ended after two public hearings.

Anyone who feels P&Z made an error in deliberation has 30 days to file an appeal in court, Mr. Papp said. "I don't expect an appeal, because we handled the issue fairly and carefully, protecting both the neighbors' rights and the applicants' rights."

George Friesen, of Luke's Wood Road, who has been an opponent of the church's proposal, told the Advertiser Wednesday that P&Z failed to address the long-term implications of a large church in a semi-rural, residential area.

"The Planning & Zoning Commission treated this proposal like a plain vanilla proposal to set up a small shop on Cherry Street, something that wouldn't change the character of the downtown," he said. "Yet, this proposal has the potential to change the entire neighborhood."

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New Canaan Advertiser, The (CT)

April 10, 2008

Section: Editorial

Page: 7A

#### **Church explains plans for Grace Farms**

Article Text:

Editor, Advertiser:

We would like to thank the residents of New Canaan for their support through our application process and would like to take a moment to explain the vision of our church and correct any misperceptions regarding its use of a 48-acre piece of Wind some Farm.

As you may know, last summer we applied for a special permit to build a church on this land. When this special permit was granted, it allowed for a temporary church with a capacity of 900, the Planning & Zoning Commission's decision contained 18 conditions intended to address all of the neighbors' concerns raised during the public hearings on the church's application. Our appeal was intended to clarify one condition which inadvertently left the church with the only option of meeting in a temporary sanctuary, in reality a gym, for the foreseeable future. A settlement of our appeal was reached with the commission which fairly and equitably clarified the one condition and allowed the construction of a permanent sanctuary for the pre-approved capacity of 900 people. If the church ever desired an increase in capacity of up to 1,200, the Town would require a new, independently commissioned traffic study, paid for by **Grace** Property Holdings, and a public hearing. Two neighbors objected to that settlement and filed a motion making them a party to our appeal. Effectively, this means they were given the ability to block the bilateral settlement entered into by **Grace** and the commission. In the three weeks since that decision, we have invited these neighbors to the table to discuss a settlement three different times and so far they have failed to respond to our overtures. We invited their attorney to visit the property in order to discuss a settlement; however he did not accept our invitation. This leaves us only the unattractive option of moving forward through the courts.

We are trying to give a gift to the local community. With respect to our plans, we will retain more than 90 percent of our property as open space and will share peaceful gardens, walking trails, a field and a barn with the local community with access and usage being controlled in order to foster a peaceful environment and fulfill the intended purposes. We are excited to go beyond what is needed for our simple church, to something that will improve the local landscape and the community.

The Town commission approved the initial special permit by an 8-1 vote and agreed to clarify the approval of the special permit to allow a permanent sanctuary by a unanimous 9-0 vote. The two neighbors who disagree with the commission's decisions describe our plan in legal documents as a mammoth structure creating traffic snarls. These characterizations are completely

untrue. With respect to buildings, the existing barn, which is 29,000 square feet, will be renovated as a social, education and youth center and will remain the largest structure on the property. You can barely see it from the road; it is tucked in the southwest corner of the expansive property. We will add 12,000 square feet to the barn to allow for a gym/multi-purpose facility that will also serve as a large, publicly available meeting room and the church's temporary sanctuary. In roughly five years we hope to build a 19,000-square-foot sanctuary about 100 yards from the barn. At that point, the capacity of **Grace Church** will be similar to other churches in town; however, 45 acres of the property will remain as open space. In other words, over a period of five years, we will be adding the equivalent of three large houses on a 48-acre parcel of land, or the equivalent of one large house per 16 acres. Parking will be in the rear corner, made of pervious pavement, behind the ridge and barn, barely visible to anyone. Except for a few covered picnic tables, walking trails and peaceful gardens, that is the extent of the planned building. **Grace Farms** will be an inspirational destination, featuring peace and tranquility to be thoroughly enjoyed by all.

With respect to traffic flow, manual traffic counts on a typical Sunday show a peak rate of traffic of five cars per minute (one car every 12 seconds) entering Saxe Middle School, where **Grace Church** currently holds its service. The traffic flow is low because the nature of our church is such that people come early and stay late, serving, and spending time with one another. Even if traffic flows double, we would still be well within traffic safety standards not even accounting for the expectation that traffic will be spread over a longer time period as people linger after church because the property will be such a pleasant place to be. The driveway to the proposed parking lot is one-quarter mile long, enough length to contain a line of about 84 Jeep Grand Cherokees before one vehicle spills out into the street. Just in case, we will also have a police officer directing traffic as it is in everyone's best interest to avoid traffic problems.

While we can understand the concerns of a couple of neighbors on the basis of theoretical assessments of traffic or misinformation about our true building intentions, we are confident that if they could see **Grace Farms** lived out in reality, and not just as plans on paper, they would agree it is a tremendous asset to New Canaan. The alternative, as permitted by current zoning, is the construction of 10 very large houses with multiple-car garages. This would engulf the open space, create new subdivision roads and driveways, and increase the load on local schools and town facilities. In contrast, we will preserve more than 45 acres of open space. But most importantly, **Grace** intends to be a good neighbor as our values preclude any other possibility. We welcome the opportunity to sit down with our neighbors to discuss their concerns and are still hoping to resolve this matter to everyone's satisfaction and move forward with our gift.

**Grace Community Church**

Planning Team

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Estimated printed pages: 2

New Canaan Advertiser, The (CT)

May 22, 2008

Section: News

Page: 2A

### **Planning & Zoning briefs**

Article Text:

White Oak Shade

The Planning & Zoning Commission denied without prejudice a six-lot subdivision at 122 White Oak Shade Road, on 10.5 acres owned by Mr. and Ms. Charles B. Schafer, Jr., Tuesday, May 20. Commissioners found fault with engineer Holt McChord's plan to satisfy their requirement that 10 percent of the property be designated open space, which he presented as individual conservation easements in the backyards of home lots.

Chairman Laszlo Papp said the general public wouldn't be allowed access and enjoyment of the open space if it was isolated by surrounding private property.

Because the application was denied without prejudice, the Schafers may re-file an alternate plan immediately, he said.

### **Grace Church**

Attempting to resolve some of the confusion that has embroiled the commission in competing lawsuits since late last year, P&Z agreed to clarify that **Grace Community Church** may ultimately build the 1,200-seat sanctuary it initially requested last fall, subject to conditions.

Last November, the church was granted a permit for a 900-seat sanctuary on Luke's Wood Road, just half of the two-phase plan in its application.

No less than one year after a certificate of occupancy is obtained, according to the amendment approved this week, **Grace** may return to P&Z with a request and supporting traffic study for a second, 1,200-seat sanctuary. The smaller sanctuary would then be converted to a gymnasium.

### **NCVAC rebuilding**

A conceptual plan for a new Volunteer Ambulance Corps building and police garage at 174 South Avenue was unanimously approved.

The expanded facility will allow all of NCVAC's emergency vehicles to be protected in bays from the elements, Building Advisory Committee Chairman Jim Beall said, and may be built to more environmentally friendly specifications.

### **Town Hall re-zoning**

The commission voted to re-zone the Town Hall property Business A, from Main Street in the front to the Playhouse parking lot in the rear.

Currently non-conforming, 77 Main Street straddles Residence B, Retail A and Business A zoning districts.

Town Planner Steve Kleppin suggested re-zoning to the Town Hall Building Committee as a way to pre-empt some potential regulatory snarls after it concluded that the eventual overhaul of the nearly century-old meeting house would require expansion.

### **Millport Apartments**

The Housing Authority received approval of its final architectural plans for the rebuilding of subsidized housing at 57 and 65 Millport Avenue.

P&Z was unhappy with the appearance of an earlier set, and asked the Housing Authority for improvements and greater detail.

The 16 existing, oft-derided, one-story units are slated to be razed at the end of the summer, Chairman Chuck Berman said, and replaced with 40 two-story units.

### **Richmond Hill**

The commission voted that a statutory referral from the Department of Public Works, seeking to demolish an auxiliary building on the south side of 64 Richmond Hill Road, was not contrary to the Town Plan of Conservation and Development.

The 108-year-old building includes a single-story, two-car garage that the department has used to store vehicles and equipment.

Senior Engineer Tiger Mann said a replacement structure should be built in Waveny.

Kimberly Nevas

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## NewsBank InfoWeb

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New Canaan Advertiser, The (CT)  
March 28, 2013

Section: News  
Page: 1A

### **P&Z Says Grace**

#### **Commission OKs new church on old farm**

Author: *Anna Lillian Moser; Reporter*

Article Text:

This weekend could be a special Easter for **Grace Community Church**, which for years has held its Sunday ser-vices at Saxe Middle School, thanks to the Planning and Zoning Commission's unanimous approval of its proposed project on **Grace Farms**.

The congregation, for years, has been hoping to build its own sanctuary on the old Windsome Farms that borders New York State. And to do that, **Grace** brought in a world-renowned architecture firm from Tokyo, Japan, to design what the leaders hope to be a architectural marvel.

But before the approval of both **Grace** Farm's site plan and special permit application, commissioners finalized the conditions of the approval on Tuesday, March 26. The commissioners are hoping the conditions will strike a balance between the needs of the project and the concerns of neighbors.

Although **Grace Church** services this Easter Sunday will be once more at Saxe, a special Good Friday, outdoor, casual service will be held at **Grace Farms**, starting at 4.

Originally, **Grace** Property Holdings LLC went before P&Z to present its proposal for a building called the River at the former Windsome Farms property on Lukes Wood Road and Smith Ridge. The building would be constructed on a sliver of the 75-acre **Grace** Farms property that the foundation is preserving for the community as a permanent open space. The building, which was designed by the architecture firm Sanaa of Tokyo, has been designed in harmony with the surrounding landscape and would be constructed from glass, concrete, steel and wood.

A long, single roof, about 10 feet above the ground, will twist and turn with the landscape. The building's sanctuary would seat about 715 people and have a capacity for 900.

After meeting with neighbors last year, plans were altered slightly, leaving a 180-foot buffer between the pro-posed building (which would be on the southern end of the 75-acre property) and the nearest neighboring property, as well as adding more landscaping to better cover view of the proposed building. The number of parking spaces were also reduced from 131 to 126, with some of the spaces being moved toward the property's northern entrance.

Commission members were concerned people outside of the congregation would visit the site just to see the River building, creating unwanted traffic in the area, including parked cars on the

street. The commission debated prohibiting the public from walking on the property, but eventually deleted the condition.

'I'm not saying we should say it's a public park, but we have a need for open space,"

Commissioner John Goodwin said, adding that while people might go to the site to view the architecture, he doesn't believe there will be masses of people. "I don't understand why we would prohibit the public from walking onto the property."

Commission secretary Jean Grzelecki added that **Grace** Farms is private property and the amount of non-congregation visitors can be controlled by the owners.

Other conditions discussed were limiting the enrollment of **Grace** Farm's preschool program (which was deleted because the site plan already has a limited number of class-rooms in place) and limiting the delivering of fill to the sight during construction. The commission put a condition in place that would prohibit fill from being delivered to the site before 8:30 a.m., after children in the area have been picked up for school, but debated lifting the restriction during summer breaks.

"No, I think it should be across the board," said Chairman Laszlo Papp.

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