

May 21, 2016

Mr. John Goodwin
Chairman, Planning & Zoning
Town of New Canaan
77 Main Street
New Canaan, CT 06840

Re: Grace Farms – Special Events

Dear Chairman Goodwin:

We appreciate very much your acknowledgement of our May 13th letter, and that you are actively reviewing the broader issues associated with the use of Grace Farms and its compliance with the special permit and associated conditions. We look forward to your response and understanding at the May 31st meeting P&Z's position on the matters presented.

In the meantime, however, we wanted to bring to your attention a number of activities planned to occur at Grace Farms in the very near future which, in our view, are of the sort for which many other organizations in town would be required to seek P&Z approval were they to occur at their facilities. We trust that you and the zoning enforcement officers have been informed of these activities by the Foundation, and are given the opportunity to determine whether these events are within the scope of the existing special permit prior to the dates on which they are scheduled to occur.

For example, on Grace Farm's website, there is reference to a May 30, 2016 Memorial Day barbecue which is open to the public. There is no indication of any limit on the number of attendees. As neighbors who may be directly and adversely impacted by the commotion of such an event, we would like to understand the town's position as to whether this activity is within the scope of the special permit granted in relation to Grace Community Church as a Religious Institution or whether this is some other sort of event which requires approval of P&Z. This barbeque appears to be unrelated to Grace Community Church as there is no reference to this event on the church website and the only calendar entry for May 30 on the website of Grace Community Church is for a 6:30pm Monday Bible Study session at a location "TBD."

In addition, there are a number of upcoming events not referenced on the website of either Grace Farms or Grace Community Church but where Grace Farms is hosting or has hosted the events on its property:

On Saturday May 21, 2016, Silvermine Arts Center will celebrate its first annual Living Art Award with an evening benefit at Grace Farms. New Yorker cartoonist and author Roz Chast will accept the inaugural Living Art Award. Having sold tickets at a price of \$500 each, the event is now sold out. Details are available on the website of the Silvermine Arts Center. <https://www.silvermineart.org/events/?id=423>

On Friday June 10, 2016, there is a Family ReEntry event referenced in an article at <http://ncadvertiser.com/76282/family-reentry-event-at-grace-farms/#axzz494EfdLBs> which is scheduled to occur on June 10, 2016 at 6:00pm. Tickets are being sold for the event at a price of @200 each. The article sites possible attendance as being up to 700 people.

During April and May, the New Canaan Chamber of Commerce has been promoting cooking classes at Grace Farms for a price of \$200 for four classes. <http://newcanaanchamber.com/calendar/grace-farms-junior-chefs-101/2016-05-10/>

And on Saturday, May 14, 2016, the New Canaan Historical Society held its Modern House Day Tour & Symposium at Grace Farms from 8:30 to 7:00. Admission to the event had a cost of \$275 per person. This event was promoted by the New Canaan Historical Society and referenced only on their website (rather than the Grace Farms or Grace Community Church website), but was nevertheless an event sponsored by Grace Farms.

These events suggest that the Grace Farms property is being used as a community center, conference center and/or public park in activities that are clearly unrelated to the Grace Community Church's mission as a Religious Institution. Moreover, it would appear that the frequency of events being held at Grace Farms seems to be giving the community the impression that it is just like any other conference facility available for public events. As reported on the New Canaanite website on May 15, 2016 (<http://newcanaanite.com/new-canaan-ymca-eyes-waveny-for-april-2017-gala-parks-officials-flag-impact-on-lawn-38770>) at a recent Parks and Recreation meeting regarding the planning for the April 2017 YMCA Gala "Commissioner Matt Konspore asked whether the organization had approached Grace Farms, and Y Executive Director Craig Panzano said that it had but 'unfortunately, they can only handle 200 to 250 for food, and they do not 'tent.' ""

As Grace Farms is actively courting local organizations to make use of its facilities for events that have long term planning implications, we believe the need to properly interpret the Grace Farms use conditions is acute. Particularly as it relates to the activities planned for May 30 and June 10, we believe that the Town of New Canaan has a responsibility to promptly evaluate whether these planned events are allowed under the special permit and associated conditions.

We are bringing these events to your attention to ensure that you have an opportunity to evaluate them in advance of their occurrence. The fact that many of these events are not posted on Grace websites may make the job of the town's zoning enforcement officers more difficult. We nevertheless hope that the monitoring of these activities and determination of their compliance with the existing special permit can become a regular occurrence. We believe it is incumbent upon the town to make such determinations in a timely manner. A number of our prior inquiries related to events and activities hosted at Grace Farms have been left unanswered, leaving us with no understanding of the basis underpinning the town's determinations.

We look forward to engaging in an ongoing, constructive dialogue and we sincerely hope that our May 13, 2016 letter might be the basis for going forward with a more complete discussion and evaluation of Grace Farms' activities in relation to the special permit and associated conditions. But as the events highlighted in this letter demonstrate, we believe that time is of the essence in the town making a determination on the upcoming events as these dates are fast approaching.

We greatly appreciate your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

Paul Ostling
Danita Ostling

Danita & Paul Ostling

Jennifer Holme
David Markatos

Jennifer Holme & David Markatos

Emiko Bissonnette
Donald Bissonnette

Emiko & Donald Bissonnette

Mike Bucaliewicz
Jennifer Bucaliewicz

Jennifer & Mike Bucaliewicz

Dona Bissonnette
Timothy Curt

Dona Bissonnette & Timothy Curt

and

cc: Rob Maffiozzi, First Selectman
Steve Kleppin, Town Planner
Ira Bloom, Town Attorney