

Support Sherborn's Agricultural Heritage



March 18, 2018



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Situational Summary

Silverwood Organic Farm has had many requests from Sherborn residents to use the farm barn for a special event – typically wedding, birthday, anniversary, bar mitzvah, bat mitzvah, or family reunion. The farm would very much like to respond positively to these requests as it would be a great way for town residents to connect a special event with Sherborn's rich agricultural heritage, and any usage fees would be important for farm sustainability.

Silverwood Organic Farm has been instructed by the Town of Sherborn Building Inspector that to be able to host events, the farm barn would need to be permitted for "assembly" usage rather than "agricultural" usage, which is the permit presently held. The first step in permitting and making construction changes is to meet zoning requirements. The Building Inspector has further confirmed that the Town of Sherborn does not consider events held on farms to be agricultural and for an assembly usage permit to be issued, Sherborn's zoning regulations will need to be changed to permit event usage of farm buildings.

Silverwood Farm has been working with the Sherborn Planning Board to propose an amendment to the Sherborn zoning regulations that would permit event usage of farm buildings. Any amendment to Sherborn's zoning regulations requires a vote at Town Meeting and a 2/3 vote in favor is required for passage of the zoning change.

This matter is about more than a zoning change, it is about supporting the few remaining active farms in Sherborn that contribute to the Town's rural heritage and agricultural character.

How can a Sherborn Resident Help?

All we ask is that you attend the few imminent public meetings where this subject will be discussed and support Sherborn's farmers by speaking and voting in favor of the proposal. Major speeches are not required – a minute of heartfelt supporting comments counts immeasurably. It will be important to attend Town Meeting to vote for the proposal as every vote counts, and only residents who show up at Town Meeting to vote will be counted.

How is This Helping to Protect Sherborn's Agricultural Heritage?

The best way to protect and maintain farmland is to actively use the farmland for agricultural purposes. That sounds great – the romance of farming. The reality of farming is that it is a very difficult business subject to many risks – weather, pests, commodity pricing, ever escalating costs, more and more regulations, taxes and government fees, the list goes on. For sustainability, farms need every dollar of income available for survival and sustainability. Conventional farming is increasingly uneconomic in suburban areas.

The one advantage that suburban farms have is the proximity to major population centers with people that want to connect with our agricultural heritage in a special way. Some call it agritourism but it is more than that. Silverwood Organic Farm is a produce farm but it is also a place, like all farms in Sherborn. An amazing place where you can

Support Sherborn's Agricultural Heritage

be in touch with over 300 years of history. All farms in Sherborn are rich with history and their own special character. With the current zoning bylaws, it is not possible for the residents of Sherborn to have a special event that is an incredibly memorable experience and that at the same time recognizes, appreciates and contributes to any of those farms.

The proposed zoning change will increase access to Sherborn's agricultural heritage in a personal and special way for all town residents.

Why Are Events So Important to Sherborn's Farms?

Hosting special recognition events is important for suburban farms like those in Sherborn:

- The special event is typically at a time outside usual farm working hours when the farm is not active with planting or harvesting activity. Such special event activity is very complementary to farm operations.
- The special event brings people to the farm that might not otherwise visit and is a unique marketing opportunity.
- A special event is about as low-impact a revenue source as is possible – it uses existing buildings, there is no hazardous byproduct, there is no negative effect on soils and growing areas.
- A special event is high margin revenue compared to all other farm revenue - the farm does not have to incur significant input costs to generate the income.
- In today's suburban farming environment, hosting events is increasingly an accepted part of maintaining a viable and sustainable suburban farm business, and is equally important to the farm as is planting and growing crops.
- At a business level, event income is critically important for helping with suburban farm financial viability and sustainability

Why are Farms so Important to Sherborn?

Most residents live in Sherborn for, or as a result of, the town's rural character. As a rural town, with a limited population, every resident can be involved in the school system and the town's government. That active community involvement has resulted in the top public school system in the state and a well-run town. Farms are a critically important aspect of that rural character as they shape the perception and feeling of place for the whole town. Sherborn has only three commercial scale fruit and produce farms remaining. Non-commercial farm-scale parcels of land are being sold off to 40B developers at an increasing rate. There are 40B developments in progress on Green Lane, South Washington Street, Whitney Street, Coolidge Street, and a large land parcel on Maple Street is under option to a major housing developer.

Silverwood Farm provides the local community with certified Organic, locally grown, freshly harvested produce that is available at nearby Wholefoods Market stores, Brothers Market, the Holliston Superette, local restaurants, and Wegmans Natick in 2018. Silverwood Farm offers employment to many residents of Sherborn and local people. The farm also provides volunteer opportunities to Dover-Sherborn High School

Support Sherborn's Agricultural Heritage

students and a hands-on opportunity to learn about agriculture and sustainable growing practices. Other active farms in Sherborn provide similar benefits and opportunities to town residents.

If Sherborn wants to retain its authentic agricultural character, the remaining farms need to be actively supported and encouraged. Supporting the zoning change is one small action that can be taken by every Sherborn resident to help – and Sherborn's farms need all the help that is available.

Important Upcoming Dates

To get a proposal on the Town Meeting warrant is an involved process. The Sherborn Planning Board has been responsive to helping Sherborn's farms through proposing an amendment to the town's zoning regulations. Text for the proposed zoning language change has been formulated and made available for public comment. One Planning Board Hearing was held March 7th and a continuation of that hearing is scheduled for Wednesday March 21 at 7:00 pm. Important dates are as follows:

- **Wednesday, March 21 at 7:00pm.**
Continuation of Planning Board Hearing where public comments can be received on the zoning change proposal. **Please attend this meeting and make your voice heard in support of Sherborn's agricultural heritage.** After this meeting, the Planning Board will finalize language for the proposed zoning change and submit it to the Board of Selectmen for review and a vote of approval.
- **Monday, March 26 at 7:00 pm.**
Selectmen's meeting to review the proposed zoning change and vote whether for or against the proposed zoning change. **Please attend this meeting and make your voice heard in support of Sherborn's agricultural heritage.** Advisory Committee meeting immediately following the Selectmen's decision to review the proposed zoning language change in light of the Board of Selectmen's vote and recommendation. The Advisory Committee will vote as to the recommendation to be made to the residents of Sherborn regarding the proposed zoning change on the Town Meeting warrant. **Please attend this meeting and make your voice heard in support of Sherborn's agricultural heritage.**
- **Tuesday, April 24 at 7:00pm.**
Annual Town Meeting where Sherborn residents that are present will vote on the zoning language change proposal. Public comments will be received on the zoning change proposal before the vote is held. **Please attend this meeting and make your voice heard in support of Sherborn's agricultural heritage. Every vote will count and matter.**

What are the Negatives of the Proposed Zoning Change?

The principal consideration with events is traffic and noise, which are both important concerns. All of Sherborn's remaining three active fruit and produce farms are on heavily trafficked roads – Kendall Avenue for Sunshine Farm, Route 27/Coolidge Street for Dowse Orchards, and Western Avenue for Silverwood Organic Farm. Most farm

Support Sherborn's Agricultural Heritage

abutters are already dealing with locations where hundreds or thousands of vehicles pass their houses daily and any periodic event traffic would be minimal in comparison. The real issue is noise for abutters.

All of Sherborn's active farms have farm owners living on the farm so noise is an important consideration for the farm owners too. Almost half of the new text proposed for the zoning amendment deals with noise control and mitigation. The proposed language provides stringent and specific requirements that have been adapted from zoning changes that have worked very well in other towns and is as follows:

- a) Music must cease promptly at 11 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays and 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday evenings. Exceptions may be granted for Sundays before a Monday holiday.
- b) Amplified music is permitted but the sound must be kept to a maximum of 85 decibels in accordance with L10 guidelines; measured 50 feet from the source ("L-10" refers to a national guideline for measuring noise levels over time and is recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency. The measurement of sound or noise shall be made with a sound-level meter (decibel (dB) meter). The instrument shall be maintained in calibration and good working order.
- c) The source of outdoor amplified sound must be a minimum of 100 yards from all lot lines, unless a lesser distance is approved through a special permit from the Planning Board.

False and Misleading Statements Made by Western Avenue Residents

Silverwood Farm was dismayed to hear false and misleading statements made by several Western Avenue residents at the recent Planning Board hearing held on March 7th. Despite everyone's best efforts, it is understood there will always be objections to even the most positive initiative, but the false and misleading comments made by the residents concerned were gross exaggerations and highly inaccurate and harmful.

Those false and misleading comments made it sound like Silverwood Organic Farm is running a nightclub on Western Avenue with an event every night. That is **just not true**. Examples of the handful of activities that the Hodson-Walker family has hosted on a charitable basis and personally at the Silverwood Farm barn include:

- **Annual Friends of the Sherborn Library "Friendsgiving" dinner** event held in November to raise funds for the Sherborn Library
- **Annual Dover-Sherborn Education Fund Cocktail function** to raise funds for the D-S school system
- **Annual Jimmy Fund Movie Night** to raise funds for cancer research on behalf of a family friend with brain cancer who is a D-S High School sophomore.
- **The Sherborn Yacht Club Annual Family Picnic**
- **Dover-Sherborn Middle School Drama Program Cast party**
- **Sherborn Playground fundraiser**

Support Sherborn's Agricultural Heritage

- **Graduation Party** for the Hodson-Walkers' daughter

These were not rowdy parties and included many Sherborn resident attendees who were supporting important charitable initiatives for the town. In addition, events are not always parties. Other events hosted by the Hodson-Walker family at the Silverwood Farm barn have included:

- **Sherborn Council on Aging Summer Luncheon** held annually at the Silverwood Farm barn
- **Pine Hill Elementary School Teacher Appreciation Luncheon** held annually at the Silverwood Farm barn
- **Dover-Sherborn School Superintendent Offsite Administration Meeting**
- **Dover-Sherborn High School Freshman Parent/Headmaster Meeting**

It is easy to go to a town board meeting and complain. It is much harder to do something positive and actively contribute to Sherborn's rural and agricultural heritage.

Take Action to Support Sherborn's Agricultural Heritage

Please attend the upcoming meetings and make your voice heard in support of Sherborn's agricultural heritage.

- **Wednesday, March 21 at 7:00pm.** Planning Board Hearing; Sherborn Town Hall.
- **Monday, March 26 at 7:00 pm.** Board of Selectmen meeting to be immediately followed by Advisory Committee hearing; Sherborn Town Hall.
- **Tuesday, April 24 at 7:00pm.** Annual Town Meeting; Lindquist Commons at D-S Regional School Campus.

If you have availability to attend one of the important meetings, that would be much appreciated. If you can't attend, please telephone (508-651-7855) or write to the Planning Board via the Town Planner, Gino Carlucci, at planning@sherbornma.org, or telephone (508-651-7850) or write the Selectmen's office via David Williams, the Town Administrator, at dwilliams@sherbornma.org.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the proposed zoning change, please call the Hodson-Walker family at 508-651-0418.

On behalf of Sherborn's farm community, your support is much appreciated.