
Neighbors sue over smart farm plan

CONNOR LINSKEY
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

MANSFIELD — Residents from abutting properties are suing the applicants for a controversial “smart farm” and the local planning and zoning commission for approving it.

The plaintiffs hope the approval of the application will be rescinded.

According to court documents in the Mansfield Town Clerk’s Office, on or about March 14, 2021, John J. Prete and Donna Prete of Clinton filed an application with the Mansfield Planning and Zoning commission seeking special permit approval to make improvements and establish the Agbotic Smart Farm.

The plaintiffs claim the proposed facilities will cause unreasonable noise, fumes and light from the greenhouse facilities.

According to Agbotic’s website, agbotic.com, the aim of the smart farms is to grow without using a single extra drop of water or excess energy.

The proposed smart farm consisted of six greenhouses and an office with two restrooms, associated parking, site lighting, access roads, a well and septic system on 438 Browns Road in the

Storrs section of Mansfield.

At the PZC’s June 7, 2021, public hearing, John J. Prete said vegetable and herb crops would be grown in the greenhouses as well as hemp.

He said he plans to use the hemp to produce tea, as he does at his New York facility.

NEIGHBORS, Page 4

Neighbors sue over smart farm plan

Continued from Page 1

The proposal included a total of 129,036 square feet of improvements, with 112,320 square feet of greenhouse space.

The plaintiffs — John Lenard, Jean Lenard, Scott Rhoades, Eleanor Rhoades, Ronald Cotterill and Peggy Tucker — claim the proposed facilities will cause unreasonable noise, fumes and light from the greenhouse facilities.

They also claim the PZC acted arbitrarily and unlawfully by approving the application in multiple ways.

This includes approving the application when the applicant allegedly failed to demonstrate the charcoal filters required as a condition of approval would prevent odors from emanating from the growth of hemp and would not discourage neighbors or affect their property values.

The plaintiffs also claim the PZC acted arbitrarily and unlawfully by approving a plan they say failed to

provide effective buffering, landscaping and berming necessary to avoid disturbing neighbors and diminishing their property values.

Long saga

The lawsuit aims to put an end to a controversial saga that started last spring.

After the initial public hearing April 5, 2021, the hearing resumed May 3, 2021.

At that time, the applicants' representatives made a presentation to PZC members, who then asked questions.

Two members of the public spoke in favor of the application and multiple persons spoke in opposition to the application for a variety of reasons.

The hearing resumed June 7, 2021.

During the hearing, the applicants' representatives presented revised plans intended to address staff comments and other information raised during the prior hearing.

Evidence was presented by application opponents including information regarding the

history of water shortages in nearby wells.

There was also a report by John Lenard, a retired engineer and founder of the firm Lenard Engineering, regarding alleged deficiencies of the applicant's hydrological report.

He alleged its failure to conduct testing for water yields to evaluate neighborhood impacts necessary to satisfy the requirements of Mansfield zoning regulations.

The public hearing was closed on June 7, 2021.

At their meeting June 21, 2021, members of the planning and zoning commission discussed the application.

They raised concerns regarding odors, water usage, traffic and the possible need for conditions if approved.

At their meeting July 6, 2021, the motion to approve the application was passed by a vote of six members in favor and three members against.

Legal action

From July 2021 to just last month, the plaintiffs and

defendants have been busy filing briefs to support their case at the Tolland Judicial District Courthouse in Rockville.

The defendants' next brief is due March 21 while the plaintiffs' reply brief is due April 8.

Unlike the plaintiffs, Mansfield Town Manager Ryan Aylesworth said he believes the planning and zoning commission did its due diligence prior to approving the application.

"The planning and zoning commission has zoning ordinances and regulations that it's entrusted with applying," he said.

"In this case I think they made a determination based on their objective review of what was being proposed was the right decision."

"I think they tried to ask all the right questions, gather all the pertinent information and make a decision based on the best available information," Aylesworth added.

Follow the Chronicle on Twitter - @thechroniclect.

Neighbors sue over smart farm plan

CONNOR LINSKEY

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

MANSFIELD — Residents from abutting properties are suing the applicants for a controversial “ smart farm” and the local planning and zoning commission for approving it.

The plaintiffs hope the approval of the application will be rescinded.

According to court documents in the Mansfield Town Clerk’s Office, on or about March 14, 2021, John J. Prete and Donna Prete of Clinton filed an application with the Mansfield Planning and Zoning commission seeking special permit approval to make improvements and establish the Agbotic Smart Farm.

According to Agbotic’s website, agbotic. com, the aim of the smart farms is to grow without using a single extra drop of water or excess energy.

The proposed smart farm consisted of six greenhouses and an office with two restrooms, associated parking, site lighting, access roads, a well and septic system on 438 Browns Road in the Storrs section of Mansfield.

At the PZC’s June 7, 2021, public hearing, John J. Prete said vegetable and herb crops would be grown in the greenhouses as well as hemp.

He said he plans to use the hemp to produce tea, as he does at his New York facility.

NEIGHBORS, Page **4**

The plaintiffs claim the proposed facilities will cause unreasonable noise, fumes and light from the greenhouse facilities.

Neighbors sue over smart farm plan

Continued from Page 1

The proposal included a total of 129,036 square feet of improvements, with 112,320 square feet of greenhouse space. The plaintiffs — John Lenard, Jean Lenard, Scott Rhoades, Eleanor Rhoades, Ronald Cotterill and Peggy Tucker — claim the proposed facilities will cause unreasonable noise, fumes and light from the greenhouse facilities. They also claim the PZC acted arbitrarily and unlawfully by approving the application in multiple ways.

This includes approving the application when the applicant allegedly failed to demonstrate the charcoal filters required as a condition of approval would prevent odors from emanating from the growth of hemp and would not discourage neighbors or affect their property values.

The plaintiffs also claim the PZC acted arbitrarily and unlawfully by approving a plan they say failed to provide effective buffering, landscaping and berming necessary to avoid disturbing neighbors and

diminishing their property values.

Long saga

The lawsuit aims to put an end to a controversial saga that started last spring.

After the initial public hearing April 5, 2021, the hearing resumed May 3, 2021.

At that time, the applicants' representatives made a presentation to PZC members, who then asked questions.

Two members of the public spoke in favor of the application and multiple persons spoke in opposition to the application for a variety of reasons.

The hearing resumed June 7, 2021.

During the hearing, the applicants' representatives presented revised plans intended to address staff comments and other information raised during the prior hearing.

Evidence was presented by application opponents including information regarding the history of water shortages in nearby wells.

There was also a report by John Lenard, a retired engineer and founder of the firm Lenard Engineering, regarding alleged deficiencies of the applicant's hydrological report.

He alleged its failure to conduct testing for water yields to evaluate neighborhood impacts necessary to satisfy the requirements of Mansfield zoning regulations.

The public hearing was closed on June 7, 2021.

At their meeting June 21, 2021, members of the planning and zoning commission discussed the application.

They raised concerns regarding odors, water usage, traffic and the possible need for conditions if approved.

At their meeting July 6, 2021, the motion to approve the application was passed by a vote of six members in favor and three members against.

Legal action

From July 2021 to just last month, the plaintiffs and defendants have been busy filing briefs to support their case at the Tolland Judicial District Courthouse in Rockville.

The defendants' next brief is due March 21 while the plaintiffs' reply brief is due April 8.

Unlike the plaintiffs, Mansfield Town Manager Ryan Aylesworth said he believes the planning and zoning commission did its due diligence prior to approving the application.

"The planning and zoning commission has zoning ordinances and regulations that it's entrusted with applying," he said.

"In this case I think they made a determination based on their objective review of what was being proposed was the right decision."

"I think they tried to ask all the right questions, gather all the pertinent information and make a decision

based on the best available information,” Aylesworth added.

Follow the Chronicle on Twitter - @thechroniclect.

[Copyright \(c\)2022 Chronicle Media LLC 2/8/2022](#)

[Powered by QContent](#)

Tuesday, 02/08/2022 Page .01

Copyright (c)2022 Chronicle Media LLC 2/8/2022