

September 12, 2023

First Selectmen Gordon Ridgeway
The Selectmen of the Town of Cornwall
The Members of the Cornwall Planning and Zoning Commission

Dear Folks:

I am writing to several parties to oppose the Ridgeway application in its current form and ask that they withdraw their application and begin active discussion with their rightly concerned neighbors before considering any resubmission.

Their application raises immediate and substantial concerns that, regardless of any public comments submitted to date, demand immediate recognition and further research by the Planning and Zoning Commission in order properly to fulfill their obligations to our community. In particular, the introduction of the commercial sale of alcohol, on premises public alcohol consumption, lack of commercial road access to their property and the probable dangerous impact on essential rural country roads with multiple blind curves and necessary speed limitations all need to be studied and assessed. This has not taken place. Neither is it likely to take place if stifling and inappropriate limitations imposed on the zoning process are not immediately opened to fully inform and encourage public participation.

The lack of adequate traffic flow safety studies is on its face grounds for rejecting this petition in its current form at this time. For example, traffic from the north from at least the high school and through many surrounding areas of Lime Rock, Falls Village, Ames, Lakeville and Salisbury will be directed down Cream Hill Road and across Scoville Road, a winding rural residential causeway totally inappropriate for and inhospitable to commercial traffic. The addition of alcohol considerations makes me all the more gravely concerned.

I wish to participate in and contribute to all necessary studies undertaken and ask to be apprised of all future proceedings. I believe in that regard that I speak for many of my neighbors who have evidenced the same concerns and desires to properly address the many serious issues raised by this premature application.

Sincerely,



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From: Bill McClane <billmcclane@icloud.com>
Date: September 9, 2023 at 3:03:23 PM EDT
To: landuse@cornwallct.gov
Subject: Public Letter of support for Ridgway Cidery Project

Dear Members of the Cornwall Planning and Zoning Commission

My wife and I are writing to voice our enthusiastic support of the proposed Ridgway Farm Cidery on Town Street.

We became aware of the proposal through threads on the Cornwall Community Network, from the “Save North Cornwall” signs next to the existing Ridgway farm entrance, and from many casual conversations. We are writing, in part, because there seems to be a concerted effort on the part of a small number of Cornwall residents to prevent the Ridgway family from creating what could be a viable agriculture-based business on their own land. We find this effort disheartening.

After reading the proposal and reviewing the drawings, not only do we support the project, but we are excited by it. Wineries, breweries and cideries provide true income for agricultural properties, a tasting room would provide another great gathering place in our town, and we love that it is not a newcomer with vast resources coming to plant their flag, but rather a long-term Cornwall family looking to expand an already great farm business. As a community we should support such efforts in general and this effort in particular.

We’ve also read through postings opposing the project. In these protests, much is made about the potential ill-effects of increased traffic. My wife and I have heard these arguments before - when the Golds wanted to add a Sweet Peat pile to their operations. Were told that truck traffic would destroy the pavement, that people would be unable to walk safely on the roads, jog or walk their dogs, and there would be a rise in deadly car accidents. These are the same arguments made regarding the cidery... and this time it’s not even trucks, but just passenger cars that pose the supposed danger. I’d point out that none of these dire predictions came true previously and there’s no evidence that such predictions will come true this time. Marginally higher traffic on a few roads, mostly on weekends, is not a destructive and destabilizing force.

What’s more, having served on the EDC I know that getting outside traffic to come through our commercial districts has been a long-standing priority. If you google-map the routes to the Cidery from places like Millerton, Kent, Great Barrington – it brings traffic right through Cornwall Bridge and West Cornwall. Both are commercial centers that we as a community are hoping to promote. What a nice fall day – heading to the Cidery to pick up a few growlers for a party, then stopping for lunch at the Cornwall Bridge Market or whatever new iteration of the Pink House manifests... maybe stopping at Ride and Ski, the Wish House, or Bike shop along the way. What a great day spent visiting Cornwall.

One letter asserts that the Ridgway farm's interests should be sacrificed because a handful of residents treat town street like a public park, which it is not. The letter went so far as to assert that the expansion should be stopped because a single resident would no longer be able to safely walk along Town Street while reading a book. What kind of absurd standard does that apply? Cornwall farmers should not be subservient to the leisure habits and eccentricities of individual residents. Yet another letter written in protest suggests that the proximity of the farm to the Congregational Church would be somehow inappropriate since people could buy hard cider while able to see a church in the distance. If that's the case, should the proximity of the Cornwall Bridge Package store to St. Bridget's Catholic Church be re-examined?

On a final note - Authors of each protesting letter mention in some way how they appreciate the Ridgway farm stand and how they appreciate the Ridgways as neighbors.... though clearly not enough to support the advancement of their livelihood. We personally find it a bit galling when people celebrate the rural character of Cornwall only to stand in the way of true agriculturally based financial stability. A picture perfect farm stand? Sure. A beautiful apple orchard to stroll by? Sure. But a Sweet Peat lease? Nope. A cidery that will draw in people and provide for long term viability of an old Cornwall farm? Nope... not picturesque enough.

You want to know what happens to farms that can't be financially viable? They sell their acreage to housing developers. That's what destroys rural character, not agricultural viability.

Thank you,

Bill McClane and Loren Bevans

272 Cream Hill Road

West Cornwall, CT 06796

To Whom It May Concern,

We are residents of 218 Town St, and so near neighbors on the same street on which the proposed hard cider outlet would be built. We are concerned at the idea of increased traffic on this quiet country road, particularly the sort of traffic that the sale of alcoholic beverages attracts. Selling hard cider is very different from selling apples or vegetables. Mr. Ridgway operates a popular farm stand on his property, which we use and support. But an alcoholic beverage tasting site, which will attract numerous buyers from throughout the region, is very different from a stand offering zucchini to the neighbors. Once established, this commercial site will appear on Google maps, drawing traffic from all over the region; a large proposed parking lot demonstrates Mr. Ridgway's hopes and plans in terms of high use.

Town Street is now a quiet pastoral road, with few houses on it and a very low level of traffic. Because of this quiet nature, and because of its beauty, it is widely used by walkers, runners, dog-owners and baby-strollers - even a walker-reader, who strides peacefully along this road with an open book in her hand. In these ways, Town Street functions as a local park for local residents. This use should be respected as an important part of community function. To create a commercial hub for outside drivers on this quiet green space would be to revoke the rights of those local users who now enjoy this bucolic area. Flooding the road with cars will make it impossible for non-drivers to enjoy it, and unsafe for them in any case. It would be impossible to read a book while negotiating traffic. The rights of neighbors should be considered as important as the rights of one resident.

We like having Mr. Ridgway as a neighbor, and we support his farm stand. We have no objections to an apple farm. We have no objections to the sale of cider or hard cider in jugs sold in the current stand. We do have strong objections to a space dedicated to selling alcoholic beverages, to be tasted and consumed on site, on a residential street. Town Street was not designed to support traffic generated by an outlet like this. There are specific areas in Cornwall zoned commercially where such activities can take place.

We ask you with respect to not approve such request. It will change the nature of Town Street, destroying the peaceful quality of this neighborhood, the very quality for which many of us chose to live here. It will change property values for everyone, because few homeowners want to live next to a commercial operation. It seems unfair to allow one resident to lower the property values of all his neighbors.

We would also ask that, given Gordon's position as first selectman, that any member of the Planning and Zoning Commission who has a relationship to the petitioner should recuse him or herself from the vote on this matter.

Regards, Tony and Roxana Robinson
218 Town Street