

Planning & Zoning Commission
Town of Haddam
30 Field Park Road
Haddam, CT 06438

November 3, 2022

RE: Proposed Retail Development of Lots 8 & 9 at Killingworth Road

Dear Members of the Planning & Zoning Commission:

I reside at 948 Killingworth Road with my two young children and I am the direct neighbor to the north of the proposed development at Lots 8 & 9 of Killingworth Road. I have concerns about this site plan and how the proposed construction of a 10,700 sqft. national-chain retail store and the impact it will have on our community and the surrounding properties, including my own. I am hopeful that the Commission will consider these points and will be deny the application and support the further interest of the residents of the Killingworth Road/Beaver Meadow Road neighborhood, and our town at large. I have included some thoughts and suggestions for how to improve the proposal for the conservation of property values and to enhance the community's use and enjoyment of the site to support the Commission's denial of the application.

Sec. 14.4.4 of the Haddam Zoning Code cites criteria that the commission should consider in site approval. The four major criteria include that the "proposed use, buildings, structures, and site development...shall be designed and arranged to protect and enhance public health, safety, property values, and our welfare, ...to conserve the existing terrain and natural resources of the site...to be in harmony with the character of the surrounding area...and to **enhance** the unique rural and historic nature of Haddam...to protect nearby residential, historic, and environmentally fragile areas." The proposed development of Lots 8 & 9 fail to meet any of these criteria.

Safety is a huge concern for our community with this development. First, there is not an adequate plan for fire safety. This seems like a gross oversight that creates a huge risk for my property and the other neighboring buildings and should cause the Commission to reject the proposed plan. Second, in terms of safety, as well as property values and welfare, has the Commission considered the additional noise overnight and during early hours and dangerous traffic that having large tractor-trailer deliveries will bring? Many vehicles and trucks already speed down Rt. 81, and this additional traffic will increase the risk of accidents. Third, a store such as budget national-chain retailer may increase criminal activity and theft in the area, increasing the need for support from law enforcement.

Cramming a 10,700 sqft. national-chain retail store onto these lots will diminish safety and property values in the area. With a plan to clear-cut both lots of all of the existing trees and level the topography of the lots, the development will destroy the existing terrain and natural resources of the site, and will do nothing to add to the historic, unique character of our town or harmony of this quiet corner of Higganum where there are many homes. There has been no consideration for keeping any of the original features of the existing terrain and resources, nor the historic character of the property, as the plan does not include creating a buffer of existing woods or trees or preserving any of its existing features. It is hard to imagine that between the wet, wooded area that is shared by my property and these lots, as well as the pond on Lot 7 would not be negatively impacted by this development. This area is home to wildlife from frogs to deer.

Similarly, the plan denotes that there is a possible encroachment of the septic system that supports the Dino's Pizza building. With all of this redevelopment so close to that system, it seems likely that the disruption will cause problems for the pond and neighboring properties.

The proposed site plan overlooks the tremendous beauty of the property that the current owner has enhanced. The owner has cleared some portion of the land, exposing the hill which slopes towards the rear of the lots and has opened access to the pond, so that the neighboring properties can enjoy its beauty. The development of an over-sized retail store will diminish the enjoyment of the pond and its natural beauty as the plan stands.

Many of us live here because we enjoy the conveniences of our smaller grocery and retail stores and do not mind traveling out of town for things that we might need but cannot buy here. It is part of the charm that comes along with living in such a rural, unique, and historic town like Haddam. Development of another national-chain retail site does not make sense for our town. It goes against our town Plan of Conservation and Development, as this proposal is not in line with any of the ideals, goals, and strategies we have sort forth for the development of our town and these valuable commercial areas. The Haddam Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) sets forth, "It is important that new businesses respect the history and identity of Higganum, meaning that a chain store with corporate architectural design that could be found anywhere is not appropriate for Higganum. Rather, shops and services that fill local needs, or provide products that have a sense of place, are more desirable. Businesses that support the eco-tourism industry, such as boating, fishing, hiking, and camping, are also appropriate for Higganum." (POCD p. 12) It is disappointing to learn that despite the investment in the Plan of Conservation and Development, we have not made revisions to our Zoning Code that would help further the goals and strategies of our plan.

In particular, the commercial area of Killingworth Road, the Strategies for development include, "2. Ensure that zoning in the smaller commercial areas is consistent with actual uses, particularly where uses are currently strictly residential... 3. Encourage more mixed-use development in the smaller commercial areas, such as apartments over ground floor retail...4. Wherever possible,

make it easier for people to access the smaller commercial areas on foot or by bicycle from their homes and from neighboring public open spaces. 5. As the smaller commercial areas develop or redevelop, encourage buildings that front the street, with the majority of parking located to the rear and/or side.” (POCD p. 32)

In the case of the suggested development of this site, none of these strategies are being met. The proposal for this site does not encourage mixed-use development, which would be in character with the neighborhood, and does not improve foot-traffic access. In fact, the installation of this retailer under the proposed plan will decrease safety for pedestrians as well as residential traffic in the neighborhood, decreasing the walkability and enjoyability of the existing businesses.

The site development plan proposes purchasing and incorporating a portion of Lot 7 into Lot 8 and the overall development. They want to right-size the lot for the benefit of their own corporate gain—not for the benefit of our community. There’s an argument to be made that if their plan doesn’t fit on the existing lots, then it is not a successful plan. But I ask the members of the commission that should this plan move forward, the plan should be right-sized to the benefit of the community and our town. This is an opportunity to create a site plan that would meet what we are striving for in our zoning code. Something could be created that would be in harmony with the character of the neighborhood and **enhance** the natural features of the area.

As planned, this development would restrict the future use of Lot 7 and the redevelopment of Lot 3 (should that ever be necessary) and misses a huge opportunity to enhance the usage of the Lot 7. Just down the road on Rt. 81 in Clinton, a developer has redeveloped the former site of the Morgan High School. This site is located directly next to a river. The developer installed a pavilion and playground next to the river for patrons to enjoy. This is a beautiful example of how to create a site plan where the natural features of the land can be enhanced for people to enjoy the natural feature of the site. Would it be possible to require the developers to include public features that might enhance our enjoyment of this site, such as a picnic area with tables and benches, or another feature that would actually enhance our community’s use and access?

I would also like to propose that the Commission please require a revision to the proposed buffer zone of the site development plan. According to Sec. 7.4 of the zoning code, the Commission may require a buffer zone between a site of commercial use and existing residential use.

As the plan stands, there is very little proposed by way of a buffer and there is heavy reliance on my property to act as a buffer, as the proposed plan will clear-cut all of the existing trees on Lots 8 & 9, leaving only the trees on my lot.

The site plan has the parking lot directly backing up to my property with no buffer or set back, and there is only a small line of 6-7 inch trees proposed that will take a great deal of time to come to maturity. Please require a more significant buffer zone—the developer should be required to preserve at least an additional 20-30 feet of existing treed land—let’s not cut them

down and start over again. A solid wood or PVC fence of at least 6 or 7 feet in height would be ideal to cut back on the noise and lights from vehicles and trucks that would be using the site, as well as the proposed line of trees, or taller trees that are more mature than what is proposed so that they will actually reduce light and noise pollution between our properties. The developer also has failed to provide any plans for signage, and the application should be denied on this basis as well.

Another unique feature of this property is the existing stone wall. The stone wall represents the historic character of our town and our agrarian heritage and it should be preserved on the site. Similarly, there is currently a handsome split-rail fence that runs along the adjacent property that could also be continued and would visually enhance the presentation of the proposed store.

I would also like to suggest that the Commission consider requiring the developer to do more to obscure the site of the loading dock area, such as more fencing. In visiting the Tylerville location of a similar business, it appears that hundreds of inventory carts are stored outside—not inside the building, some loose and not contained. For patrons of the neighboring businesses and residents, this is unsightly and will greatly detract from the beauty and enjoyment of the public use of the area.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read and consider my thoughts and suggestions. I appreciate your support and the work that you do on behalf of our town and the growth of our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Larissa Johnson".

Larissa Johnson, Esq.

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