

4/17/2025

TO: Dane County – Zoning And Land Regulation Committee

RE: Comment Responses to Town of Cottage Grove and Dane County

Comment #1:

Last year, there was a somewhat elaborate plan to install lights around the perimeter of the site. The new plan now seems to suggest just three new lights near the new building in the back. Are these three lights now the full extent of new lighting that is proposed?

Response: Currently, these are the only proposed lights. We have created a lighting plan (see attached) based on the full extent of the lighting design that can be implemented over time.

Comment #2:

Provide a catalog page for the selected lights, which should be “dark sky” compliant.

Response: A lighting plan with the existing light information has been included.

Comment #3:

The plans cut back designated parking spaces in the rear gravel parking lot but keep the gravel area at its far west end (labeled “existing gravel area to remain”). What is the new function of that gravel area if not parking?

Response: Existing gravel areas of the parking lot that are to remain are intended for food truck and vending services. A label has been included on the plan.

Comment #4:

Indicate how turf grass will be established in the overflow parking area, or maybe more appropriately how long it will take to get established, before cars will be allowed to park there? Seems like it may take a couple years of growth to handle cars.

Response: We already met with a seed rep and picked out the turf mix that establishes quickly and can handle heavy traffic. As soon as the field is dry we will be getting the turf planted. Giving it about 4 months to set root.

Comment #5:

How will the edges of that overflow parking area be marked so that customers know not to drive beyond it to find parking? Indicate on plan.

Response: We will use T-posts along with white chains to make boundaries.

Comment #6:

There is some suggestion of a one-way-in and one-way-out to that overflow parking area. What improvements will be made to mark this area? Why not instead just have a single two-way entrance lined up with the proposed driveway in the overflow parking area?

Response: T-posts with chains and staff will guide patrons through the parking entry during large events. The intent of the one way system is to keep entering guests separate from exiting guests as much as possible. Additionally, a one-way out further from the queuing helps provide more space between exiting and entering vehicles. Additionally, this was a recommendation from a agricultural tourist consultant to assist with navigation and queuing.

Comment #7:

Verify that the "2-acre farm animal and playground area" from 2024 near the west end of the site is no longer in the plans, or if it still is, label on updated site plan.

Response: We do plan on having some animals this year. A label has been added to the plan sheets.

Comment #8:

To the extent the Town is not already aware, what improvements (if any) have already been made as a result of the 2024 approvals, what are still left to complete, and what may have been abandoned from those 2024 plans?

Response: The following improvements have been made to the site:

- Lighting
- Ropes course
- 5-acre rented land agreement with the property owner to the south for crop production and a corn maze.

Items to be completed include:

- Potential for farm animals
- Building relocation (this CUP)

Comment #9:

The submitted application suggests that there could be 20 employees at peak season. I am having trouble reconciling this relatively modest total with a proposal that includes 960 parking spaces (i.e., at least 960 customers if all full). Please explain or reconcile.

Response: At peak times and events, time ticketing is used to stagger entry onto the site, so staff are not overwhelmed. Additionally, the majority of event ticketing is purchased on-line so it is clear time of arrival and the anticipated number of guests. The majority of events (during peak and off peak events) are unmanned and do not require staff. Staff is typically employed at point of sale opportunities. Last, the additional turf parking area is for maximum build out and is not anticipated that the full extent of the area will be used for parking.

Parking and Traffic Comments:

The revised plans now suggest about 340 parking spaces without the proposed 5-acre overflow parking area in use, and about 960 total parking spaces when the proposed overflow parking area is in use. This is up from about 450 total parking spaces in the 2024 plans.

This revised parking count could correlate with significant traffic volumes on Vilas Hope Road and its intersections with nearby highways like CTH BB just to the north. The application includes an "event plan", and indicates that "a finalized, modified version of this plan to be filed with the local authorities at time of approval and prior to opening to the public". The expected timing for submittal of a modified event plan should be made clearer. I also advise that such modified event plan include more information on expected off-site traffic movement, including potential support from traffic control personnel during larger events, and the suitability of Vilas Hope Road and nearby intersections to accommodate traffic safely and efficiently during larger events with or without such support.

The anticipated/maximum frequency of larger events, or maybe in other words events requiring use of the overflow parking area, should also be more clearly understood. The following text in the applicant's materials suggest that larger events or the need to use overflow parking could be fairly frequent (but this could be a misunderstanding):

From Submittal: The temporary grass parking would be utilized a maximum of six months a year. Typically, the temporary grass parking will be utilized Fridays from 4pm to 8pm, Saturdays 10am to 8pm and Sunday 10am to 6pm between September 1st through October 31st.

If such large events are infrequent (e.g., a few times per year), then I would advise a conditional use permit condition to cap large events requiring the overflow parking area at X events or Y days per year, in addition to an enhanced traffic management component of the expected modified event plan. If, instead, there are frequent larger events, then a professional traffic impact analysis for this amended project may be warranted before further approvals are granted. Such an analysis would identify what if any off-site road and intersection improvements might be necessary to accommodate frequent event traffic.

Response:

Planned events will be similar to last year in terms of frequency, attendance, and timing, which did not result in off-site traffic issues. The intent of the revised circulation pattern is to better manage on-site traffic and parking by allowing for easier queuing in multiple lines and creating one way circulation routes that offer clearer circulation patterns for visitors and more manageable and predictable traffic patterns for staff. The intent of six month use for the turf parking is maximum allowed per County standard. It is not the intent to use the overflow parking every day for six months. The turf parking is also desirable for guests as it is closer to the original 5-acre farm rental land and easier for guests to carry bulkier purchase items from that area to their vehicle within the turf parking.

The events below would be typical events that would require the use of the turf parking area.

Events:

- 1) Fall Harvest Festival (September 12th through October 26th).
 - a. Fall Harvest Festival has not used both existing parking (paved and gravel) to capacity at this time.

Building Design Comments:

Given its location distant from public roads and residences, it is my opinion that the proposed hoop building (even with its relocation from 2024 plans) meets associated Town design review ordinance requirements. For the “proposed approved farm store building” much closer to Vilas Road, the applicant should supply proposed exterior building elevations before that building is anticipated to be built, indicating proposed exterior materials. Given its location much closer to Vilas Road and existing residences, it should have a much more finished design than the hoop building per Section 12.08(4)(b) of the design review ordinance. I understand that its construction may be a ways out.

Response:

Noted. A building design for Farm Store Building will be submitted at the time that portion of the project is deemed practical.

Landscaping Comments:

The Town design review ordinance requires submittal of a landscape plan. It was agreed in 2024 that recent and pending landscape improvements near Vilas Hope Road would be sufficient to meet the landscaping requirement. Warm Belly representatives told me that such landscaping has been installed, but I was not able to independently verify this.

Response:

Landscape was installed in Fall 2024. The images below are from this spring prior to the planned re-mulching of the beds.



Exterior Lighting Comments:

The exterior lighting proposal remains unclear to me. The application suggests proposed lighting would be as approved in 2024, except around the hoop building area. The application also indicates that “all proposed lighting of rear field/parking area will be limited to harvest times of year, with access minimized during the winter months; all is outlined on proposed Event Plan.” The submitted event plan does not cover lighting. All lighting must comply with Section 12.08(4)(d) of the Town design review ordinance, which sets standards to promote dark night skies and minimize neighbor impacts. Dark sky standards were reinforced with Town Comprehensive Plan amendments adopted this January. The General Site Plan map shows, in its lower right corner, a “proposed flood light” detail that is not compliant with dark sky standards. In general, I recommend a much clearer and consistent understanding of all additional exterior lighting that is proposed but not yet installed, and verification that all such lighting will meet Town standards.

Response:

A lighting plan has been created that includes the use of the existing light fixture.

DANE COUNTY COMMENTS:

2025-4-16 email

Traffic Comments:

We will need more information on the traffic counts that the business has been seeing, because the seasonal grass parking that is proposed would effectively double the site’s parking capacity and it is reasonable to expect this will increase customer traffic. The specific concern that has been raised relates to the fact that the business has just 2 connections to the broader region on county trunk highways – to the north at CTH BB, and to the south at CTH AB near where Vilas Hope Road meets Buckeye Road (see attached exhibit showing these locations and some aerial imagery from 2024). The intersection at BB has widened pavement / turn lane; however, the intersection at AB does not have a turn lane, which could lead to unsafe conditions at that intersection during the peak season.

The East Buckeye Road intersection is a factor too, though I am not sure who has jurisdiction / control over roadway improvements, signage etc there. It appears to be a local road within City of Madison jurisdiction, but Vilas Hope is mostly in the town.

Since traffic management is the primary driver of this CUP, we are hoping you have some traffic data to share, whether it be customer counts, traffic counts on Vilas Hope Road, or traffic assumptions or estimates from similar businesses? Any data you can provide will be helpful. It may be adequate to satisfy the safety concerns, but if it is not we may need to obtain more information in the form of a traffic study.

Response to Comments:

The major goal of creating a larger parking lot was for safety and getting cars off Vilas Hope Rd more efficiently. Last year there were two days that, for a moment, cars were waiting on Vilas Hope. Creating more ticketing lines and larger parking will help our staff get customers parked faster.

The expansion is definitely over planning and preparedness for the future but will allow for growth if need be.

Timed ticketing for event parking is also implemented for the site to facilitate a reduction of traffic congestion. For example: 10am, 12pm, 2pm, 4pm are the typical times we stagger parking/entering with the majority of customers purchasing tickets online. If traffic congestion does occur, we can limit online ticket sales and cap the amount available at any point if a traffic flow becomes a problem. For example, if a specific time reaches capacity and creates a problem, future efforts can be implemented to cap those times and not allow sales.

We coordinated with an Ag consultant who recommended three internal lanes for ticketing and a larger parking area would fix any future problems of traffic flow.

The highest customer day last year brought around 1,500 for the whole day. The majority of customers are families, and would average three people per vehicle, which is approximately 500 cars spread across the entire day.

Approximately 80% of our traffic came from the north based on observations during ticketing.

Regards,
Andy Meessmann, PLA
SNYDER & ASSOCIATES, INC.