

HAMPTON PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
HAMPTON TOWN HALL, 164 ROUTE 97

PUBLIC HEARING & REGULAR MEETING

Monday, May 19, 2025 7:00 PM
COMMUNITY MEETING ROOM
Hampton Town Hall
164 Main Street, Hampton CT

DRAFT MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Chairman Kevin Grindle called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

2. Roll Call/Seating of Alternate Members

In attendance for the meeting were regular members Ev Hyde, Gary DeCesare, Stan Crawford, Sue Hochstetter, Peter Serafin, and Alternate Kathy Thompson. Also in attendance was Town Planner John Guskowski and several members of the public.

3. Audience for Citizens: *Citizens may address the Commission on items not otherwise on the agenda*

There were no comments from the citizens in attendance.

4. Approval of Minutes: April 21, 2025 Regular Meeting

Motion to approve the April 21, 2025 minutes by Ev Hyde, seconded by Stan Crawford. Motion carried unanimously.

5. Public Hearing

- a. Special Permit for Tier III Home Occupation – Farm Winery at 4 East Old Route 6.
Applicant/Owner: Wheeler Winery, LLC

Chairman Grindle noted that the public hearing was advertised in the Willimantic Chronicle on May 8th and May 15th. He invited the applicant to present to the Commission. Matthew Wheeler, applicant, presented for the application. He shared a plot map of the property on East Old Route 6 where he and his fiancée wish to open the winery. He gave a brief history of his history in the culinary industry and how he came to be interested in wineries, and how he is currently a winemaker at a different winery in Connecticut. His fiancée, Alyssa Niquette, is an engineer. He discussed the subject property and how it fit their needs for a facility. He laid out the phasing of the establishment of the winery, which would start with planting vines and growing for a year, then renovating the barn that would become a tasting room. He discussed property access and an existing stone-dust parking area adjacent to the existing driveway. The larger event space and vineyard expansion would most likely take 3-5 years.

Chairman Grindle asked about what sort of activity would be taking place that would separate the winery use from background residential use of the property. He asked about proposed capacity, both initially and into the future. Mr. Wheeler stated that customers would most likely use the existing ROW along Route 6, which would be improved in consultation with the CT-DOT, with parking near the proposed tasting room, with a projected initial maximum of 50 cars.

He projected that most visitors would be staying for 1-2 hours, and would work well in conjunction with several other wineries in the immediate area, including Sharpe Hill and Quiet Corner. He noted that the 12 event limit by the Tier 3 Home Occupation was more than sufficient for their current plans. If expansion happened into the future, he would return to the Commission for a new Special Permit. Alyssa Niquette stated that the first several years will be focused on production, without much public involvement beyond farm-stand style customer pick-up. She noted that this would be a slow start. Matthew Wheeler stated that the initial hours of operation would be only 11-5 on the weekends, and the tasting room would hold approximately the same hours, weekends only, for several years. No outside employees are projected in the initial few years.

Sue Hochstetter confirmed that the main customer driveway would be off Route 6, but the private residential entrance is on East Old Route 6. Once renovated, Matthew Wheeler believes that the tasting room may have a capacity of up to 100 people, but that would be determined by the Fire Marshal. Chairman Grindle discussed the project traffic of 10-20 vehicles per hour accessing from Route 6, which was a very minor percentage of existing traffic and capacity. Matthew Wheeler stated that Route 6 had approximately 8,000-12,000 vehicles per day. Chairman Grindle expressed no concerns about traffic volumes or driveway location. Sue Hochstetter discussed the size of the potential event space, which Alyssa Niquette stated would be approximately 30' x 70', with a maximum capacity of 100-150 visitors at the outside, several years down the road. Ev Hyde stated that the narrative described the operations and mission of the operation very well. He also stated that left- and right-turn movements should be studied from this driveway location. Matthew Wheeler stated that future access could also use the existing driveway on East Old Route 6. Kathy Thompson asked about the condition of Route 6 at this point, and Matthew Wheeler stated that it was basically one wide travel lane in both directions at this point, with both expanded lanes ending to the east. Kathy Thompson asked about the signage, to which Matthew Wheeler stated that they would work within the regulations, but the property was generally properly visible. Some of the buildings may be slightly visible from the road, though Alyssa Niquette stated that the existing vegetation did hide some of the lot's interior. Peter Serafin asked about the potential of a craft brewery as well. Matthew Wheeler stated that they may consider a craft beer sales license as part of their retail operation, but had no plans to brew on site.

The Commission discussed the state's "wine trail" and the other wineries in the area and how visitors might coordinate group visits. Matthew Wheeler discussed these logistics. Chairman Grindle opened up commentary to the public. Marc Riccio from Branford, CT, stated that he was seeking a property in 2021 to help bring his niece from Kentucky to Connecticut along with her horses. He bought a horse property in Hampton and worked to prepare it to be a horse farm. He talked about the labor involved in cleaning up the barn, clearing brush, upgrading electrical, and fixing the drainage on the property. He stated that his family decided against having a horse farm in Hampton, and put the property on the market. He met applicants and appreciated their interest and plans for the land. He agreed that the property was ideal for a winery. He encouraged the Commission to support the winery plans and application, as it would fit well into the fabric of the Town. He retained seven acres of adjacent land and will be a neighbor unless the applicants wish to expand at some point. Ev Hyde asked about the time required to plant vines and develop production, and Matthew Wheeler stated that it would be about three years.

Don Bezanson stated that he was a neighbor and a long-time horticulturalist. He supported the idea of a growing operation next door. He did express some concerns about the increased traffic along Route 6, including numerous accidents and other traffic issues in the area. He stated that per a conversation with a State Trooper, the average speed on this section of Route 6 was nearly 70 miles per hour. He sought some traffic calming measures in this area, particularly given the need to merge just easterly of this site. The applicants stated that the peak traffic volumes would still be slow. Mr. Bezanson stated some concerns about pesticide use and potential runoff from parked vehicles, etc. Matthew Wheeler stated that he had workplace certification of pesticides and the Integrated Pest Management methods of the winery he works for. The pesticides would be very judiciously applied directly to the plants and would focus on the vines themselves. DEEP manages pesticide policies. He stated that he met with DEEP about that matter, and

they did not discuss the vehicle parking issue or potential runoff from vehicles. He stated that the cart path, once upgraded into a proper driveway, would include drainage that would capture stormwater flows. Chairman Grindle confirmed that DEEP would manage pesticide issues and the Commission would address stormwater drainage. Alyssa Niquette stated that their water was tested and was clean and abundant. Karen Haraghey stated that she was concerned that stormwater would run down toward Route 6 and into her yard. She supported small businesses, but was concerned about runoff. She asked about phasing of the traffic increases, which would probably not occur until 2027-2029. She also stated that the neighbors were concerned about light pollution and excessive signage. Chairman Grindle confirmed that the Regulations prohibited off-site light pollution. Matthew Wheeler discussed potential off-site signage.

John Guszkowski asked about the Health District's review of proposed septic systems, and Matthew Wheeler stated that the barn did not have an existing well and septic system. John Guszkowski stated that health approvals could be noted as a condition of approval, along with DOT encroachment permits, which generally follow local approvals. The Commission discussed the safety of Route 6 and potential signage or traffic improvements, and the regulation of state road safety vs. local road safety. Gary DeCesare discussed higher traffic volumes when wineries get popular and busy.

Motion to close the public hearing by Gary DeCesare, seconded by Ev Hyde. Motion carried unanimously.

6. Old Business

- a. Special Permit for Tier III Home Occupation – Farm Winery at 4 East Old Route 6.
Applicant/Owner: Wheeler Winery, LLC

Motion to approve the application for a Tier III Home Occupation Special Permit as being consistent with the Hampton Zoning Regulations and the Plan of Conservation & Development with the conditions that no Certificate of Occupancy will be given for the winery until all relevant health permits and DOT Encroachment permits are in place by Stan Crawford, seconded by Gary DeCesare. Ev Hyde discussed the DOT encroachment process. **Motion carried unanimously.**

- b. Commission Workshop – 2026 Plan of Conservation & Development

John Guszkowski noted that he drafted a potential Vision Statement for the upcoming Plan of Conservation & Development and shared it with the Commission. Ev Hyde noted that this was a lot to discuss and the conversation could take place next meeting.

Motion to table discussion by Ev Hyde, seconded by Sue Hochstetter. Motion carried unanimously.

7. New Business

There was no new business.

8. Staff Report & Enforcement Issues

John Guszkowski shared the ZEO report from Jay Gigliotti. The Commission discussed the report, including the unexplained pumping water from the Little River. John Guszkowski noted that he would follow up on the residents in a trailer and the use of a small shed near the Little River. Stan Crawford stated that it was a shame that commercial businesses had to conform to strict property cleanliness standards, but residential properties did not. He would report additional violations to the ZEO. The Commission discussed the potential of adding fines or possibly blight standards and will revisit at the next meeting.

9. Correspondence

There was no other correspondence.

10. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Ev Hyde, seconded by Gary DeCesare. Motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John P. Guskowski".

John P. Guskowski, AICP, CZEO
Town Planner