

**COVENTRY INLAND WETLANDS AGENCY
MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING OF THURSDAY, June 17, 2021**

By: Mathieu

Time: 6:08 p.m.

Place: Virtual

1. ROLL CALL:

		PRESENT	ABSENT
REGULAR MEMBERS:	Martin Briggs		X
	Suzanne Choate	X	
	Patricia Laramee	X	
	Lori Mathieu, Chairperson	X	
	Thomas Woolf, Vice Chairman		X
ALTERNATE MEMBERS:	Open		
	Mike Powers		X
STAFF:	Todd Penney, Town Engineer/Wetlands Agent	X	
STAFF:	Mindy Gosselin, Wetlands Agent Assistant	X	

2. NEW BUSINESS:

- A. 21-17AR – 2047 Boston Turnpike, Hytone Farm – Applicant/Agent: Keith Hodge – TeamAg Inc.; Owner: HF Land Holdings, LLC – Greg Perracchio – Construction of anaerobic digester system, manure storage structure, storm water facilities, and related components at Hytone Farm in the Regulated Area.**

Mathieu read the application into the record.

Keith Hodge, Engineer for TeamAg, Inc., was present for the applicant. TeamAg, Inc is an agricultural engineering firm base in Pennsylvania. He met with Penney, Gosselin, and the Zoning staff a couple of weeks ago to discuss this project. It was suggested the project be approached as an as-of-right farming activity. There will be some activity in the wetlands and the upland review area.

Gosselin said the packet includes narratives from Hodge and the Soil Scientist, the wetlands determination map, the legal opinion from Rich Roberts, and Section 4 of the Wetlands regulations that address as-of-right activity.

Greg Peracchio, owner of Hytone Farm, joined the meeting at 6:14 p.m.

Hodge said that he appreciates the IWA organizing this special meeting in the interest of the project timeline. All on the project appreciates the efforts and taking this time to discuss the matter. Mr. Hodge shared the site plan at a high level. This was two sheets with color aerial images giving an overview of the property where the work is proposed and a property to the south that is proposed pending further discussion with that property owner. The vast majority of the main tract is in agricultural use. There is only a small wooded area to the southwest that is not in agricultural use. The plan shows the existing farm infrastructure with crops fields on the west side. The cultivated fields are often in corn. The owner is planning to build the digester facilities in the haying field. The property to the south there is a proposal to run a pipe across what is also hayfield until it runs up to the wooded area. There is discussion necessary with that neighbor. The area the pipe is proposed for is also in agricultural use. Hytone Farm has been a long term renter of the crop land. An easement would be needed for the pipe. Although this is not yet agreed to, Hodge wanted to put it in front of the IWA this evening as it does cut across some of the farm's wetlands area.

Greg Perrachio said this property is an adjacent farm to his home farm and he and the neighbor have had a good working relationship. This owner sold his cows five to six years ago; Perrachio started renting that land at that time. Perrachio houses some young cows on that farm and he utilizes the farm land. Mr. Perrachio is confident that the easement would be easy to obtain.

Hodge continued to explain the nature of the project and its goals. The idea is that Hytone Farm wants to build a digester which is a means of treating the manure and generating clean energy. All parts of a system that treats the manure run through an environment without oxygen. At the same they will be taking the manure that goes through the digester into a storage tank to replace the manure lagoons on the property.

Mr. Perrachio said his farm is on Route 44 and highly visible. The farm was started in 1944 that was transitioned to dairy only in 1960. He has 380 mature cows and ~200 young stock. The barn is scraped twice a day to remove the manure. That is pushed into the lagoons that stays in there for four to five months. When the time is right (being cognizant of weekends or holiday periods due to the odor during manure spreading) we spread the liquid manure on the fields when it will take up the nutrients. Currently have 30+ year earthen lined lagoon. It is functional. But there are opportunities to have a better nutrient source with the digester. The digester will also reduce the amount of odor. In addition to better nutrient use and odor reduction, electricity will be produced. The project flows well with the farm operation. Perrachio has been looking at this process for the past several years and feels it will be of benefit to the operation. A larger waste storage tank will allow them to hold the nutrients a bit longer.

Mathieu said she is hearing this facility will give the farming operation more capability with controlling nutrients and odor, and generating electricity. Perrachio said he tries to improve the operation as much as we can trying every year to do a better job. This is a big project. Mr. Perrachio is comfortable with this technology.

Mr. Hodge described the structures for the project and described the purpose of each. Food waste, from the manufacturing of food, will be delivered to the site to enhance the digester; this will be delivered to the depackaging building. Hodge's understanding is this will be part of phase two of the project. The sand separation system will remove the sand bedding material from the manure. Sand is the prime choice for bedding materials in the barn and we

do not want to get sand into the digester tank. This process also offers the opportunity to recycle the sand. The bunk silo complex is there feed is stored and the bunk silo runoff treatment area takes the runoff from the silo area. The proposed location of the storm water pond is the big item that encroaches into the wetlands area. The proposed location is the lowest point on the site making it the logical spot. That will take runoff from the new project building roofs and driveway area. That area is currently hayfield. The pond is designed to be a permanent pool that is released over time. Mr. Perrachio added this area is wetlands soils but it has been in productive farm land for longer than fifty years. It is farmable as a hayfield; corn cannot be grown there.

Choate said the main question for the IWA is is there a farming activity or not. If the IWA deems it as farming then it would fall as an as-of-right activity. She feels that using food waste to supplement the process would still be a farming activity. If the food waste becomes the main activity it is no longer a farming as-of-right activity. How does the IWA classify this? Perrachio said the food waste provides extra nutrients needed for the crops and will allow him to buy less chemical nutrient. Hytone Farm currently farms ~800 acres of owned and rented land. The amount of food waste to be brought in is calculated to cover this amount of land. The farm has partnered with a consultant who is in charge of contracting for the food waste. This person currently has three projects running. She has tried to source fat, oils, and grease. Perrachio's goal is to be able to farm until he retires in thirty years. It is tough to make it in the farm business. This process will add to his bottom line to produce electricity and not have to buy as many chemicals. Laramee said it makes sense what the applicant is trying to do and gives him credit.

Mathieu said the activity in front of the IWA involves the proposed storm water pond and any activity in the regulated area. Is this truly part of a farming activity? From what she is hearing from Perrachio the answer is yes. Will the electricity generated be used on site? Mr. Perrachio said virtual net metering will be used. His electricity bills will be offset and any extra will be sold to partners looking to resell green energy. It does pencil out to add to the bottom line of the farming activity. He has been doing this for 30 years and wants to continue for 30 more. Mathieu added the memo from Attorney Roberts is very important for the Members to review; it provide very good guidance. Mathieu does see this as an as-of-right activity. She would like to see the storm water pond moved to the east outside of the wetlands area and is interested in hearing more about the proposed pipe. Mr. Hodge said the grading does not allow shifting the pond to the east. Choate agrees this seems like a farming activity in every way. Her reaction to the pond in the wetlands is not great as well. She would like to see water quality happening. Hodge said the lagoon will be decommissioned. Mr. Hodge addressed the concern stated about the food waste processing replacing the agricultural operation. As he understands the process food waste digesting is a bit too variable in output. The dairy manure provides a good stabilizing factor in the digestion process. It is very unlikely the digester would function without the manure. There are systems that use manure digesters only. The dairy manure is the key ingredient in the recipe. It is stabilizing and it provides an ongoing influx with bacterial populations that are key to the process.

Mathieu said this is a good marriage of the processes. Hytone Farm is one of the faces of our town. This is going to be very visible. She would love to promote this an example of producing green energy and allows the farming activity to continue on. This is something good for the farm and the town. This would be the second one in Connecticut. Perrachio said only our manure will be used. There is no plan to bring in outside manure. With this

current location he is comfortable with the number of cows he has which is why he is looking for other ways to add to the bottom line. This is a waste reduction plant. What will be spread on the fields is not as offensive as the current process. Mathieu said when you add the tank you will have a large visibility. You want to promote this so people do not get upset about it. It is good to hear this process will help you to continue on farming.

Mathieu said once you dig in the wetlands area it will fill with water. Is that why the pipe is proposed? Hodge said the intent of the pipe is to manage the low flows. There will be subsurface drains to take the base flow and get it to the pond at the back of the adjacent property rather than have it flow over a productive hayfield. Hemlock Brook starts to form in those woods. Choate said you may be able to outlet sooner than at that pond. Perrachio said it is fairly flat where the brook starts. Perrachio added a solid 6" pipe is proposed to take the water from the storm water pond to the existing pond in the woods. Choate said there will be less erosion using a pipe rather than having water run over the bare field and the water outletting to the pond will be cleaner. Perrachio said he has not yet spoken to the neighbor about allowing this since he wanted to make sure the IWA feels it is reasonable and viable.

Motion: I move the Coventry Inland Wetlands Agency determines this a farm as-of-right activity for application 21-17AR – 2047 Boston Turnpike, Hytone Farm – Applicant/Agent: Keith Hodge – TeamAg Inc.; Owner: HF Land Holdings, LLC – Greg Perrachio – Construction of anaerobic digester system, manure storage structure, storm water facilities, and related components at Hytone Farm in the Regulated Area.

By: Choate

Seconded: Laramée

Voting:

For: Choate, Laramée, Mathieu

Against: None

Abstain: None

Mr. Perrachio said he is sure this will be a popular subject once the farm tour is up and running again. A half-day could be dedicated to this portion of the operation. It is a big and exciting project. He is hopeful it will be a good addition for the operation.

3. ADJOURNMENT:

Motion: I move the Coventry Inland Wetlands Agency adjourn at 7:21 p.m.

By: Choate

Seconded: Laramée

Voting:

For: Choate, Mathieu, Laramée

Against: None

Abstain: None

Respectfully Submitted,

Yvonne B. Filip

Yvonne B. Filip, IWA Clerk

PLEASE NOTE: The minutes are not official until approved by the Inland Wetland Agency at the next Agency meeting. Please see the next Agency meeting minutes for approval or changes to these minutes.