

18 March 2024

Ms. Janet Hill, Chair  
Zoning Commission  
Town of Washington  
2 Bryan Plaza  
Washington Depot, CT 06794

Re: **Steep Rock at Macricostas - 116 and 124 Christian Street – Modification of 2019 Special Permit**

Dear Ms. Hill,

Steep Rock Association requests a Modification of its existing Special Permit, per Section 13.1.B.3 of the Town of Washington Zoning Regulations, generally to construct an outdoor Pavilion for community use, construct two Farm Barns for agricultural use, and accomplish miscellaneous minor improvements.

At its regular meeting held on December 16, 2019, the WASHINGTON ZONING COMMISSION took the following action:

*APPROVED: Steep Rock at Macricostas – 116/124 Christian Street, Special Permit – Section(s): 4.4.10 – Uses Permitted by Special Permit – convert 124 Christian Street-Seasonal Structure-relocate office to 116 Christian Street – both offering educational space, with conditions: 1.) That the two lots of 116/124 Christian Street have the same ownership with co-mingled uses, 2.) That any amplified noise ends by 10pm, passed 4-0 vote.*

Proposed modifications include:

**1. At 116 Christian Street:**

- a. Install a new septic system for the existing structure housing Steep Rock offices. The Health Department has approved the application submitted by Brian Neff PE.
- b. Relocate 7 parking spaces from the location designated in 2019. The relocation preserves a knoll with panoramic views of Macricostas Preserve and sets the parking lower on the property with appropriate screening.
- c. Construct a timber-framed Pavilion and terrace, and restore & relocate an existing timber-framed shed. The Pavilion replaces an existing dilapidated structure in the same general location and is to serve as a workshop for educational programs and an outdoor shelter for visitors, volunteers, and Steep Rock personnel.
  - i. The 2019 Special Permit application noted the existing structure's use as: "...outbuilding to be used as a workshop/learning lab for volunteer-based and hands-on educational programs such as nest box building and macroinvertebrate studies."

**2. At 124 Christian Street (subject to DEEP easement):**

- a. Install a new septic system for the South Farm Barn. The Health Department has approved the application submitted by Brian Neff PE.
- b. Construct two Farm Barns (agricultural use) incorporating:
  - i. Maintenance yard for work projects and equipment.
  - ii. Shelter for farming and maintenance equipment and implements.
  - iii. Workshop for work projects and maintenance of equipment.
  - iv. Workroom and cooler for Judea Garden.
  - v. Greenhouse for Judea Garden.
  - vi. Staff toilet room.
  - vii. Future generator.
- c. Re-shape the Macricostas Preserve main parking area.
- d. Install two 30"x30" condensing units adjacent to newly renovated Camp House, the 18th century structure converted to museum use.

124 Christian Street is the historic Camp Farm, now the 238-acre Macricostas Preserve, purchased in 2000 with funds from the State of CT, the Town of Washington, and private individuals. It is owned and maintained by Steep Rock, and subject to a 2001 Conservation Easement held by the State of CT. The Easement charges Steep Rock with forever maintaining and conserving the land in its natural and open condition, and grants Steep Rock the right to "...the repair, replacement of existing structures not to be exceed(ed) by a 25% increase of the footprint...". This reserved right refers to the pre-existing barns. CT DEEP has approved the proposed improvements.

Steep Rock's farm and maintenance equipment is presently housed in the Bronson barn on Sabbaday Lane, now owned by Rumsey Hall who has generously allowed Steep Rock to use it until a replacement is found. The proposed Farm Barns are configured to provide a safe and secure area for agricultural equipment and projects, where staff can work without interfering with the community's use and enjoyment of Macricostas Preserve. The orientation of the structures enables south-facing roof surfaces for solar collection.

Judea Garden volunteers grow, harvest, and distribute on average 3,500 lbs. of fresh produce annually to members of the community with limited financial resources. We have seen a usage increase of 15-20% in our target towns of Washington and New Milford and have extended our help to Warren, Litchfield, and Torrington when produce is available. Judea Garden needs space to start seedlings and to process and store its produce.

It is Steep Rock's thinking that these proposed modifications align with the intent of the 2019 Special Permit. In addition, all proposed structures and improvements are otherwise included in Uses Permitted in the R-1 zone per Sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.7.

**Special Permit Standards**

- 13.1.C.1** Washington's 2014 Plan of Conservation and Development includes a stated Goal: *Washington should continue to encourage the preservation of farmlands...* It also notes the importance of Steep Rock preserves and prioritizes activities

that are at the core of Steep Rock's mission: land stewardship and open space preservation.

**13.1.C.2** The location, type, character, size, scale, proportion, appearance, and intensity of the proposed structures and improvements are in harmony with Section 4.1's stated Purpose for the R-1 Farming and Residential District. The traditional, one-story Farm Barns are far smaller than their predecessor whose footprint they overlap, and rural character of the 200' corridor along Bee Brook remains uncompromised.

**13.1.C.3** No change is proposed to access for fire protection purposes and other emergency services.

**13.1.C.4** No change is proposed to existing driveway and farm lane access from Christian Street.

With no increase in the intensity of uses, no increase in traffic patterns is expected. The proposed Farm Barns will eliminate trailering to and from Macricostas Preserve and will reduce trailering on town roads to other Steep Rock preserves.

No change is proposed to parking capacity on the site.

**13.1.C.5** 116 Christian Street is a 3-acre parcel. Proposed lot coverage is 8.007%.  
124 Christian Street is a 237.9-acre parcel. Proposed lot coverage (excluding trails) is 0.318%.  
Combined, the property is 240.9 acres and proposed lot coverage is 0.414%.

Proposed structures meet setback requirements with two exceptions: 1) the South Farm Barn encroaches 30' into the 200' (zoning) setback from Bee Brook per Section 12.1.2 (applicable to a point 200' north of Christian Street); and 2) the Camp House condensing units encroach 115' into the same Bee Brook setback. The Zoning Board of Appeals granted a Variance for both encroachments at its regular meeting on February 15, 2024.

**13.1.C.6** Relocated parking at 116 Christian Street is proposed lower on the site behind a natural vegetative buffer along Christian Street.

**13.1.C.7** No proposed activity poses a threat to inland wetland areas, nor are any material changes proposed to natural features, vegetation, or drainage. Modest grading is required in and around the proposed Pavilion and Farm Barns.  
At its regular meeting on November 21, 2023, the Inland Wetlands Commission approved Brian Neff's application for the Barns, determining that "All proposed work falls under an as-of-right agricultural exemption."

**13.1.C.8** Steep Rock is committed to passive recreation and the quiet enjoyment of nature. Activities conducted on the property are governed by this concept and

respectful coexistence with neighbors. Noise generating equipment as defined in Section 12.14 is limited to two condensing units and a future emergency generator, all of which are immediately adjacent to the structures served.

**13.1.C.9** No blasting or earth or rock removal is proposed.

**Lighting**

In the interest of conserving the natural environment, Steep Rock will provide only the minimum exterior lighting necessary for security and safe pedestrian circulation to and from the buildings. Light fixture use and selection will conform to Section 12.15 and will be Dark-Sky Friendly.

**Signage**

No change to existing signage is proposed.

Thank you for your consideration of this application which is respectfully submitted on behalf of Steep Rock Association. We are eager to meet with your Commission to answer your questions.

Sincerely,

Reese Owens  
Agent for Steep Rock Association