

February 24, 2022

To the Zoning Commission:

As you may know, in the summer of 2018, the homeowner at 6 West Mountain Road clear-cut wetlands in violation of town regulations. He was granted "as of right" retroactive permission for the clear-cutting under an Agricultural Exemption based solely on a promise of starting a farm. At the time of the violation, this individual had no farm, no farmland, no farm animals, or farm equipment. He produced no crop or agricultural product of any kind. My understanding is that similar situations have occurred at other properties in town. Unfortunately, the proposed amendments to *Zoning Regulations Section 14.3 Site Plan Requirements*, while well-meaning, would not have prevented these incidents.

Currently the definition of a "farm" in the agricultural exemption is extremely vague. This, coupled with the precedent set by previous decisions made by the Inland Wetlands Commission, has created a huge loophole. Any homeowner can easily dodge these new amendments by claiming an Agricultural Exemption. Using this exemption, they would then be free to clear-cut native specimen trees, notable trees or all the trees (plus add ponds & "farm" buildings) – and yet have no farm at all.

The proposed amendments to *Zoning Regulations Section 14.3 Site Plan Requirements* contain vague and unenforceable language which serves only to add aggravation and expense for legitimate homeowners willing to follow the rules. If you truly want to protect trees and wetlands, the Zoning Department and Inland Wetlands Commission should take a closer look at Agricultural Exemptions and close the "clear-cut" loophole. They should clearly define what the Town of Washington considers "a farm" and create a formal system for checking up on homeowners who have claimed this exemption. Further defining and enforcing current regulations will be far more effective than adding additional vague rules, which are well-intentioned, but will have no meaningful impact on the problem.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Johnson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stephanie Johnson  
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Washington, CT 06793