

June 21, 2023 Note to Conservation Commission and ZBA regarding 24 Canal Road:

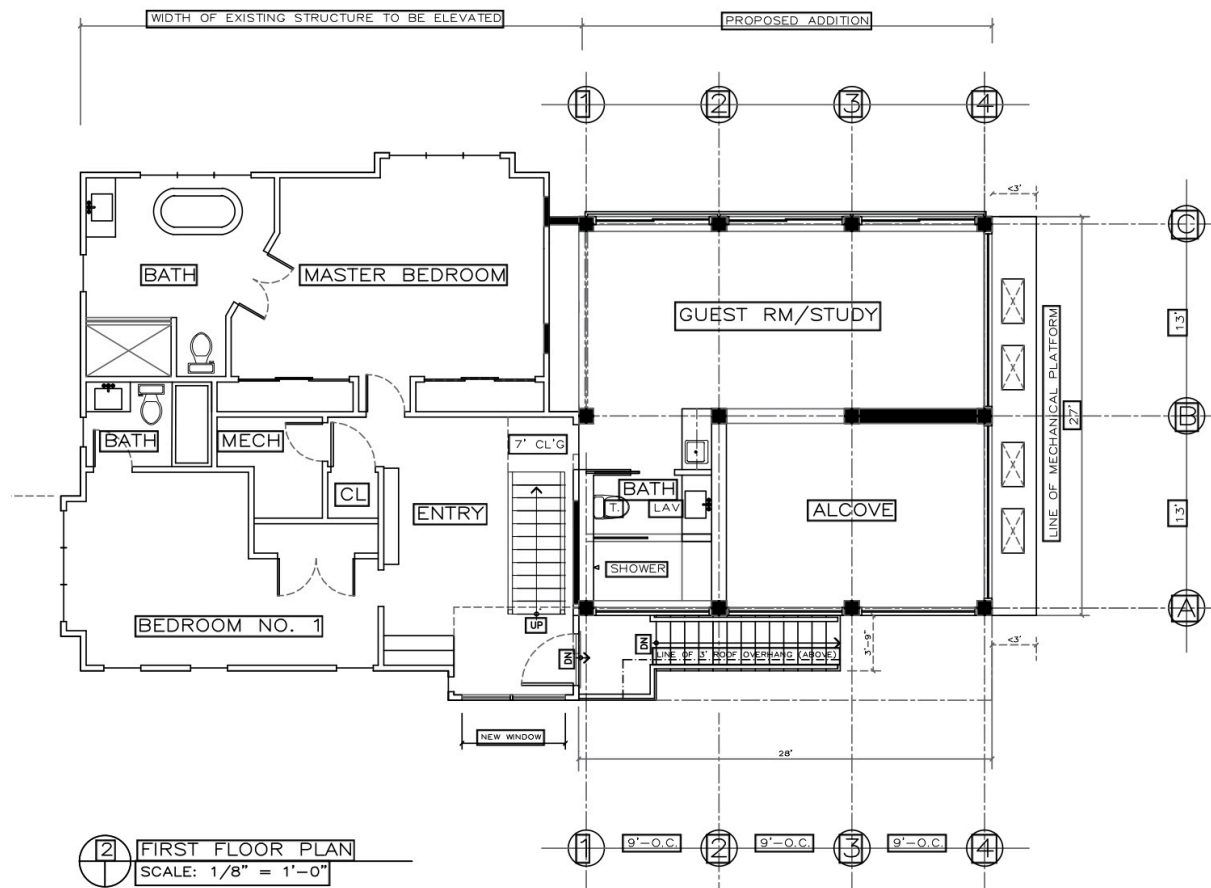
My name is Jeff Manchester of 14 Spriteview Avenue in Westport

As a resident directly across the canal from the subject property, I am vehemently opposed to the egregious building of the proposed addition of garage, office, extra bedroom and bathroom at 24 Canal Road.

This plan increases the properties coverage to 47%, under the guise of FEMA compliance.

In the June 2nd 2023 ZBA Letter, Cyndy Tyminski of Moon Gardens, LLC states the “proposal includes lifting of the **existing two-story single dwelling** (FFE 13.4’) to achieve a FEMA compliant dwelling (17.2’) with associated new development **including an attached carport, mechanical deck, stairs, driveway and drainage structures.**”

Moon Gardens, seems to have omitted the office/guest room, alcove as shown below on one of the architectural plans on the town’s website. And to be clear, for anyone that has seen the property, or looked at the Wingedfoot Construction, LLC plans, it’s a three-story building plus roof deck.



And in the Jim Kousidis application from Kousidis Engineering, it states in the Application Westport Conservation:

PROJECT DESCRIPTION/PURPOSE (Describe the proposed activity): Proposed renovations to the existing existing residence with residential additions, including an attached carport, additions to the living space and a new driveway. The existing residence and all residential additions will be brought into FEMA compliance.

I hereby depose and say that all statements contained herein and all exhibits attached hereto are true and binding to the best of my knowledge:



(Signature of Applicant)

April 11, 2023

(Date)

Just to be abundantly clear, the “**existing residence**” is already over coverage at 26% and importantly was/is FEMA compliant, when it was built around 2007. FEMA compliance was confirmed in the Flood & Erosion Control Board meeting of June 11, 2023. An audio version of which is on the Town site and shared with me by Edward Gill, one of the Town Engineers working with the Flood & Erosion Control Board.

Interestingly Mr. Kousidis, the engineer shepherding the application shared the reason for the build on the Flood & Erosion Control Board call, that the “**owner would like to have a dry parking space.**”

If the "hardship" is the occasional flooding of the garage, I hope the Conservation Commission and ZBA will see if the engineers/owners have considered any other **feasible or prudent alternatives**? The owner can continue to park on the septic/leach field as they often do today.

Toward that end, I read in the recommendation in **Staff Notes** shared with the Conservation Commission, perhaps that is what is meant in Alternative to Reduction of Impacts #1 recommendation?

1. “No Construction Alternative”

In the Alternative to Reduction of Impacts #2, it seems odd to me to have the owner resubmit a Landscape Plan with plantings that are native, salt tolerant trees and shrubs, **OR** reduce the size of the building, driveway and associated coverage:

2. d) A revised Conservation & CAM Landscape Plan shall be submitted to the Conservation Department depicting the restoration of all lawn north of the proposed residence with a planting that contains native, salt tolerant trees and shrubs, **or alternative development plans shall be submitted to the Conservation Department depicting the reduction in size of the addition, driveway and associated coverage. Revised plans shall be subject to Staff approval.**

The “lawn,” referenced in 2. d) is actually the Septic and Leach field that was filled in and raised to its current height during the last build. And this was presumably part of the last violation on the property when land had to be reclaimed from the marsh that was “inadvertently filled in” when Mr. Colin Kelly, Director of the Conservation Department had to intervene.

Besides the “No Construction Alternative,” it seems like a feasible alternative is to keep driving cars to higher ground or install a car lift “to keep the cars dry.” Toward that end, many in the Saugatuck Shores area have lifted their homes in their existing footprint to become FEMA compliant. Others have added a mechanical lift to raise cars during the infrequent storms, like the property at the corner of Canal Road and Harbor Road. Or one can simply take their vehicle to higher land, as we have to do in Saugatuck Shores with some of the perfect storms.

A quick Google search recommends several car lifts for a home garage from \$2k - \$5k, saving the homeowner an expense of the build and avoiding the disruption of the stone wall, land and marsh with construction of a driveway, new garage and office/bedroom on the septic field.

<https://www.cnet.com/roadshow/news/best-car-lift-for-home-garage/>

The home as you all know is on a tough street, Canal Road. So regardless of any of the potential plans to raise and add any additions, a resident will still have to wait for the waters to recede off of Canal Road before they can leave the property. To be clear, the hardship is actually Canal Road -- A known issue for any buyer/resident on Canal Road including this owner.

Switching gears to **Neighbor’s notifications** - Do notification requirements of Conservation differ from ZBA? When the last application for ZBA was filed for the then 59% proposed coverage in April, there were 21 residents/owners who were notified.

Oddly, for the recent Conservation Department Notification only 8 people were notified? A 62% reduction in residents notified. And oddly, it was not mailed to the physical property addresses? One resident between Robert Corroon at 4 Spriteview and Chase Leonard at 10 Spriteview, was not notified at their physical home address of 8 Spriteview. Instead, it was sent to a mailing address that is a non-used address, where no mail is forwarded? Perhaps in future notifications, mailings should always include the properties within the notification area, as this neighbor was not aware of the plans for the addition? An addition being added literally right in their backyard.

I attended the Field Trip for the Conservation Commission and in reviewing the Conservation Commission Staff Notes received after the Field Trip on June 16, 2023, one more comment:

“The application proposes to abandon the existing garage and raise the first floor elevation of the existing residential structure to elevation 17.2’. ***Additionally, the application proposes to demolish the existing single-family residence*** and construct a FEMA-compliant, two-story, residential addition and carport with a first-floor elevation of 17.2’ and carport floor elevation of ~8.2’.”

I don't believe the intent, at this point, is to demolish the existing single-family residence. Presumably a typo on demolition.

Finally, in the ZBA Hardship Appeal, so you all have the context, the owner stated:

Lastly, it's worth mentioning that we are owners of GROUNDED WORLD, a sustainability and impact marketing business. This business is one of a very few Westport Businesses that are B-Corp certified — proving we uphold the highest standards in environmental and social governance. The business is also a member of 1% for the planet. We hope through this improvement project we will continue building on our businesses ESG commitments, including becoming Carbon Net Zero Certified which should contribute positively to Westport's Net Zero by 2050 initiative as well."

Leveraging Google again, I did a search and see the State of CT highlighted the Grounded World, LLC based in Westport, CT on Canal Road as a civically engaged organization on May 4, 2023:

<https://portal.ct.gov/SOTS/Press-Releases/2023-Press-Releases/Secretary-Thomas-Announces-the-Launch-of-the-Civically-Engaged-Organization-Program>

"05/04/2023

Secretary Thomas Announces the Launch of the Civically Engaged Organization (C.E.O.) Program

*(Hartford, CT) – Today, Secretary of the State Stephanie Thomas announced the launch of her **Civically Engaged Organization (CEO) program**, coinciding with National Small Business Week. The initiative invites businesses and non-profit organizations to commit to being civically engaged, either through active participation in the local community or by helping to broaden public and employee civic awareness. The program, which will require organizations to renew annually, brings together two of Secretary Thomas' key focuses – business and civic education.*

As of today, the following organizations have already taken to pledge to be Civically Engaged Organizations...

- *Grounded World, LLC (Westport)"*

It's kind of ironic, an ESG firm looking to build on the grass/marsh for a new disruptive addition. Perhaps the owners of Grounded World, LLC should look to rent an office in Westport instead of building an addition to support the business in our residential neighborhood? More or less, helping to live up to the Spirit & Letter of a B Corp and their statement of "upholding the highest standards in environmental governance."

In summary:

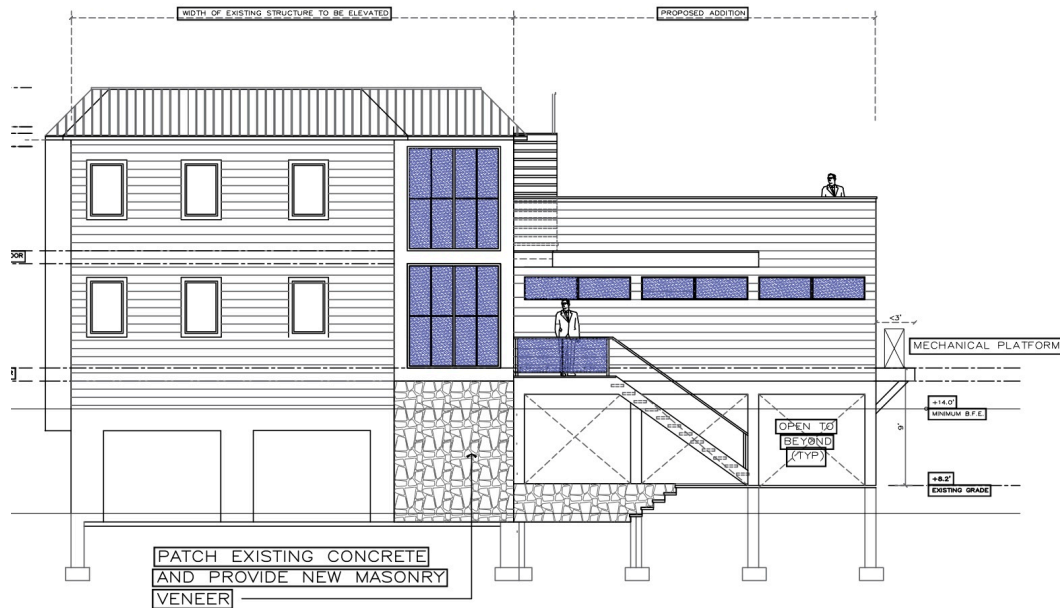
- The coverage request is outrageous at 47%, with a property that is already over coverage at 26% and is already FEMA compliant
- Parking/flooding was a known issue when the property was purchased on Canal Road
- Other feasible or prudent alternatives have clearly not been investigated

- There is a notification gap that is concerning with only 8 people being notified for Conservation Department & 21 residents or so for the last ZBA notification within 250'
- The owner of 24 Canal Road and Grounded World, LLC should look to find proper office space instead of building an office/bedroom above a new "car loft" on Canal Road

The Conservation Commission & ZBA should outright reject these respective applications.

Best Regards,
Jeff Manchester

View of house where it currently stands, the build plans below with the removal of the only mature trees on the property:



FRONT ELEVATION