

March 21, 2017
Planning Board

Present were: Tom McCue, Lori Langlois, Martha Creegan, Greg Estrella, Richard Cassidy, Helene Rayborn, , Ex-officio members Lucie Remillard and Jen Myers, and Alternate Naomi Levesque

Aline Boucher was excused for the evening

Others Present: Pamela Laflamme, Community Development Director; Michel Salek, Code Enforcement Officer; Barbara Tetreault, Berlin Daily Sun; Chris Jensen, journalist; Marguerite Piret, Abu Ally, Sam Gaeth, Ron Folger, Kelly Wieser, and Jay Poulin and Eric Grenier from HEB Engineers; Mike Perrault, Public Works Director; Jim Wheeler, City Manager; Gary & Andrea Ferron, Peter Nolet, Tony Nolet

Mr. McCue appointed Ms. Levesque a voting member for the evening.

Public Comments – No one spoke

Approval of February Minutes

Ms. Remillard moved with a second from Ms. Langlois to approve the February 2017 minutes. So moved, the motion carried.

Minor Subdivision – East Milan Road, Tax Map 404 Lot 47

Ms. Laflamme stated that the application for the minor subdivision is complete as submitted. **Ms. Rayborn made a motion to accept the application as complete; seconded by Ms. Langlois. All in favor, the motion carried.**

Jay Poulin of HEB Engineers introduced the team from North Country Growers, LLC.

Mr. Poulin gave a description of the proposed project and why the lot needs to be subdivided. The project is to construct greenhouses to grow vegetables and only vegetables, tomatoes and salad greens. The greenhouses will be heated by natural gas fed engines. Water will be collected from the roof, which will be transferred to lined irrigation ponds, and this becomes the irrigation for the facility.

The plants will be continuously grown organically in a highly automated process that is pesticide free. The produce will be sustainably packaged onsite and sold to vendors in the major marketplace. This is a distribution facility, and not a farm stand (produce cannot be bought directly from or at the facility). Customers are major supermarket chains and major distributors in New Hampshire. They are also trying to get a university in New Hampshire

as customers. Specific retailers could not be named as they don't know who has distribution in Berlin.

The need for organically grown produce is big in New England. Currently, everything gets shipped into the area. Produce will be picked fresh daily at the facility and on shelves by the next day. Transport will be within 8 hours of the facility.

The land is 213 acres in size currently in the Industrial Business Zone and is owned by the City of Berlin through the Berlin Industrial Development & Park Authority. North Country Growers have signed an option to purchase the property. It is bound by the Androscoggin River to the west, Horne Brooke to the south, East Milan Road to the east, and the town of Milan to the north. The property includes 2 landfills: one was capped in 1994, the other is abandoned. There is a ground water management zone that surrounds the capped landfill and is monitored as a boundary of activity use restrictions. Historically, the property has been used as agricultural. There is a major wetland in the middle. The southern portion of the site is the development area which was logged in 2016 by BIDPA. 30 acres were cleared. There is limited access to the property for the large amount of frontage. There is a 30 foot deeded right of way along Chalet Loop Road that can be used. There is also access to natural gas.

They are proposing a 3 lot subdivision. Lot 1 will be the abandoned landfill at 10.3 acres, Lot 2 the capped landfill at 30.6 acres, and Lot 3 the remaining land at 172 acres. As Lots 1 and 2 will be landfills, they will remain property of the City of Berlin. There will be no activity on this land. Lot 3 will be owned by North Country Growers, LLC.

Ms. Laflamme, reviewed the waiver requests submitted as part of the minor subdivision requirements.

Mr. McCue open the Public Hearing at 6:49pm

Public comments – No one spoke

The Public Hearing closed at 6:50pm

Board discussion – No one spoke

Ms. Remillard made a motion to approve the three lot Minor Subdivision of Map 404 Lot 47 as presented conditional upon the sale of the property to North Country Growers, LLC from the City of Berlin and granted the following waivers:

- **Waiver – Plan size: the Board will allow the request of an increase in submitted plan size.**

- **Waiver – Scale:** the Board will allow the request to use a scale of one inch to 200 feet due to the acreage of the property being shown in subdivision.
- **Waiver – Two-foot Contours:** the Board will allow two-foot contours to be shown on the plan only on the proposed development area.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Cassidy. All in favor, the motion carried.

North Country Growers LLC – Site Plan Review – East Milan Road, Tax Map- 404 Lot 47

Ms. Laflamme stated that the application is complete as submitted. **Ms. Langlois made a motion to accept the application as complete, seconded by Mr. Cassidy. All in favor, the motion passed.**

Mr. Poulin presented the same plan used for the subdivision. There are about 40 acres at the southern end that are relatively flat where there are no wetlands, not in floodplain, and is close to natural gas line. There is some shoreland, but that can be dealt with. There are some more wetlands adjacent to Horne Brook, but the 40 acres is clear of any real issues. The facility will have zero impact on the wetlands area or Horne Brook.

The southern 43 acres will be developed, including a 9.5 acre tomato greenhouse, 10.3 acre lettuce greenhouse, and 2 acre work area. Security is an important element of the project and they expect to hire 80 employees.

Some unique aspects of the project are that they will recycle rain water and melted snow for irrigation. There is also already a deeded right of way they may use to gain access to the property, however a new access road will be created off of East Milan Road that will run parallel to the Nolet property. The deeded right of way will likely be used as the primary access to the property during construction and will then be gated and used only as emergency access upon completion of construction.

The entry area will contain 126 parking spaces, with a drop off area and parking spaces. There will be a loading dock area where trucks and loading operations will be. A small arrival/entrance building will need to be entered prior to entering the actual greenhouse facility. Patios and ramps are proposed as part of the design. The greenhouse will be constructed at one elevation. The land is relatively flat but it does slope towards the river. There will be cutting and filling due to the contour of land.

The greenhouses will be metal buildings with glass skin (walls and roof) with mini peaks on the roof to collect water. Buildings will be one story high.

A head of lettuce can be grown in 17 days, with an expected daily volume of 17,000 heads of lettuce. Growing is a continuous operation; seedlings starts at one end of greenhouse and

produce is full grown by the time it gets to the other end. Tomatoes take longer to grow and the expected output is 8 million pounds a year. All produce will be organically grown, without using pesticides. Insects will be combatted with other insects that will be brought into the facility. Both predatory and prey insects will be native to New Hampshire and many will be bred in Europe. Pollination will be done with bees.

Ms. Creegan wondered if the business venture was experimental. There are 25,000 acres of greenhouses in Holland, Belgium and Northern France. None of this is new technology. All of it has been used and has worked for the last 15-20 years.

The whole site has been designed to State Regulations for drainage. Irrigation ponds will be used for irrigation. Storm water ponds will be used for the treatment of water. The facility will be serviced by municipal utilities that will be brought in from East Milan Road. This will be used for everything, including fire protection and washing the produce, but not for irrigation of the plants. They do have to find another source of water for irrigation before getting operational. Irrigation water cannot be treated. They prefer not to use the river, however, they could get permit to draw from it. Water Works has several wells and are willing to work with facility to provide ground water.

The development will be flush with landscaping. They want this to be a nice attractive facility, with mounds and plantings throughout. There will be new LED downcast lighting along the main road and in the parking lot. A five foot by sixty foot granite wall with a sign between the access road and the Nolet property on East Milan Road has been proposed. There will be fencing around the entire property; wrought iron at the front/entry portions and chain link around the remainder.

All other City and State department permits and reviews have been submitted. Water Works and Public Works are on board. The Police Department has been contacted and they are in support. There are some requirements and changes that will need to be made before all final approvals are given. There is a 250 foot wide zone of Shoreland that borders the Androscoggin River. The corner of one building is in this zone. The City must sign off on this. An air permit from DES has been applied for due to the exhaust from the engines.

There were questions from the board regarding the boiler and engines. There will be two prime power engines and a 10 megawatt boiler. The boiler will be used as an auxiliary heat source to the engines. It will be backup for heating facility. There will be a 30,000 gallon propane tank as back up for emergency situations.

Mr. McCue voiced concern of all of the new LED lighting that would be coming into the area. When asked what steps they may be taking to protect the dark skies that abutters may value, Mr. Poulin answered that all site lighting will be downcast. It is all housed and cut off. Mr. Gaeth responded that for the greenhouse they will be using blackout screens. These will

keep the sun out and can be used to block light at night. Screens will be installed on the walls and ceiling, with close to \$1,000,000.00 in screens the lighting will not affect abutters. The screens will also be used to keep the greenhouse cool during summer and warm in winter. (A video was shown to demonstrate that shades effectiveness.)

Mr. Cassidy inquired whether the glass used was insulated or low-energy. Greenhouse glass that is specific to this application and is very translucent will be used. It will also be safety glass designed to crumple and not shatter in the event it breaks. Ms. Remillard asked what the life expectancy of the shades were. While the shades are expected to be replaced every 15 years, regular replacement and repairs will be done to maintain the facility.

Mr. Poulin described the project's 24 hour per day operation. There will be two shifts, 7am-3pm and 11am-7pm, of forty employees each. There will also be a staff at night, so that the facility is constantly manned. Truck traffic will occur daily during the 7am-7pm work day, with four trucks for shipping and receiving and two for supplies.

Noise will be about seventy (70) decibels at one meter, which is about the same as a television in a room that will be coming from the three stacks at the south end of the building. The primary concern for noise would be the engines, which will be contained in a noise controlling structure to keep it to a minimum. Aside from employees, electric golf carts and fork lifts there won't be anything major contributing to noise at the facility. The conveyor belt used for growing moves extremely slow making little to no noise.

The facility will be just south of The Bodyline facility that is across the river. This is where it will be most visible. There will be a fifty (50) foot enhanced buffer with evergreens and mounds where the property borders Chalet Loop Road. There will also be pines and evergreens that are on the private property that is between the two properties.

The buildings will be nineteen (19) feet tall. The three stacks will come up though the building at a total height of forty (40 feet), twenty (20) feet will be visible above the building. The height is specific due to the type of draft needing to be achieved.

When asked if abutters had been approached. Mr. Nolet is here and they've had discussions.

Mr. McCue Opened the Public Hearing at 7:39pm

Gary & Andrea Ferron, 115 Chalet Loop Road, Berlin, NH

The Ferron property abuts the right of way that will be an access road to the facility. Mr. Ferron inquired: how far away will greenhouse be from our property line? Approximately 50 feet. And the road that will be there that will be closer? Yes, it is 15 feet wide and has to be 20 feet wide per the Berlin Fire Department. The gravel road is 10 feet from your property line. So there won't be any room to do any landscaping there. There will not be

lights on this back road. If this were to take place, how long will construction take? Several months. We hope to be in operation next quarter of next year. Want approval in April and May, much will happen over summer. Glass building will be erected then most of work will be done inside building. We are concerned as land owners what it will do to our property value.

Peter Nolet, representing his son Tony Nolet, 173 East Milan Road, Berlin, NH

There is not fifty feet of space between our property and the road. These are rural communities and you're almost right on the property line with this new road and all of these lights. There hasn't been a lot of traffic or activity. You are no longer living in a rural setting, you are living in an industrial park. We have concerns about this.

Ms. Remillard inquired how far the road is related to the Nolet property. Ten feet. Ms. Laflamme interjected that the setbacks are for buildings. The City doesn't have setbacks for roads in our ordinance. They can technically go up to a property line. Mr. Poulin stated there is a pinch point regarding this property.

Ms. Laflamme asked Mr. Poulin to describe the land conditions beyond the landfills. There could be significant, the access would be impacting a wetland. Ms. Laflamme noted for a very big parcel it has very limited access points.

Mr. Salek asked that they shed some light on recycling of the tomato plants. After we harvest plant we plan to compost them. Not sure if that will be our facility or sent out. Composting, wouldn't that require separating the plants from the structures they grown on?

Peter Higbee, Norway Street, Berlin, NH

Has there been any discussion for wage of jobs? Entry level jobs: harvesting and tending to plants, working on packing line, untrained jobs will be paid \$30,000 per year plus benefits. These workers will work in teams of five people and a supervisor. There will be an entomologist. Supervisors will be paid quite a bit more.

Barbara Tetreault – Berlin Daily Sun

Trucks. Will you be using your own or using a distribution company? This has not been decided. Most of the work is in the greenhouse, tending the plants and packing. How long does it take to grow a tomato? 3 months before you get a crop. The plants go up 19 feet. The tomatoes on the top get harvested as the ones below grow. The plants will probably be replace annually, by section.

Ms. Remillard confirmed that it would be eighty fulltime jobs, year round employment.

Mr. Salek asked that the four bay loading dock be identified on the site plan.

Peter Nolet, Berlin, NH

What kind of security will be on the road going passed the Nolet property? Will there be a shack with a guard? We will start off with one security guard [during construction]. Then there will be two at all times. The turn-around is also on the property line. Ten feet from the property line.

Gary Ferron, 15 Chalet Loop, Berlin, NH

if the project was a go, when would construction start? April/May he works nights, 60 hour weeks at night. Mr. Ferron said he understood there's nothing you can really do about that. I would like you to take into consideration our property values. My only concern is the value of our property. We already have the Chalet in front of us so we'll be surrounded by business.

Mr. McCue closed the Public Hearing Closed 7:58pm

Mr. McCue asked what will hours of operation be during construction? Normal daytime hours, they will not be working through the night. All of the areas that are pavement and gravel were also pointed out.

Ms. Laflamme stated that there is snow storage all around the property and in the areas for parking.

Ms. Remillard is supportive, eighty jobs in the area is certainly welcomed. She would like to have local distribution to our one and only market in Berlin. She thinks it would be nice to meet with the two abutters who are very close to the property. It is their home and it is very close. It would be very good for the community if you could come to an amicable understanding.

Ms. Laflamme commented that she had received a lot of calls from several abutters and everyone who called was very supportive and nobody had any concerns. Others called in who were not abutters with concerns regarding lighting and once they were informed about the lighting plans, they were very supportive. One called in concerned about the type of crops that would be grown.

Ms. Levesque questioned if there are vegetative options to help buffer the abutters from the noise and traffic. We have a landscape architect and we will speak with him.

Ms. Laflamme went over the conditions for approval and asked if members had any to add.

- 1. Approval is conditional upon the sale of the property to North Country Growers LLC from the City of Berlin.**

- 2. Receipt of permit applications and approvals from NH Department of Environmental Services related to the following permits:**
 - a. Shoreland Permit**
 - b. Air Resources Division Permits**
 - c. Alteration of Terrain Permit**
 - d. Sewer Connection Permit**
- 3. Receipt of approval from NHDOT District One driveway permit for entrance from East Milan Road.**
- 4. Water line installation shall be done in accordance to NHDES Best Management Practices (BMP) Rules, Env-Wq 401**
- 5. Receipt of approval from US Environmental Protection Agency, Region One, related to the Stormwater Management & Erosion Control permit.**
- 6. All signage for the development shall have a permit from the code department prior to installation.**
- 7. The project shall comply and provide receipt of any other applicable federal, state, or local permits and will be placed on file with the Planning Department.**
- 8. No building permits shall be issued until all conditions are completed and satisfied.**
- 9. Any changes to the plans as presented including the crops grown in the greenhouses (if to be something other than vegetables and fruits) shall be reviewed by the Community Development Director and any other City Staff as deemed necessary; any changes that are considered significant changes shall be brought back to the Planning Board for their review and a public hearing shall be held at that time at the expense of the applicant.**
- 10. Fencing proposed to be higher than six feet tall will require a special exception from the Zoning Board of Adjustment.**
- 11. The following items are waivers granted by the Planning Board specific to this project:**

Waiver – Plan size: the Board will allow the request of an increase in submitted plan size.

Ms. Langlois made a motion to approve the Site Plan Review subject to the conditions and waivers; seconded by Ms. Remillard. All in favor, the motion carried.

Project Updates – None tonight, will go over at next meeting

Lot Merger – Tax Map 126, Lots 69 & 71

City council put land that it owned out for bid. There is a tiny piece of land in the middle that it also owns and it was decided they would merge this with the larger piece before selling.

Ms. Langlois made a motion to merge Map 126 Lot 69 to Map 126 Lot 71; seconded by Mr. Cassidy. All in favor, the motion carried.

Public Comments – No one spoke

Member Comments – No one spoke

Planner Comments – Bump-outs and lights. There are some bump-outs on Route 16 that will move back 18”, but not all.

Mr. McCue announced the following presentations:

Saturday April 8 is Saving Special Places 2017 by UNH Coop Ext.

Friday March 31, Presentation on Road Use and Land Law

There being no further business to come before the board, Mr. Cassidy made a motion to adjourn for the night, seconded by Ms. Rayborn. All in favor, the motion carried. The meeting ended at 8:21 pm.

Jen Myers

Administrative Assistant