

Monday, January 18, 2021

Zoning Board of Adjustment
Town of Temple
Temple, NH 03084

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Adjustment:

I am writing regarding the Special Exception application submitted by Ben's Sugar Shack.

Our family has used Ben's Sugar Shack products for years, and they're wonderful. It's also great to see a young person become a passionate entrepreneur. We wish Ben continued success.

It is also important, and prudent, to make sure that one's enterprise grows at a reasonable pace according to its location and to market needs. I'm wholeheartedly in favor of Ben's Sugar Shack expansion, but I believe the initial proposed facility may be too large for several reasons.

Retail Portion Too Large

Specialty shops, versus convenience stores, always face high risks if they don't have the level of clientele needed to maintain revenue. I've seen several 'butcher,' 'seafood' and 'specialty cuisine' shops open in Amherst (ie., across from Staples) and Bedford (ie., across from Beaver Road), only to close a year or two later. The building that housed the Amherst Butcher shop is still vacant four years later.

Several years ago Bursey's was still located on Route 101 in Wilton. It's selection, and description of products sold, is similar to what is included in Ben's Sugar Shack's Business Plan, though no meat or fish. No matter when I was there, there were never more than 5 or 6 people at most in the store during rush hour; generally I was the only customer there. For those who remember Bursey's, it was a great store with lots of wonderful products, but eventually it's owners moved because they couldn't make the kind of revenue needed to keep operations going.

I felt it was appropriate when Ben's Sugar Shack opened the retail shed at the corner of Route 101 and Webster Highway. But there were never any other customers whenever I was there. I realize that having more products than simply maple syrup products would attract more customers, but has a market Feasibility Study been done?

Attorney Hanna requested that a consulting review be done on the effect of the operation on the housing market, which upon review, contains no real data support

the conclusion. But apparently no real Feasibility Study has been undertaken to look at the viability of the retail operation itself.

An unbiased third-party should conduct a Feasibility Study for the retail operation. For instance, would people be interested in buying meat and fish at a small shop? What is the estimated number of people who would be interested in stopping on any given day? How does that translate into the revenue needed to pay for the retail space, equipment, product to be sold, staff, etc.? Since no Business Plan has been provided either, it's hard to determine the potential activity and what the proposed size of the building is based upon. It may be that the proposed retail shop of 3,000 square feet is too large.

The Effects of Climate Change on Maple Syrup Industry and Increased Pollution

The effects of ever-changing climate disruption on agriculture is still unsure, and this includes the maple sugar industry. From what I understand, Ben's Sugar Shack seems to have smartly planned for this with the intention of bringing maple sap from other areas of northern New England, as well as importing maple sap from Quebec. How certain is it that the business will be able to do this in the foreseeable future, or even 20 years from now? Have business relationships already been established? Who are the other sizable competitors in both regions that might also want to buy from the same maple sap sources?

According to Sciencing.com, "Processing 800 gallons of maple sap takes approximately 60 gallons of oil or a cord of wood to produce 20 gallons of finished syrup. The costs for using non-renewable energy sources such as oil are high, and the resulting pollution for burning fire wood is very high." This highlights additional air pollution that would come from an operation the size of what's being proposed. Source: [sciencing.com > the-negative-impacts-on-the-environment](http://sciencing.com/the-negative-impacts-on-the-environment).

I realize that businesses can never forecast with certainty all the raw materials needed, but this is a constant concern to them. There are two reasons for bringing this up: (a) regulatory or other unforeseen issues may arise that prevent the shipment of maple sap out of Canada, reducing availability of raw materials; and (b) climate change may indeed impact the amount and quality of sap available. Should an unforeseen shortage of sap arise, the need for such a large building would be drastically reduced.

The Rural Character of Temple

When people are asked what they love most about Temple, they always site 'the rural character' as the number one reason. It's fairly quiet, and we can enjoy wildlife and the night skies. A large facility with extensive lighting would negatively affect the view of the stars, and impact neighbors and wildlife in the area.

The Town's Master Plan states "Temple should remain a rural town with a mix of forests, streams, wetlands, open space and farmland. Agriculture, forestry, trails and outdoor recreation should be encouraged to maintain Temple's rural character."

Once a large facility like this is built, it will forever change the character of Temple. People in Temple don't want it to become like Milford with any type of building allowed to be constructed anywhere. And because undertaking any kind of business entails certain risks, constructing a large edifice could become a problem for the town should the business not produce the level of revenue needed to keep it open. (I sincerely hope this is not the case, but it should be considered.) We've all seen buildings that are constructed when times are good but left vacant for years, even decades, when the economy goes into recession.

Over the years I have worked with many entrepreneurs, several of them successful but many others not, and they all share the same trait: they believe that their idea is unique, that people will flock to their enterprise, and that going big is the way to success. Ben Fisk has already shown that he has a successful business; he should be realistic and consider modifying his business plan if he wants it to continue to flourish rather than being held back by financial obligations if the revenues don't meet the expenses. This might be better understood if the Business Plan was made available, at least to the Zoning Board.

My request to the Board is that they request that a thorough Feasibility Study be conducted. Based on its conclusion, they may consider an application for a small processing facility and retail space, one that is larger than what Ben's current uses, but smaller than what is being proposed. It is my hope that Ben's Sugar Shack can continue to grow and be successful, but at a pace and size that is reasonable for the business, for the abutters, and for Temple as a whole.

Sincerely,

Lilliane LeBel
26 General Miller Highway
Temple, NH 03084