

February 28, 2021

From: Everett Park Friends of the New London Barn Playhouse (listed at the bottom)

To: The New London Barn Playhouse
(c/o Keith Coughlin, Executive Director)

Dear New London Barn Playhouse:

I'm writing on behalf of neighbors of the New London Barn Playhouse living on Everett Park. This letter results from conversations that originated in walks along the street as people discovered the January minutes of the New London Planning Commission, at which the Barn made an informal presentation to the Planning Commission discussing year-round activities possibly involving as many as 120 participants. None of us had known about that presentation in advance, and we felt it appropriate to lay out several concerns, in the hopes that they might be considered and perhaps resolved before the Barn submits further formal applications to the town. We look forward to discussions with you. It is probable that an amended form of this letter will after that go to the New London Planning Commission to be on the record when further applications there from the New London Barn Playhouse are considered.

We are all supporters of the New London Barn Playhouse, who are following with interest (and, when we can, donations and volunteer hours) the expansion of the Playhouse and its move toward a more year-round program. We very much want the Barn Playhouse expansion to be successful. We note that you have already been very responsive to several suggestions that we have made or supported earlier, such as insulating the new building for winter use and having an elevator located for improved handicapped and winter access.

Many of us hope that over the long term the Barn will continue to grow and prosper; others fear that it will become more like a commercial enterprise than "a quaint summer theater". We do not all agree on the thoughts and suggestions in this letter, but several of us felt that giving you a list of concerns and suggestions would be more helpful than a pile of separate communications.

1. Drainage.

Susan and Don Cox, Tom Koehler, and Margie Weathers are on the Barn side of Everett Park and their yards have in the past suffered badly from water runoff. Nan Putnam and Ed Blanchard are across Everett Park from the Coxes, and Edward Ordman and Heidi Tobin (who live at 132 Everett Park) own several acres at 112 Parkside, downhill from Nan Putnam, which have significant wetlands and seasonal streams fed by water coming down the hill.

We are very impressed at the professionally done drainage and retention pond system you are planning. Some of us are unsure whether the expanded winter program and parking lot paving affect the drainage needs. We also know that such systems are complex and that future problems (mosquitos, siltation, unusual rain or snow melt patterns, deferred maintenance) can cause problems. We would like to have in place a system by which we can report any problems or difficulties with the system that are observed in the next few years, so that problems which arise can

be responded to promptly. In other words, who do we call or write if we have questions or problems, and who will be responsible for responding?

2. Parking and traffic.

Everett Park is a favorite walking and dog-walking street, with pedestrian groups, children, bicycles, and skateboards. It is also a favorite place for Barn patrons (and staff, such as the summer interns) to park. There have been instances in past years of cars parked on both sides and/or so near the corner of Williams Street and Everett Park that fire trucks would be unable to get through. When the Barn declined to interrupt a performance to ask people to move their cars, cars have had to be towed away. The issue of such announcements is between the Barn and police or fire departments, and changing street parking rules may need the Selectmen. In summer 2019 parking was allowed only on one side of Everett Park (the side nearer the theater) which helped. We hope an arrangement can be made with the town that will solve the summer problems on a continuing basis (perhaps permanent “no parking here to corner” signs, and seasonal one-side parking.) We wonder about your plans for winter. Will there be no on street parking when there is snow on the ground? No on street parking after dark in the winter? Will patrons understand these rules?

We doubt that the proposed barn parking lot is adequate for the proposed winter programs, especially if they expand to 120 people (plus staff?) If you have a large program when on-street parking is not feasible, you may have to make advance arrangements such as the use of the Spring Ledge parking area and provide someone to direct traffic there and assist pedestrians across Main Street. Some of us urge you to keep event size to a number that will clearly fit in your parking lot (e.g., 50 people in winter) until you can get a more accurate estimate, based on actual experience, of the number of parking spaces used.

Traffic on Everett Park is rarely a problem as people arrive. It is a problem when they leave in a large group after dark, which will be aggravated when snow leaves no room for pedestrians. We are delighted that you plan a separate entrance and exit and directed traffic flow in the parking lot. We propose that you have “Right Turn Only” exiting the lot on Williams Street after shows, which particularly in bad weather might mean providing someone to direct traffic at Williams Street and Main Street.

Several members of our group find that the noise outside their homes of car doors slamming and engines starting near 11 PM interferes with their sleep. We hope that in the long run better parking arrangements will reduce or eliminate that.

3. Automobile Noise and Lights.

It is common for commercial enterprises to be required to provide visual and auditory protection for adjoining residential neighborhoods. We understand that outdoor lighting on the Barn buildings and parking lot will be aimed to prevent light pollution affecting surrounding houses. However, lights and noises from automobiles in the lot are audible and visible at a number of surrounding houses, not just the Cox’s. We believe the present proposal is to put a collection of evergreen plants along the sides of the parking lot. The deciduous plants now there provide no visual barrier much of the year. Visually shielding the Cox’s lot would probably require 8-to-10-foot trees, which are considerably

more expensive than six-foot ones; we don't know the present plans. And even after a few years' growth, these trees provide little meaningful sound barrier. This may become more urgent in the future if the venue hosts weddings, concerts attracting a younger audience, or other events that might bring a more boisterous crowd. While the harder problems may be some years in the future, providing a barrier such as is commonly placed between commercial and residential spaces may be much less expensive to do now. We propose a dark green wooden fence, six or seven feet high, along at least the bottom edge of the parking lot and possibly along three sides. The fence should be on the Barn's land, surrounding trees and shrubs outside the fence on the Barn property line (and also inside if you prefer. This might allow less expensive trees than trying to do the visual and auditory shield with plants alone.

4. On-site planning

With a view towards addressing these problems, we request an on-site meeting, that is, a walk through and discussion in the Barn parking lot, once the snow is sufficiently gone that we can see exactly where the boundaries of the land and proposed parking lot are, and better understand the proposed drainage system.

Sincerely,

Everett Park Friends of the Barn
 This letter was written by Edward Ordman
 based on discussions with

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