

FW: Amendments to the Nature-Based and Art Overlay District

Caroline Pelletier <CPelletier@freeportmaine.com>

Sun 9/10/2023 9:18 PM

To: Cecilia Smith <csmith@freeportmaine.com>

Cecilia- Please share this with the Planning Board Monday and have printed copies available for the meeting.

Caroline Pelletier

Interim Town Manager / Town Planner

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-----Original Message-----

From: Mary Berry <mktberry@gmail.com>

Sent: Sunday, September 10, 2023 4:09 PM

To: Caroline Pelletier <CPelletier@freeportmaine.com>

Cc: Doug Heestand <doug@desertofmaine.com>; Mela Heestand <mela@desertofmaine.com>; Mela Heestand <mela.heestand@gmail.com>

Subject: Amendments to the Nature-Based and Art Overlay District

** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL **

To the Freeport Planning Board:

My name is Mary Berry and I have lived at 92 Desert Road since 1983. My property exists across the street from the north side of the Desert of Maine and shares a boundary line with it from the end of Desert Road to the Pownal town line. I now share the house with my husband, David Cluchey.

Since Doug and Mela bought the house across the road from us, we are probably the neighboring property most directly effected by the noise, traffic and lights from activity at the Desert of Maine.

Initially, we were supportive of the vision and the changes Doug and Mela made to the Desert. Their project was described as a place where "art and nature come to play." It was stressed to us that the new Desert of Maine would be built in harmony with the environment. The emphasis would be on nature and non-amplified music and performances.

It is now several years into the development of the project. We have experienced construction noise and traffic on our rural road and there will be quite a bit more when the barn is built. There have been road safety issues with speeding vehicles on this little dead end extension. The potential for parking lot noise, headlights and late night confusion following a wedding celebration could logically heighten the disturbances to us and to the rest of our neighborhood.

When the Desert is operating in good weather, we hear continual shouting and screaming, mostly from

the mini-golf facility.

We have talked with Doug and Mela about these negative impacts, and they have made changes to alleviate some parking problems and to address some traffic issues. We have appreciated their willingness to negotiate with us.

Now the Desert seeks to further expand its activities and amend the Nature-Based and Art Overlay District section of the Freeport Zoning Ordinance to permit the operation of a wedding venue at the Desert of Maine. We observed the Freeport Town Council Meeting on Zoom when the Overlay District was originally approved. We took solace from the fact that, at the suggestion of a Town Councilor, language was inserted that weddings would not be permitted at The Desert of Maine. The prospect of weddings and the associated impact of inebriated celebration next door to us was something we were happy to avoid.

The change to permit weddings at the Desert seems contrary to the stated goals of the Desert to create a center for nature and the arts, the original vision of the Desert Project presented to us at the beginning of this process. And, the presence of a wedding venue will directly impact negatively on our life in the neighborhood and it certainly will reduce the value of my adjacent land.

For these reasons we urge you to retain the restriction on operating a wedding venue at the Desert of Maine.

Sincerely,
Mary Berry and David Cluchey