

Monroe County Board of Appeals
July 7, 2021

The Monroe County Zoning Board of Appeals met July 7, 2021, in the Monroe County Court House, Waterloo, Illinois, with the following members present: George Obernagel, Dennis Rodenberg, Vicki Taake, Russell Gregson, and Mike Kovarik. Also, present: Chris Voelker and Laura Kipping.

Dennis Rodenberg opened the Public Hearing concerning Michael Basler who is requesting an Area/Bulk Variance to allow a 14' x 16' pavilion within 10 foot of minimum setback distance from a principal building in A1 zoning. The property is located at 9217 D Road, Columbia, Illinois and is zoned A-1. Parcel #04-32-300-012.

Denise Buettner read the letter of intent.

Dennis Rodenberg gave the oath to those wishing to speak.

Michael Basler was sworn in to speak.

Mr. Basler stated the letter of intent was very thorough. It is only 2 feet longer, parallel to the house. Everything is pretty much the same. He apologized for not getting the permit ahead of time. When he got the original pergola in 1993 it was not needed.

George Obernagel motioned to approve, second Vicki Taake recommended an Area/Bulk Variance to Michael Basler to allow a 14' by 16' pavilion within 10 feet of minimum setback distance from a principal. building in A1 zoning. The address is 9217 D Road, Columbia Illinois, Parcel # 04-32-300-012, zoned A-1. Yes – 5, No – 0. Motion Passed.

Welcomed Mike Kovarik to the Board of Appeals.

Dennis Rodenberg opened the Public Hearing concerning Greg and Melinda Meyer, 1385 Centerville Road, Columbia, Illinois, who are requesting to amend their Special Use Exception to allow them to use the pavilion for wedding ceremonies until the wedding barn can be rebuilt. The property is located at 1385 Centerville Road, Columbia, Illinois, parcel #04-24-100-005. The parcel is zoned A-1.

Denise Buettner read the letter of intent.

Dennis Rodenberg gave the oath to those wishing to speak.

Greg Meyer stated he does not want to do anything outside of what the Special Use states, but wants the wording clarified that they can use the pavilion without the wedding barn, until it is rebuilt.

George Obernagel asked if he is doing this in your name or Sugarcreek LLC.

Tim Stubblefield – State’s attorney – their special use states that they have to be the owners. If they own all of the shares in the LLC, then they are ok.

Greg Meyer – we are the only owners of the LLC

Dennis Rodenburg asked what they are wanting.

Greg Meyer- to use the pavilion for weddings.

Dennis Rodenberg – how are you going to get around no outside music at a wedding.

Greg Meyer – would like the board’s help with this. Would like to have minimum music, similar to karaoke.

George Obernagel – is it just the pavilion, no tents, etc.

Greg Meyer – haven’t really thought that far, but going after the existing structure of the pavilion. Would there be an issue with a temporary tent? My understanding that if I want to put up a tent on my property that is ok.

Chris Voelker – believes that they want to have tents it should be in the special use.

Vicki Taake – is it ceremonies or the full wedding.

Greg Meyer – when they built the barn he didn’t really know people want to get married there, but have found out that people do want to get married out there. That is where the pavilion came in. The primary problem is the wedding site. Can we hold a small reception in the pavilion?

Vicki Taake – thought the request was to have the ceremonies at the pavilion. To have a full-blown wedding would need to have a liquor license and music. Music would be a big issue.

Greg Meyer – knows of two complaints. One the police showed up, but there was nothing going on in the barn. The second one, the police didn’t get called and they weren’t aware of the complaint until after the fire.

George Obernagel – how many could the pavilion hold.

Greg Meyer – about 100. It is not ideal.

Vicki Taake – when is the prediction when the barn will be built.

Greg Meyer – as soon as possible. Had to have investigators come in.

Mike Kovarik – what kind of limitations can you live with on the music?

Greg Meyer – they are flexible. The barn had a sound system, the pavilion does not. It will be less sound with a DJ.

Mike Kovarik – what about time constraints?

Greg Meyer– the latest is 11.

Mike Kovarik - could you live with a limit with the number of receptions you can have at the pavilion? Not the ceremonies, just the receptions.

Melinda Meyer – wants to be built by the fall.

George Obernagel –would it be catered?

Greg Meyer – it would be 100% catered.

Dennis Rodenburg– wanting it to be open by the fall. Only looking at a few months.

Melinda Meyer– Ceremonies are at the pavilion and receptions in the barn.

Chris Voelker– only one event at a time. Ceremonies at the pavilion.

Chris Voelker – health department is supposed to be contacted. When he spoke to them they said no food prep outside, water under pressure, restrooms, and hand washing stations.

Greg Meyer– have that figured out. Rent a bathroom trailer or the upscale portable toilets.

Mike Kovarik – how will you control the sound system of those that come in with their sound systems.

Greg Meyer – continue to be hands on, present the entire time, and control the sound.

George Obernagel - won't be 300 or 400 people, it will be small.

Greg Meyer – agreed.

Vicki Taake – where will people be seated.

Greg Meyer – under the pavilion.

Chris Voelker - occupancy of the barn was 377.

Greg Meyer – never had an event with that many.

Robert Hawkins – owns the land that surrounds the ranch. Thankful no one was inside when the fire occurred. Let's go back to the beginning, there is no rush and make sure it is fire proof and do it right this time.

John Armengol (Owner of Andre's Catering) - business of catering around 49,000 wedding receptions at many locations. You can control the DJ's sound, but this kind of venue I've done more times than I can think. Food can be prepared minutes away. It would be my staff handling the food. They are an amazing group of people that want to do something great. They will help the community. Here for any questions.

Mark Arndt - photographer. Was there just hours before it burnt. Melinda and Greg greeted me personally. The music was at a well volume. Because of COVID there are a shortage of venues and we are approaching the busy wedding months. Sugar Spring Ranch has a great reputation.

Laurie Johnson – neighbor – venue went in against the majority of the neighbors. I could hear the noise the night before the fire. I can hear the base from my house at 11 at night. If this is allowed, concerned that what the owners think is acceptable, the neighbors might not.

Ashley Meyer (Event Coordinator) - It's disheartening how people can be so negative about people who want to celebrate their marriage. The music does not go past 11. There are 7 girls in October that want to still have their wedding. There is nothing else out there like this. Stresses the importance of their day to make it perfect.

Mike Kovarik– do you know the events that will be a ceremony verses a ceremony and reception.

Melinda Meyer – Four days after the wedding she was told her liquor license has to be reapplied for and she can't use the pavilion. I don't know who will still want to use it. I just want to be able to use it if they want to.

Greg Meyer– this impacts our business and the relationships. The clients trust them.

Mike Kovarik – was there the night it burnt down. When the doors opened up the music was loud. At the time, he had no idea it was going to be on the board. Many the sound systems the people bring in won't be as good. But he is concerned.

Greg Meyer – Appreciates the feedback. Speakers would be toward 158. One speaker verses the really nice sound system in the barn.

Vicki Taake – the original ask was just for ceremonies. It is a big difference between the ceremonies verses full blown receptions.

Greg Meyer – Short time able to find venues.

Vicki Taake – the issues that occur in the closed building are going to come up in the open-air structure.

Greg Meyer– the people coming in will only have one speaker. Did sound tests and registered different sound levels. The pavilion's is nowhere near the barn.

Vicki Taake – are the people coming expecting a 300 wedding.

Greg Meyer– that is what the fire code allows. Never had a wedding that big.

Ashley Meyer - average weddings are 100.

John Armengol - receptions at the pavilion can at most you can fit 96 or 112 people with the tables. 12 round tables will be max.

Cindy Franke – lives on Centerville road. Their original letter of intent for the pavilion and grain bins. It stated that it wouldn't affect the neighbors. We will hold you to it, you have neighbors to think about too. Thinks the Board should consider a sound study and hear us, the neighbors.

Katheryn Hunt (Grow Marketing) –that partnered with Sugar Spring Ranch - across the board, regionally these brides are going to be put into a really hard place. Brides are booking out until 2023. It will put a lot of families in a hard place if they can't work with them. Sugar Spring has been a great light with all of the weddings. They are working with local businesses for the weddings. Also, lives 500 feet from another wedding venue with a large pavilion. It has been great to have it in my backyard.

John Franke – Centerville Road – Special use said there was no music outside. There should be no question until they can conceal it.

Tina Valentine – Original letter of intent said the additions will not affect the neighbors, music, traffic, etc. Is the fire still under investigation or has it been closed?

Dennis Rodenburg – we don't know. It is something to ask your neighbors.

Ashley Meyer - there will only be one event per day. Fire – if your house burns down are you not allowed to build again in that neighborhood.

Mary Ann Chumley – I could see all of the fire trucks. I was just wondering how you can have wedding in a building that has no fire system.

Chris Voelker – Meyers approached Columbia fire department for them to be onsite in lieu of them not having the system in place. The occupancy permit was granted with that. They were being paid to be there, not by tax payers. They could not leave that place.

Greg Meyer – Sprinklers - there was a disagreement. It is not unusual for venues to not have sprinklers. There was no public safety at risk.

Robert Hawkins – why would we let this go on into a more dangerous situation. This is not a small thing we are dealing with, it is 20 years. Give it some time to look into it.

Tim Stubblefield – Fundamental issue – problem is the pavilion was set up in case you would have a lake ceremony and it rained. Fire, things have changed. Original special use was based on that. Amendment for the pavilion use, for ceremonies, not receptions. Letter sent on June 15th. Fortunate to located venues for receptions, problem is the ceremony sites. In the petition it was for wedding ceremonies, not receptions. Concerned that people didn't get notice of what you are now asking for. If you are asking for more than the ceremonies, then I have questions as to whether the public was properly noticed. If they are going to do an amendment then there are going to be restrictions and it needs to be consistent with the letter of intent and petition.

Portia – resident of Monroe County – Mr. Meyer did say he is figuring it out. But he also said that the Board is the expert. How many from the Board has offered to help the Meyer's get back on track. This is a community that everyone wants to be a part of. This is the same type of pavilion that are in parks. They have invested in this community and no one is willing to help them.

Duncan – as I have worked with them. The noise complaints, while I was there, the sound was not unbearable. Due to the nature of the business, people do not want to make their ears bleed. I was in the house when they did the noise study and couldn't hear the sound. Majority of the weddings are on Fridays and Saturdays and never go past 11. The night of the noise complaints there were other parties going on.

Vicki Taake – the current special use says no outdoor music.

Greg Meyer – whole reason we are here is to do things right. Letter of intent – just wants the language to eliminate “used in conjunction with the rental of the wedding barn”

George Obernagel – this is for wedding ceremonies.

Greg Meyer – the special use doesn't state ceremonies. Just want that language taken out.

Tim Stubblefield – there will be confusion. What the Meyer's are presenting verses what they filed are not the same request.

Dennis Rodenburg – from a legal aspect it needs to be in writing.

Tim Stubblefield – has a legal concern based on the letter of intent and what the public was notice.

Mike Kovarik – can move on what was in the letter of intent and what the public was notified.

George Obernagel – Can it be tabled?

Tim Stubblefield – yes, and they can write another letter of intent.

Mike Kovarik motioned to approve. second George Obernagel, to allow Greg and Melinda Meyer to amend their Special Use Exception to allow them to use the pavilion for wedding ceremonies, no receptions, for six months while the Wedding Barn is rebuilt. Yes – 5, No – 0. Motion Passed.

George Obernagel motioned, second Vicki Taake to approve the minutes of June 1, 2021. All aye by voice vote.

Vicki Taake to adjourn, Mike Kovarik. All aye by voice vote.