

Dear Matt Winter, Chairman and Members of and alternates to the Kent Planning and Zoning Commission,

We would like to request that an inspection be conducted of 47 Carter Road, overseen by the Commission.

It is our understanding that 47 Carter Road has received approval for the following:

1. An accessory use to High Watch Recovery
2. Use for therapeutic purposes only (The application was for “therapeutic activities in conjunction with a privately-operated hospital, clinic, nursing or convalescent home, or similar institution.”)
3. That its primary source of therapy is a horse farm, but it has also been approved to have a ropes course as another form of therapy.

However, during High Watch’s application, #51-20SP, for a 2100 square foot greenhouse, which was rejected by the Commission, it came to light that multiple people are living in the house on the 47 Carter Road Property, which is being used as a sober home. This expands the approved number of residents at High Watch Recovery. While sober homes are not regulated by the town, this property is not approved for sober home or client use, but was designated as an accessory to High Watch Recovery. During the October 8th 2020 Planning and Zoning Commission meeting, multiple members acknowledged that having additional clients on the property was a violation of the agreement High Watch Recovery made with the town when it purchased the land.

Further, during the hearing for application #51-20SP, it was made clear that High Watch Recovery has a large and rapidly expanding agricultural operation which is not an approved use of the 47 Carter Road property. According to archives of High Watch’s website, (see attached PDF) the agricultural operation at High Watch Recovery has tripled in size in one year. It now includes 500 maple “saplings” for a huge maple syrup operation; one hundred tree apple, pear and peach orchard, more than a thousand vegetable plants, in addition to fruit, herbs, and a flower farm. It also has plans to sell these products to the public. None of these activities has been approved by the Kent Planning and Zoning Commission. This is not a few plants in a back yard garden, it is a commercial enterprise separate from the mission of a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility. Commercial farming is not a therapeutic use of this land.

This commercial farming enterprise requires many workers and a plan for multiple full-time horticulturalists, (as stated by Vinny Roberti during the #51-20SP hearing) which is an expansion that has not been approved by the town. Mr. Roberti also said publicly that the farming operation was not and would not be a therapeutic activity.

47 Carter Road has not been a farm in living memory, and the land that is now being farmed was clear-cut by High Watch Recovery after they purchased the property, which delegitimizes straightforward claims of grandfathered farming use.

It is our understanding that the expansion of High Watch Recovery is no longer permitted by the Zoning Commission. In February 2020 section 3224.8 (a) and (b), were removed from the regulations, regarding privately operated clinics, nursing homes, or convalescent homes.

Because of this change, drug rehabilitation facilities no longer exist as approved for use. Further growth, such as additional residents, or an additional use like farming, is no longer permissible.

Finally, and significantly, it is our understanding that High Watch Recovery has renovated a pole barn on their property at 47 Carter Road, without building permits. To our knowledge, they are currently using this building without permits and without a certificate of occupancy. This is an aggressive flouting of multiple regulations.

We believe the Planning and Zoning Commission should inspect and address these known violations.

An inspection of 47 Carter Road is necessary because:

1. The property cannot be fully seen from the road, so monitoring the number of residents, workers, operations and facilities is not possible without a visit to the property
2. High Watch is a bad actor on our road, and in our town. In the past three years at 47 Carter Road, High Watch recovery has clear-cut acres of land next to the road, without the approval of the town or input of the neighbors. Done in a hurry, the clearing of trees, which shape the character of our road, had to be remediated by the Wetlands Commission. High Watch Recovery also built a ropes course without a permit, only applying for Commission approval after the fact. These actions were serious infractions of Zoning Commission rules and continue a dishonest pattern of bullying neighbors and a small town with fewer resources for self-protection.
3. There is a need for oversight of High Watch Recovery as it continues to shade the truth and hide its activities on 47 Carter Road from the Kent Planning and Zoning Commission. During Application #51-20SP last fall, Public Relations Director, Jason Perillo, and Vinny Roberti, each firmly stated that the greenhouse they were applying for was a stand-alone structure and not part of a larger expansion. The High Watch Recovery website, directly overseen by Mr. Perillo, told a different story, describing the ongoing expansion “exponential” and revealed a plan for a second greenhouse less than six months after the first application had been submitted. The website also details that the greenhouse, which was denied by the Planning and Zoning Commission, was also to be used at times as a dining facility. While Mr. Perillo told the Commission that the produce grown would only be used for the High Watch staff and residents, his own website says that it would be sold to the public.
4. Carter Road has been pushed past the breaking point with traffic, road damage and trespassers, even with approvals that High Watch attained through a legitimate course of action. Shutting down this unapproved operation would provide some remediation to these growing concerns.
5. An inspection and subsequent action will reaffirm the Commission’s proper authority. That can put an end to the “do first, ask later” approach that the Commission’s Vice Chairman, Wes Wyrick, said this has been High Watch’s modus operandi for more than ten years. The Commission can issue Cease and Desist orders, apply penalties and issue fines where appropriate.

In the interest of our road and community, we, along with our neighbors on Carter, North Kent and Dugan Road, have joined many Kent Planning and Zoning Commission meetings. We have seen people of this town go to great effort and expense to comply with Kent's rules. We believe the Commission should stand up, enforce its rules and hold the High Watch Recovery Center to the same standards of compliance as it does its individual citizens.

Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,

Ellen Altfest, Rob Colvin Jr., Karen Altfest and Lewis Altfest