

To the Williston Selectboard:

April 20, 2018

This letter is in reference to the proposed bylaw amendments related to breweries.

We realize that as a town it is important to regulate industrial and commercial operations to achieve a thriving, livable town, and to support businesses which provide jobs and a commercial tax base. These businesses evolve over time. This may be represented by changes in a business' physical configuration, its operation, or even through emergence of a new business model.

Many years ago, it was typical to have more distinct lines between different types of businesses. Nobody would have considered going to a garden nursery to have a cup of soup and sandwich (Four Seasons), going to an ice cream factory to purchase a baby's onesie (logowear at Ben and Jerry's), going to a grocery store and sitting down for a meal (Price Chopper on Shelburne Rd, Healthy Living), or going to an industrial brewery for a sandwich. Evolution of the old business models adds fresh appeal, a new opportunity for sales, and at those businesses serving food and beverages, a new opportunity for socialization and community connections.

Williston regulates breweries – which by law must be located in an industrial zone - differently than restaurants – located primarily in the Taft Corners commercial zone. While our two breweries are located in industrial zones, they have developed to the point where they are/would like to be serving food with their beers. Over the past few years the configuration of microbrewery combined with food service has become a new business model, and they draw in both local customers and tourists.

Williston regulates this type of business as an industrial facility with an "accessory use". We can't address what is specifically needed to keep a business viable in terms of percentage-of-square-footage-of-accessory-use-per-manufacturing-space. However, as customers, we know there are times at Burlington Beer Company when there is hardly a chair available if we want to sit down with a sandwich. Whatever the original reasoning behind the current limits on industrial accessory use, at dinnertime it seems like these limits are hampering this vibrant new business model.

Something else to consider – breweries are required by law to use a licensed distributor to sell their product off premises, and this costs money (unless they also decide to go into the distributor business themselves). This is a burden quite unlike a pizza shop which may deliver pizzas with part-time employees driving their own cars. The additional cost of a licensed distributor means that every pint of beer sold on premises generates a larger profit than a pint sold through a distributor. The ability to sell more beer at the brewery may mean the difference between profitability and failure.

So, please recognize that the microbreweries which serve both beer and food are thriving in Williston. In addition to the town benefiting from their sales tax revenue and employment opportunities, they also provide a wonderful space where we meet our neighbors and friends. Their hours are limited and reasonable, and as they are concurrent with lunch and dinnertime we certainly appreciate being able to drive to one location to enjoy a sandwich at the same place where we enjoy a beer. We encourage you to positively consider changes to the bylaw which will support our microbreweries.

Thank you for your time and commitment to our town.

Sincerely,  
Melinda and Jeff Petter