



STAFF MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning Board members
FROM: Mark Connors
FOR: May 20, 2025
RE: 656 Asbury Street – Iron Ox Farm Site Plan Application

BACKGROUND:

Iron Ox Farm is an eight-acre farm producing fruits, vegetables, and flowers located at 656 Asbury Street on the Topsfield town line. The farm, which opened in 2017 and occupies the former Green Meadows Farm land, is located on land owned by the Essex County Greenbelt Association through a 99-year ground lease. The farm operates a seasonal farmstand and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) cooperative program and is managed by two Hamilton residents with the assistance of other employees. The property includes the farmstand, a parking lots, several greenhouses and small accessory structures and farmland.

APPLICATION INFORMATION:

The applicant is seeking to replace small temporary structures with a permanent open-air pavilion structure measuring 24-feet by 36-feet. The structure will stand 13.5-feet tall. The structure will include a concrete base, wood posts, and a metal roof. It will support the farm's operations by providing a shaded area to store materials and equipment and for employees to work and congregate when necessary. The structure will be located adjacent to existing greenhouses approximately 300-feet from the Asbury Street frontage. As such, it will not have a significant presence along the roadway and in the opinion of staff will represent an aesthetic improvement over the existing temporary structure (see associated photos).

Agriculture, horticulture, and floriculture is a permitted use in all of Hamilton's zoning districts. Therefore, the Site Plan is a non-discretionary review by the Planning Board. The Site Plan Standards of Review are included below for the consideration of the Board:

- 1.) The plan shall show compliance with Zoning Bylaw requirements for parking, signage, loading, landscaping, performance standards, dimensional requirements, and all other applicable requirements of this Bylaw;

This application includes no additional signage, parking, or loading features. The structure will comply with all dimensional requirements of the Bylaw.

- 2.) The proposed project should be compatible with existing natural features of the site and compatible in architecture and scale with the surrounding area;

As an agricultural structure, the pavilion will be compatible with the existing agricultural use. The structure will be of similar height to existing buildings on the property and will be located no closer to the road frontage than existing structures.

- 3.) The plan shall provide landscaping and open spaces that enhance the proposed development from within and without, which provide screening and buffers as necessary and which maximize amenity for customers, neighbors, and the general public;

Although no landscaping is proposed, staff does not believe it necessary for this application. The structure will be located interior to the property on a parcel with a large proportion of open space.

- 4.) The proposed project shall provide for safe and convenient vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site in relation to adjacent ways, and provide for compliance with handicapped access requirements, and provide for access and egress by emergency vehicles;

The structure will support the operations of the farm. It is not designed to be a publicly accessible facility.

- 5.) The proposed project shall provide for location and screening of exposed storage areas, machinery, service areas, dumpsters, utility buildings and structures and other unsightly uses to maximize amenity for neighborhood. The Planning Board may require landscaping and/or fencing to provide needed buffers;

Agriculture, by its very nature, can involves some unsightly features. However,

- 6.) The proposed plan shall be consistent with the capacity of local infrastructure, such as water supply, utilities, drainage and Streets, or shall provide for such improvements as necessary; and

The facility should have no measurable impact on the community's capacity of basic infrastructure services.

- 7.) The plan shall provide for compliance with Board of Health, Conservation Commission, and other Town and State Regulations. Where applicable, the approval may be made conditional upon Board of Health, Conservation Commission, State Department of Public Works or other approvals, which shall be specifically referenced in the decision.

Town Staff is not aware of any applicable approvals necessary before the start of construction with the exception of the issuance of a building permit. However, if any such

approvals are identified, the Building Inspector, consistent with his responsibilities as the Town's Building Commissioner, is empowered to withhold the issuance of a building permit or any other local permits or certificates until documentation of such approvals can be furnished.





Location of proposed pavilion