

September 9, 2024

Dear Wilton Zoning Board:

RE: Melisa Eastley's Request for Special Exception under Section 5.3.1 of the Wilton Zoning Ordinance

I have read the four letters of support for Melissa Eastley's request that have been submitted. I believe there has been a misunderstanding of the concern verbalized by the abutters who attended the initial meeting, at least a misunderstanding of my comments.

My intention was not to question Melissa Eastley's capacity as a trainer. I appreciate the comment, "It is sad to see people are already complaining and judging her. Mellisa is the nicest person, and does not deserve this." I am sorry that this has been her take-away from the meeting.

As I review Ms. Eastley's company's website, "Paws from Heaven Dog Training" located in Sharon, NH, it is apparent that she is well-respected by her clients who have brought her their beloved dogs with especially difficult behavioral issues and are so grateful that she has been able to return them to their families with minimal to no behavioral issues.

The articles about her life's story and her Facebook site speak of a young woman who has loved and worked with pets, especially dogs since she was very young. She is without question pet-centered and detail-oriented. At the site visit she was ready to provide a Fire Escape Plan that she has prepared. She also provided a bark test to demonstrate that the dogs' barking should not be a disturbance. She had a Daily Schedule for the dogs which will be presented at the next Zoning Meeting. I suspect the Daily Schedule offers neighbors a heads-up as to times when her dogs may be outside for feeding or potty, as well as times when she may be transferring them back and forth from her home to her vehicle. This allows neighbors opportunity to manage the times when they take their walks, when they choose to be outside with their families or times when they are outside with their own dogs should they be apprehensive about the dogs she is training. The apprehension may be there despite her efforts with 2 leads per dog to insure safety for neighbors.

She is to be acknowledged for her acumen to successfully start a company of her own at such a young age. Her respect of the military service and the sacrifices these service members make on behalf of our country is not often openly expressed and demonstrated as well as Ms. Eastley has. She has a desire to provide service dogs for service members suffering from PTSD. She is involved in her community, helping to train dogs for first responders. These are all qualities to be praised. These are all qualities which would make an awesome neighbor.

I am sure Ms. Eastley never imagined that her home business, albeit small, would threaten the value of her neighbors' homes. Both Caroline Gomez and Virginia Day

have told me that they have been told and are receiving in writing letters from their Realtors that they will need to disclose to future buyers of their home that there is a home based dog boarding and training business next-door to their homes. A purchase of a home is a major investment compounded by all of the necessary upkeep and updating expenses. When needing to sell, one wants to receive as much as possible for their property. Hopefully, they will be able to supply these letters to the Zoning Board as this would be of great importance to all of us who are abutters.

My concern expressed at the meeting was primarily the issue related to the risk of dog bites. I have attached an article "15 Dog Bite Statistics in 2024: Breeds, Incidences and Deaths". I acknowledge this is a lengthy article. The first 3 pages provides a synopsis of the statistics, while the successive pages go into further depth. Americans experience 4.5 million dog bites every year. The especially worrisome statistic is that half of these are experienced by children, especially those under 12 years of age. Parents with families are watchful of any potential threat to their children and these numbers whether relevant to Ms. Eastley's business or not provide a potential concern that is not usually identified in a residential setting. It is likely that these numbers will be a factor as parents are making a final decision about which home to purchase.

We chose a residential setting when we moved here. We had no thought that this situation could occur, that what is a typically commercial business could be located diagonally from our home. From what I have seen on-line I believe Ms. Eastley to be a conscientious and highly skillful trainer of dogs with behavioral issues. I do not know if Ms. Eastley has been the recipient of very unexpected circumstances, but I have. When my son was 9 years old he was bitten in the head by a dog. A close friend of mine, who lives in Bedford, suffered a pack attack when 2 dogs who resided a number of houses down the street from her broke through their fencing and attacked her while she was walking in her quiet neighborhood where she had lived without incident for 20 years. She ended up climbing up a STOP sign and crying out for help from anyone who might hear. She required multiple reconstructive surgeries over a prolonged period. I know these are unexpected, unusual events, but they did happen.

There are families of children that reside next to and across the street from Ms. Eastley. There are 4 year old twins only one more house down the road. I am sure Ms. Eastley would never want anyone to be injured. She may never have had a negative incident in her life, but the unexpected does happen. Children are at risk from dogs they know, I don't want to add the possibility of up to 3 new dogs with behavioral issues at any one time to that mix. I know this may never happen, but I have experienced the unthinkable. I don't wish this for anyone else to experience. We have a dog, most of our neighbors have one or more dogs. We know these dogs' behavior so we can respond appropriately to them. We chose a residential setting not a commercial one with dogs that we do not know.



Lynne Randall  
92 Abbot Hill Acres Rd., Wilton NH