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PROJECT PROPOSAL BY FOSTER FORGE FARM SCHOOL (FFFS)
FOR SPECIAL USE PERMIT
IN SUPPORT OF A SMALL PRIVATE SCHOOL AT

2900 BARRACKS ROAD, ALBEMARLE COUNTY VA
DECEMBER 15, 2021

REVISED AND SUBMITTED MARCH 7, 2022

(REVISED INFORMATION IS PRESENTED IN BOLD RED)

Prepared by:
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Written Description of the Project Proposal

Foster Forge Farm School (FFFS) Objective

The objective of this project proposal and narrative is to develop a relationship and plan with the Albemarle County Planning Commission and the BoaRoad of Supervisors that supports a special use permit for a small, experiential, project based, co-ed middle school that promotes learning in nature across curriculum subjects, grade levels and learning styles.

Goal

The goal of Foster Forge Farm School in submitting this proposal is to obtain a special use permit to host a small diverse private school community on land currently zoned RA at 2900 Barracks Road in Albemarle County to support the mission, core values and vision for Foster Forge Farm School.

A unique school that showcases agriculture studies, animal husbandry, sustainability and environmental conservation studies which encourages students to reach new heights in their educational journey, a journey that builds a life-long love of learning.

Solution

As we believe the best learning environment is outdoors no matter the season.

Foster Forge Farm School has created a unique program that gets kids out and utilizing their energy, curiosity and sense of fun which supports student interest, understanding and ownership over their learning experience.

Our **course of study** incorporates agriculture studies, animal husbandry, sustainability, and environmental conservation into language arts, math, science, history and other **disciplines** which include art, music, and language.

To accomplish the above, Foster Forge Farm School believes that partnering with the County to use 2900 Barracks Road as the school's home base would be mutually beneficial.

Project Outline

Foster Forge Farm School, a nonprofit educational institution, seeks application and approval for a special use permit for 2900 Barracks Road, a 6.44-acre parcel zoned RA in Albemarle County and would include the following:

a) Hours of operation, Monday-Friday from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm for approximately 170 days a year for the purpose of hosting a small private middle school.

b) The use of the property would include creating walking trails, outdoor classroom space and livestock space for agricultural studies and growing plants.

c) The goal is to make our impact on the property and the surrounding area as minimal as possible. We **will** use small buildings that have footprints of 256 sq ft and below, **incinerator or composting** toilets in our restrooms, and solar and wind energy to be as self-sustaining as possible.

d) The school's small buildings will be attractive and in keeping with the aesthetics of the area and immediate neighborhood which includes farms, residential neighborhoods, a farmer's market, a local church and a pending all boys middle school next door.

e) The school's low environmental impact on the site will include small buildings, open air shelters and revolving outdoor classroom spaces.

In accordance with Section 10.2.2(5) of the Albemarle County Zoning Ordinance, Foster Forge Farm School would like to apply for a Special Use Permit to operate a private school in a rural zoned area. The property consists of one 6.44-acre parcel.

The owner of record of the 6.44-acre site, which includes critical slopes, was used previously as a demolition waste area. The property lies within the watershed of the South Fork Rivanna River Reservoir. There are no existing buildings on site.

The property is zoned **rural** areas. The comprehensive plan land-use is also rural areas for sites that lie within the Barracks Road corridor. It appears that Barracks Road is not designated as an Entrance Corridor since it is not classified as an arterial street or arterial highway by the Virginia Department of Transportation.

The proposed school will maintain vegetative screening buffers from Barracks Road and for adjoining residential parcels located southwest in the Colthurst neighborhood. **The building sizes will be limited to accommodate school use and "cutoff" dark sky outdoor lighting for school use will be in compliance with County Code and will be limited to parking and building entrances.**

Hours of operation **will be** Monday-Friday from 8:30 am to **3:45 pm** for approximately 170 days a year. **An after school program from 3:45 pm to no later than 5:30 pm will support parent's who cannot pick up their children by 3:45 pm.** The school will serve grades fifth through eighth and will be limited to **60** students.

An estimated 3 after-school events will occur on the site during the school year. These events will typically occur between 6:00 pm and 8:00 pm. Parent's will have between 5:00 and 5:30 pm to pick up their students. The campus will not host

athletic events and its amplified sound will be within maximum sound level regulations as provided in Chapter 18-4.18.04.

An estimated 2 school events will occur on site during the summer. These events will include school open houses, parent teacher conferences and parent and community related school events.

11 parking spaces **are provided for** student parents, faculty and staff.

The School's Public Need Or Benefit

Foster Forge Farm School admits students of any race, color, national origin, ethnic origin, religion, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school.

FFFS does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ethnic origin, religion, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation in administration of its educational policies, admission policies, scholarship**s or** loan programs **or** athletic and other school-administered programs.

Foster Forge Farm School Founder, Elizabeth Anne Wachtmeister **Ed.M., JD**, has always believed **personally and professionally** that **access to** hands on, outdoor focused, project-based learning is a **proven** way to bring students into the fold of loving to learn and taking ownership over their **educational experiences in a school community that supports their own uniqueness. She has created with Foster Forge Farm School an educational environment that will benefit its student's mental, physical and educational wellbeing. Within our core subjects of language arts, history, science, and math, FFFS weaves in instruction and exposure to botany, animal husbandry, environmental conservation, foreign language, global studies and experiences, art, music, and technology. To accomplish these goals, FFFS educators will utilize within the campus: low environmental impact classroom space which includes both small buildings and outdoor learning space, a revitalized pond, paddocks and barn that will farm animals, garden space and walking trails. Students will be given time through out their academic day to complete tasks which are critical thinking as well as physical in nature.**

Foster Forge Farm School will afford students an opportunity to look inward while exploring the outer world in greater depth. Curriculum will include tasks to develop skills in critical thinking, cursive writing and creative problem solving to support FFFS students ability to analyze and synthesize content and context.

Drawing from her career in creating global experiential learning opportunities for young people, including Quest Adventures (a non-profit national and global student travel and community service organization based in Boston, Massachusetts) and Discovery Grove (an experiential, multi-discipline learning

center on St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands), FFFS will offer our students opportunities to cultivate team/community building skills and to see themselves as part of a greater whole.

In this way, FFFS students will cultivate a sustained ability to think for themselves that will serve them well into high school and beyond.

At a time when nearly 20% of children in the U.S. are affected by obesity **and many are struggling with heightened anxiety and a growing number experience bullying,** the physical health benefit of spending more time being physically active, **building friendships in person and exploring the outdoors and learning new skills** is clear.

Not surprisingly, children attending **nature and farm based** experiential schools **that provide access to outdoor** classes tend to be not only more physically fit than their counterparts at traditional schools who spend all day sitting at desks in a classroom, they also develop

a) Improved muscle strength, aerobic fitness, and coordination
b) Higher levels of serotonin in the body (the chemical linked to feelings of well-being)
c) Higher levels of vitamin D, which is important for bone & muscle health
d) Improved immune system function

These benefits are essential for young people and how their brains function. **Benefits** that translate to **academic and personal success. Just as important is the wellbeing of our children in regard to their mental health. Educational communities** must do better to support them.

Numerous studies have found many mental health benefits to children from spending time outdoors, but that time is increasingly haRoad to come by for most children. The average American child spends 4-7 minutes a day in unstructured play outdoors, while spending over seven hours a day in front of a screen of some kind. The lack of outdoor playtime for kids has become so prevalent that it even has a name— “nature deficit disorder”. **Students who are nature and farm based learners** are not at risk of nature deficit disorder. Foster Forge Farm School **will be an educational model for how** students can experience all the mental health benefits that come from spending time outside, including:

a) Lower levels of stress and fatigue
b) Improved concentration
c) Reduced incidence of **ADD and AD**HD symptoms
d) Higher levels of happiness overall

The mental, physical, and educational benefits of Forest Forge Farm School are many to our **larger** community.

How the special use will not be a substantial detriment to adjacent lots?

Our intent is that a special use permit for a small school such as Foster Forge Farm School will be a substantial enhancement to adjacent lots, and not a substantial detriment **to our neighbors. The school's** use of animal husbandry and experiential based studies, and the proposed aesthetics of the property will be in keeping with the farms and rural nature of the surrounding area and supportive **of the property's** Rural Area zoning.

Our activities and presentation will be in keeping with the spiritual and educational institutions already located in the area, such as the pending Field School and the nearby **St. David's Anglican** Church.

By minimizing our footprint and size of our school community **to 60 students**, having **school** operating hours of **8:30 am-3:45 pm** Monday-Friday, **hosting 3** school related after-school events during the school year and 2 school related events during the summer, not hosting athletic events on site, and **incorporating** low impact lighting, Foster Forge Farm School intends to be a **responsible** and respectful neighbor.

How the character of the zoning district will not be changed by the proposed special use and how the special use will be in harmony with the following?

Foster Forge Farm School will integrate agricultural studies, sustainability and environmental conservation studies which will not change the rural nature of the property. In fact, by revitalizing the environmental and agricultural use of the property with the support of an approved special use permit for our small private school, Foster Forge Farm School will enhance and maintain what we know is so special about RA zoned areas **in the County**: the preservation of natural habitats, the knowledge of where our food comes from and the support for students who have an interest in animals and farming but no longer have access to curriculum provided by partnership with the Future Farmers Association in County public schools or the space at home to keep an animal to be able to participate in 4-H activities.

The purpose and intent of the Zoning Ordinance

Foster Forge Farm School intends to promote and support State and County policies which will serve the interests of RA districts and our adjoining neighbors.Sec. 3-101 states that this chapter protects paramount public interests and shall be liberally construed to effectuate its purpose stated in Albemarle County Code § 3-100 and the following policies:

a) Production of food and other agricultural and forestal products. It is the policy of the State and the County to conserve and protect and to encourage the development and improvement of the Commonwealth's agricultural and forestal lands for the production of food and other agricultural and forestal products.

b) Provide essential open spaces. It is also the policy of the State and the County to conserve and protect agricultural and forestal lands as valued natural and ecological resources which provide essential open spaces for clean air sheds, watershed protection, wildlife habitat, as well as for aesthetic purposes.

c) Strong agricultural and forestal economy. It is the policy of the County to support a strong agricultural and forestal economy.

d) Protect and preserve natural resources and retain continuous and unfragmented land. It is the policy of the County to protect and preserve its natural resources, which include mountains, hills, valleys, rivers, streams, groundwater, and retain continuous and unfragmented land for agriculture, forestry, biodiversity, and natural resource protection.

*The current zoning for the property is RA. The purpose and intent of RA zoning in **Albemarle County** is to protect and preserve the rural nature and opportunities that RA zoning affords to the County and its residents.*

Nothing describes Foster Forge Farm School better. As an outdoor based school, Foster Forge Farm School's mission is in harmony with the intent of RA zoning as we provide a home base to learn sustainability for now and **into** the future.

The uses permitted by right in the Zoning District

Foster Forge Farm School will impart in our students the importance of conservation, sustainability and respectful and restorative land use practices that will serve the County as our students become adults and the next leaders that understand the importance of protecting the permitted uses by right in RA areas, including, but not limited to, agricultural service occupations, agriculture, commercial stable, forestry, game preserves, wildlife sanctuaries, religious assemblies, small wind turbines, stormwater management facilities, wildlife sanctuary and other related special use activities including, but not limited to, agriculture, animal shelter, solar energy systems, outdoor drama and offsite veterinary services.

The Regulations provided in Section 5 of the Zoning Ordinance as applicable

The following supplementary regulations apply to referenced uses in all districts whether or not such uses are permitted by right or by special use permit. These supplementary regulations are in addition to all other requirements of this chapter, the Code, and all other applicable laws. Unless a waiver or modification is expressly prohibited, any requirement of section 5 may be modified or waived in an individual case, as provided herein:

a) The commission may modify or waive any such requirement upon a finding that such requirement would not forward the purposes of this chapter or otherwise serve the public health, safety, or welfare or that a modified regulation would satisfy the purposes

of this chapter to at least an equivalent degree as the specified requirement; and upon making any finding expressly required for the modification or waiver of a specific requirement; except that, in no case, shall such action constitute a modification or waiver of any applicable general regulation set forth in section 4 or any district regulation. In granting a modification or waiver, the commission may impose conditions as it deems necessary to protect the public health, safety, or welfare.

b) The boaRoad of supervisors shall consider a modification or waiver of any requirement of section 5 only as follows:

a. The denial of a modification or waiver, or the approval of a modification or waiver with conditions objectionable to the developer may be appealed to the boaRoad of supervisors as an appeal of a denial of the plat, as provided in section 14-226 of the Code, or the site plan, as provided in sections 32,4,2,7 or 32.4.3.9, to which the modification or waiver pertains. A modification or waiver considered by the commission in conjunction with an application for a special use permit shall be subject to review by the boaRoad of supervisors.

b. In considering a modification or waiver, the boaRoad may grant or deny the modification or waiver based upon the finding set forth in subsection (a), amend any condition imposed by the commission, and impose any conditions it deems necessary for the reasons set forth in subsection (a). (12-10-80; 9-9-92; ORD. 01-18(4), 5-9-01; ORD.. 11-18(1), 1-12-11)

The public health, safety, and general welfare. (Be as descriptive as possible, including details such as but not limited to the number of persons involved in the use, operating hours, and any unique features of the use).

Foster Forge Farm School is a small co-ed middle school that at its max will host 60 students over four grades. Staff max will be 10-12 professionals. We are just as invested in the public safety, welfare, and health of our local community as we are about our students and staff.

That is why we be utilizing alternative energy, septic waste systems that don't impact the land or our waterways, and a small school community that will minimize traffic to and from school. Offering much of our learning opportunities outside, Foster Forge Farm School will enhance our students educational experience as well as their mental health and physical well-being.

CONSISTENCY WITH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The proposed project's consistency with the comprehensive plan, including the land use plan and the master plan for the applicable development area;

Pursuant to the Introduction in the Albemarle County Comprehensive Plan, "Since 1980, each Virginia locality has been required to have a comprehensive plan. A

comprehensive plan is a plan for the physical development of the territory within the locality's jurisdiction. Virginia Code § 15.2- 2223. It provides "a guideline for future development and systematic change, reached after consultation with experts and the public." Town of Jonesville v. Powell Valley Limited Partnership, 254 Va. 70, 76, 487 S.E.2d 207, 211 (1997).

[The County's] comprehensive plan is a product of the state statutory scheme that assures that these changes are not "made suddenly, arbitrarily, or capriciously but only after a period of investigation and community planning." BoaRoad of Supervisors of Fairfax County v. Snell Construction Corp., 214 Va. 655, 658, 202 S.E.2d 889, 892 (1974).

More specifically, the purpose of the comprehensive plan is to guide and accomplish a coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, oRoader, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare of the inhabitants, including the elderly and persons with disabilities. Virginia Code § 15.2-2223.

Obtaining a special use permit for a small school like Foster Forge Farm School on RA zoned land is complementary and crucial to supporting the mission of the Comprehensive Plan. The education of young people to protect, preserve and understand the need, or lack there of, for plans regarding future development in RA zoned area supports critical thinkers that can add to the conversation as our County faces **potential detriments, obstacles** and fortuitous opportunities in our shared future.

The mission of Foster Forge Farm School, **like Albemarle County Public Schools**, includes a substantial outdoor component requiring a campus that is open with forest and environmental habitats that **students** can explore.

It would be convenient and practical to locate a school campus on rural acres within the City of Charlottesville or within the County development areas. This would provide a convenience for families within the development area **and would limit vehicle trips on County roads. But i**n actuality, private school uses do not generate the income necessary to compete with development projects with the development areas in the area.

In addition, private schools require a special use permit in every district except the downtown Crozet district and certain commercial districts. **This additional burden further limits the ability for private schools to gain access to land within the development area.** Over half of Albemarle County public schools which are funded with tax dollars and do not require any special use permit are located within the rural areas in the county.

The proposed site for the Foster Forge Farm School is located on a Major Collector, Barracks Road and is less than 1 mile from the US 29 bypass. The site is within 800

feet of a comprehensive plan and area neighborhood seven within 120,000 feet of a 20-acre site zoned R15 and less than 1.5 miles from a major retail center, the Barracks Road Shopping Center.

Foster Forge Farm School offers a unique opportunity within Albemarle County, **where 50%, and over two million dollars of its educational budget is allocated toward capital operations for their schools.** It is anticipated that more than half of the students **attending** Foster Forge Farm School will live in a household in Albemarle County, paying property taxes towards the County's school budget. Foster Forge Farm School **offers an opportunity for Albemarle County** to increase the inventory of schools within the County and increase the capacity for students within the its public school system, done at no additional cost to the taxpayer.

In fact, precedent has been set by the County to support alternative private educational schools in the area. The area within a 2-mile radius of the proposed Foster Forge Farm School site already has private schools such as Saint Anne's-Belfield School as well as the approved Field School next-door to the subject property.

IMPACTS ON PUBLIC FACILITIES & PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

The proposed project's impact on public facilities and public infrastructure.

The impact on public facilities and infrastructure will be as little as possible. With our alternative sanitary and energy uses and small number of people coming and going from the property during designated times, Foster Forge Farm School will be the model for sustainable education institutions of the future.

Adjoining properties lie within the Albemarle County jurisdictional area for water and fire hydrants and connection to the public waterline along Barracks Road is planned. It is the applicant's intent to apply for this property to be included with the same jurisdictional area to accommodate fire and rescue needs for the school. Fire and rescue, Station 15, is nearby on Ivy Road and can provide emergency response.

The current owner feels that investigation has been performed and drain-field areas have been located for both school use or single-family detached use.

However, the school intends to incorporate a septic waste system with incinerator toilets that will not require environmental impact from a conventional or engineered septic system, nor hook up to a septic bypass if available through the City of Charlottesville or the County. The school intends to connect with the local water infrastructure that is available to the site and utilize fire hydrants for fire protection.

In regard to traffic impacts, Foster Forge Farm School will enroll 10 students its first year. Using ITE code 534, Private School (K-8), for 10 students a day, the daily traffic

will be about 9 average vehicle trip ends morning peak and about 20 average vehicle trip ends evening peak.

The maximum utilized parking spaces will be **ten** car spaces and one bus space. Bus use will reduce the traffic volume. If the student count is 60, then the morning and evening peaks will be about 53 and 49, respectively using the same ITE Code. ITE Code 534 is based on only 7 and 5 studies for AM Peak and PM Peak, respectively. AM Peak directional distribution is 55% entering and 45% exiting, PM Peak directional distribution is 47% entering and 53% exiting.

All traffic counts are subject to VDOT review and approval.

Additionally, it should be noted that the position of the proposed Foster Forge Farm School on Barracks Road is 1¼ miles west of the Barracks Road Shopping Center. This proximity to a major retail center will significantly reduce the number of trip origination's when considering design ADT.

Consider the parent of a student, traveling to a regional service at Barracks Road., Harris Teeter, Kroger, Wells Fargo, CVS, USPS, etc. They will be able to stop by and pick up their child from school on the way home or to shopping at the shopping center.

In addition, Foster Forge Farm School has the potential additional benefit of providing our neighbor, the Field School and its parents, an opportunity for their other children, not enrolled at FFFS, a dual location for student drop off, reducing the amount of driving time and place where parents would be required to bring their children for school.

Barracks Road, SR 654, is designated a Major Collector Road in Albemarle County with a posted speed limit of 50 mph or 45 mph for trucks westbound and 45 mph for all eastbound traffic.

These speed limit signs are located within the limits of the frontage for this parcel; thus, the site is at a speed limit zone transition. The parcel frontage extends about 621 feet along the south-side of Barracks Road just west of Montvue Drive.

IMPACTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

The proposed project's impacts on environmental features.

Our open-air classroom setting and small school buildings will minimize our footprint on the property, our personal waste will be incinerated and used as compost as appropriate. We intend to restore a small pond and habitat on the property and maintain tall wild flower stands to support other habitats.

Foster Forge Farm School intends to restore the pond basin that currently exists on the property and preserve the screen buffer around the pond and the adjoining wooded slopes along the southeastern border of the property see attached application plan.

Additionally, a landscape buffer is intended along the entire frontage of Barracks Road and the intent is to enhance this frontage with new plantings with similar characteristics and in keeping with the vegetation that currently exists throughout the property.

Land Use Summary Conclusion

The parcel is located just west of Charlottesville and is situated south of Barracks Road, a **two lane** paved road just west of Montvue Drive. The property is zoned RA, Rural Areas. The current 6.44-acre parcel was subdivided from a larger parcel. The property generally slopes from east to west. There is a guardrail that runs along the easternmost property frontage where Barracks Road is higher than the site. This corner site area is 'hidden' as it lies below Barracks Road where native trees are present along the road fill slope.

There are other scattered trees along the entire frontage which are to be saved **with the exception** of one tree that will need to be removed for a new entrance to the site. Additional native road frontage buffer vegetation is planned to provide a continuous buffer all along the site frontage.

Visually from Barracks Road, the developed site will continue to appear rural in nature, due to minimal infrastructure that is planned. The most prevalent feature will be the 3-panel black boaRoad fence and barn along the eastern frontage which is in keeping with what is seen as you drive along the Route 20 corridor northeast of Charlottesville.

The site includes minimal driveways to the buildings, minimal parking and drop-off areas and minimal driveway to the rear of the property. While Barracks Road slopes downward from east to west, the front portion of the property is relatively flat and very mildly sloped inwards to the site. The entrance was carefully positioned to be mindful of the current guardrail location and VDOT minimum sight distance requirements for safely exiting the site. The traffic generation is expected to be minimal and **a full** commercial entrance is expected to satisfy VDOT requirements.

With exception of the commercial entrance that will require about **one and a half feet** of fill near the road, **the entrance at about 40' into the property will be at grade**, the remaining site driveways will lie at or near existing ground elevation where only very minimal grading will be required to remove topsoil and level and grade for gravel application.

The planned barn located on the western side of the property is also expected to be at or near existing grade and will house animals to be used in conjunction with the school curriculum.

The other buildings that make up the school are small and quaint and fit the rural character of the property, diametrically opposite to a massive building that one would expect to see in a large conventional school setting.

The center of the property is characterized by a lower drainage way where an existing earth embankment dam is located. No development is planned in this area, except that which is required to meet Virginia's stormwater runoff regulations.

The pond area is currently present and will be upgraded as required and formed and shaped to create an aesthetically pleasing environment for observation and education within the curriculum setting. That leaves the back or southwest corner of the property where **three** small buildings are planned.

A driveway to this area of the site will cross the small earth embankment dam and is to be designed to accommodate a fire truck for safety purposes.

The **Deputy** Fire Marshall has been to the site and acknowledged the location of the rear buildings and driveway and confirmed that use of the existing grade of 12-15% is acceptable for a firetruck to navigate.

The remainder of the site is left undisturbed and in its natural condition with tree cover and habitat.

Overall, this Land Use is somewhat unique in that the use is designed to meet the land in its present natural state rather than a land that will be mass graded and modified to fit the use. In fact, the intent of the site design is to foster environmental sensitivity while providing a visual opportunity to teach students techniques of environmental-friendly rural land use design; design techniques that place emphasis on environmental sustainability. The final site design will be in accordance with what the school intends to teach, i.e., sustainable development of rural lands in Albemarle County and beyond, development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.