WOOLLEY ENGINEERING

May 22, 2026

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Mr. Jered Tate
Senior Planner
County of Albemarle, Virginia

From: Mr. Eric Woolley, PE
Woolley Engineering

Regarding: **SP-2025-00008 The Barns**
Special Use Permit for Special Events Narrative

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| **Project Name:** | The Barns |
| **Location:** | 400' west of 2149 Garth Road and 1,300 feet west of the intersection connecting Free Union Road and Garth Road |
| **Current Zoning:** | RA – Rural Areas |
| **Request:** | Special Use Permit for Special Events |
| **Magisterial District:** | Samuel Miller |
| **Supervisor:** | Fred Missel |
| **Parcel IDs:** | TMP 43-22E & 43-22F |
| **Total Acreage:** | 10.46 ac. (combined) |
| **Applicant:** | Katharine Gilman |
| **Owner:** | Charles A & Nancy B Gilman |
| **Architect:** | formwork |
| **Landscape Architect:** | Nelson Byrd Woltz |
| **Engineer:** | Woolley Engineering |

**Introduction:**

The Applicant, "The Barns", is seeking a special use permit for special events to support an agritourism business. The special use permit would allow the applicant to host special events up to twenty-four times a year on their farm. These special events will include larger scale programming related to what's being cultivated on the land, farm-to-table dinners, community film screenings, book readings, and intimate private gatherings. The subject parcels are zoned Rural Areas (RA), and they are situated on Garth Road. The site entrance location is roughly

one quarter of a mile west of the intersection of Free Union Road and Garth Road, near Owensville Road.

Currently, the property is used for agricultural purposes. The surrounding parcels are residential and agricultural properties. Existing vegetation, wooded areas, and open fields are currently present on the surrounding parcels. The project has been designed to keep in place all healthy existing mature trees while planning for the future with additional canopy tree planting. The land will be enhanced with new vegetative screening where the parcel abuts residential properties. New vegetative screening will visually buffer the driveway and proposed structures from neighboring properties. See Figure 1 for project location map.




**Figure 1: Project Location Map**
*Source: Albemarle County GIS Web Mapping*

**Project Proposal:**

The Barns Project seeks to create a regenerative farm agritourism business focused on growing medicinal herbs, botanicals, and farm produce. They intend to introduce chickens to the farm and will enhance their existing bee keeping activities. The Project will invest in additional beehives beyond those already on site, will add chicken coops, bird and bat boxes, and pollinator boxes, and will establish several production gardens throughout the property. Each element will be connected by a series of mown walking paths that navigate through various cool and warm season grass meadows, creating a walkable agritourism loop for classes and visitors. Production gardens will include medicinal and culinary gardens, a cut flower garden, and native orchards. All site improvements will prioritize habitat enhancement, biodiversity,

and enhanced soil health. The program will utilize what is grown each season to create both community experiences through educational programming and end products for direct sale. The public will have direct access to, and thus benefit from, local regenerative agriculture methods and associated dynamic programming.

The applicant for the project is Katharine Gilman and the parcels are owned by her parents, Charles and Nancy Gilman. The applicant proposes to build one barn with two wings connected by a shared roof structure. There will likely be two or more small accessory structures augmenting the main building.

The program endeavors to inform groups of all ages, from children to the older generations. Currently, there are few tourist attractions in the area that allow visitors to truly connect with the environment in such a deep way. The program aims to create a nurturing, natural, non-affecting attraction that is easily accessible and appeals to people of all ages. The goal is to attract visitors passing through or those living in the area, while focusing on production of agriculture.

Since the main use of the property will be agriculture, the workshops will be on a relatively small scale as described below. The applicant anticipates that daily workshops would be attended by 10-20 persons at a time, but will have the capacity to accommodate 36 people (including the teacher). Daily activities would typically be one-hour in length with at least a 30-minute gap between all activities to allow for parking to refresh without congestion. The property will be closed on Mondays and Tuesdays, with limited weekday programming and fuller weekend programming. All activities and programs will operate between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. See the chart below for illustration of the expected usage:

| Event Type | Expected Frequency | Maximum Attendance |
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| **Workshops** | 1-4 Workshops Daily | 36 attendees/workshop |
| **Weekend Workshops** | 1-2 times per month - Primarily Weekends | 75 attendees |
| **Special Events** | 24 times per year | 150 attendees |

The Barns workshops would follow along with (the produce) what is being harvested that week on the farm. All workshop events would have a strong connection to the current agricultural activity on the farm. For example, workshops may revolve around learning about the apiary and the honey operation, learning about cut flower growing and floral design, learning about medicinal herb properties and tinctures.

The Barns would offer weekend workshops one or two times per month. These workshops would occur exclusively on the weekends on either Friday, Saturday or Sunday and would not span more than one day of the weekend. Typical workshops would consist of readings, performances and visiting chef experiences all relating to what has been harvested or what is currently growing on the farm. These hands-on experiences are intended to be intimate, and any music associated with these workshops would be acoustic, non-amplified and would occur

indoors. The teaching kitchen for the barns would resemble a typical residential framework of appliances. The teaching kitchen would also act as a location for licensed caterers to handle, warm and distribute food as it relates to other activities. Workshops would generally take place 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Up to twenty-four times per year, the farm would offer their facilities for special events. Special events may include fundraisers, gatherings or private parties. The maximum number of attendees for these events would not exceed 150 persons. Parking for these events would utilize the permanent daily parking spaces along with grassed areas designated for overflow parking. A total of 64 special event parking spaces would allow for 150 attendees and 4 staff members. If necessary, portable toilets would be situated convenient to the facility, but outside of view from neighbors and the public roadway, following restrictions set forth by the County.

The applicant anticipates partnerships in the community that may span beyond the subject of agriculture. In light of these potential partnerships, they would like the ability to host the community in wider conversations and activities beyond agriculture. The applicant anticipates that the majority of special events throughout the year would be attended by less than 50 persons and emphasizes that it is the theme of the events that is necessitating the special use permit versus the number of people on site. Special event activities would take place between 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

The applicant intends to limit any noise on the property to the standards set forth in Chapter 18, Article II, Section 4.18 of the Albemarle County Code.

| TMP | Acres | Existing Zoning | Proposed Special Use |
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| **43-22E** | 5.23 | Rural Area (RA) | Special Events |
| **43-22F** | 5.23 | Rural Area (RA) | Special Events |

**Consistency with Comprehensive Plan:**

This project aims to construct one building with two mid-sized wings, porches and a connecting breezeway. The current combined total floor area of the two conditioned wings is roughly 3,100 square feet. The proposed new building has been designed by the architect for relatively easy conversion to residential use in the future, if necessary. A small permanent parking area will serve visitors, and it will be landscaped and screened from neighboring properties.

As described in the Albemarle County Comprehensive Plan which was adopted on June 10, 2015, the subject parcels are both located within the Rural Area 1 area. Albemarle County's Comprehensive Plan calls for Rural Areas to maintain their rural identity and appearance. The small impervious footprint and large area of preserved land in this proposal support this goal.

**Albemarle County Comprehensive Plan 2015 - Rural Area:**

**Criteria for Review of New Uses proposed in Rural Area**

"New uses should:

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| • "relate directly to the Rural Area and need a Rural Area location in order to be successful, (e.g., a farm winery has to be located in the Rural Area and would be unlikely to succeed in the Development Areas); | An agritourism business benefits from being away from a busy, urban environment and nestled in the middle of agriculture. The placement helps them to continue the production of crops and animals while also inviting others to participate in agriculture related activities. All of these activities will benefit from being a more rural, relaxed environment. |
| • "be compatible with, and have a negligible impact, on natural, cultural, and historic resources; | All of the healthy existing mature trees will be preserved, as will the balance of fields and wooded areas. The landscape architects have already implemented a long-term care plan for preservation of existing vegetation. Very little earthwork reshaping is anticipated so the natural rolling topography will remain. No impact on cultural and historic resources are anticipated. |
| • "not conflict with nearby agricultural and forestal uses; | Minimal pollution of light, air, noise, and water will be generated. Occasional acoustic (non-amplified) music will be intimate and occur inside the buildings with small auditory impact. |
| • "reflect a size and scale that complements the character of the area in which they will be located; | One building is proposed at a scale similar to nearby residences. Outdoor improvements include a garden, a firepit, and a terraced lawn, all of which will be at a scale typical of the existing neighborhood. The permanent |

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| | parking areas will be heavily landscaped and screened to minimize their visual impact. |
| • "be reversible so that the land can easily return to farming, forestry, conservation, or other preferred rural uses; | Very little of the land will receive impervious cover, so future landowners can easily return to its historical pasture use. The buildings can be converted into residential use in the future. If gravel parking areas are permitted, they can be more easily removed if they ever become unnecessary. |
| • "be suitable for existing rural roads and result in little discernible difference in traffic patterns; | Two churches and one large equestrian sports ground are within one mile of the site. An existing country store is 0.25 miles from the properties and generates consistent traffic volumes. Monthly gatherings of less than 75 people will be smaller and less frequent than is typical for nearby non-residential uses in the area. |
| • "generate little demand for fire and rescue and police service; | None of the agricultural operations or events accompanying them are associated with increased demand for fire and rescue or police. The fire pit will be constructed according to code, far away from buildings. Interior cooking elements would be fully assessed by the fire marshal. |
| • "be able to operate without the need for public water and sewer; | All water and sewer will be served by on-site wells and septic fields. |
| • "be sustainable with available groundwater; and | The owners are flexible and will adjust plans if there are groundwater limitations. |
| • "be consistent with other Rural Area policies." | This proposal abides by all Rural Area policies. |

**Albemarle County Comprehensive Plan 2015 – Rural Area:**

**Features Expected in the Rural Area**

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| "Features expected in the Rural Areas include … 4. Rural and historic landscapes that enhance the visitor's experience; 6. … buildings and sites that are clearly rural." | Rural landscapes will be preserved under this special use. Buildings will be situated well away from the road, and the parking areas will be heavily vegetated and screened. The site will remain unmistakably rural. |
| "… in order for tourism to thrive, natural and historic resources must be preserved." | Tourism from within Virginia and out is anticipated with this use, and no historic |

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| | resource will be impacted. Natural resources will be conserved and maintained. |
| "New homebuilding is not desired in the County's Rural Area … The County is interested in helping property owners find ways to keep properties intact rather than subdividing." | No new home is proposed with this special use. Two existing parcels are proposed to be used together for the agritourism business. |
| "Loud noises from outdoor events at residences or other nonagricultural activities can affect livestock." | Occasional workshops and Special Events will be at an appropriate scale, and noise will be limited in volume and duration (ending not later than 10:00 p.m.). |
| "Tourism is a vital part of Albemarle County's economy… It is important that care be taken with tourist activities so that they do not overwhelm or negatively affect the very resources that make rural Albemarle attractive to residents and tourists." | This project would be built with the intention of serving both Albemarle County residents and visitors. Most programming will be at a very small scale, with no more than 36 participants. Larger events are proposed on a monthly basis, but only up to 75 attendees, which is consistent with the existing nearby churches and racetrack. Special Events would be coordinated directly with other local tourism partners to offer coordinated opportunities for alliance of services. |
| "Outdoor recreational activities are one of the ways local residents and visitors enjoy the Rural Area" | Proposed programming includes walking pathways and a pedestrian experience throughout the landscape. |
| "Another significant aspect of tourism is transient lodging in the Rural Area." | The applicants does not intend to offer transient lodging at their facility. Any day-time retreats would be offered in partnership with other local overnight accommodations. |
| **Albemarle County 2044: AC44 Draft Plan:** | |
| "protecting waterways and dark skies continue to be community priorities" | One building on the scale of a residential farm structure will not generate a significant amount of pollutant runoff to waterways. Lighting on the site will be achieved with small, low-impact full cutoff lighting fixtures. Parking area lighting would be programmed with an automatic timer to discontinue use 30 minutes following the end of programming. |

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| "Support low-impact uses to encourage the economic viability of rural properties." | A small agritourism business will have minimal impact on local traffic, and the proposed land cover will help conserve and rejuvenate the current soils. |
| "Discourage residential growth and development and the related demand for increased public services." | No homes are proposed with this use, and demand for public services is anticipated to be relatively small. |
| "Require that uses are compatible in scale to the surrounding buildings, both in height and footprint." | The proposed buildings will be at a similar scale to historic farm residences and annexes, but smaller than nearby modern residences. |
| "Promote uses that allow land to return to agricultural/forestry or conservation use." | Little impervious area will be added to the site, and the existing pasture will be rejuvenated through plants for rich growing grounds. |
| "Operate without public water and sewer." | Water and sewer will be provided by on-site well and drain field facilities. |
| "Buildings should generally be 1-2 stories and have a building footprint of 5,000 sq ft or smaller." | The proposed buildings are at a scale consistent with this guidance. The total conditioned space between the two wings is approximately 3,100 square feet. |

**Consistency with Albemarle County Code:**

> "Intent, where permitted.
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> This district (hereafter referred to as RA) is hereby created and may hereafter be established by amendment of the zoning map for the following purposes:-
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> Preservation of agricultural and forestal lands and activities;-
> Water supply protection;-
> Limited service delivery to the rural areas; and-
> Conservation of natural, scenic, and historic resources."

*From Albemarle County Code Chapter 18 Article III Section 10.1*

This project fulfills the intent of Albemarle County's Rural Areas Zoning. Agricultural style land cover is retained, water will be provided by an on-site well, the project will provide a small scale of service to the area, and natural resources are protected.

**Impacts on Public Facilities & Public Infrastructure:**

All water for the site will be provided by a well, and all sanitary sewers will be routed to on-site drainfields. The demand for emergency services should be low. Average daily use is not expected to exceed 50 vehicle trips per day, with up to 75 visitors for monthly events. Computations using standard VDOT methods indicate that this project will increase daily peak traffic volumes by approximately 1%, and monthly events by 3%.

**Impacts on Environmental Features:**

The subject parcels are currently utilized as cattle pasture. Most of the area of the two parcels under consideration will retain their current land cover. There will be improvements in the form of new agricultural operations such as bee pollinator boxes, chickens, production of herbs and other flowers. Site design would protect nearly all the healthy existing mature trees, and the majority of existing pastures would remain as meadows. Mown grass pathways would interconnect the three mown overflow parking areas to the main buildings. Walking paths are proposed throughout the existing landscape. The neighboring parcel to the east, which contains a residence occupied by the landowner, would be interconnected by a walking path through the undisturbed tree cover.

All proposed improvements to the site are located outside of critical slopes, stream buffers and floodplains. All lighting will be low impact and compliant with the County's dark skies ordinance. Environmental impacts are anticipated to be relatively small.

**Conclusion:**

The applicant's intent is to have a farm dedicated to producing agricultural products. The products will be used to create items to enhance programs and demonstrate how agriculture can be connected to the body, mind, and soul. Agricultural production is the main goal of the farm however, a Special Use Permit would allow for larger, more in-depth events. Those who are interested in agricultural operations will be able to host larger events and share their interests. The applicant has already significantly improved and invested in their existing landscape on their properties. They value the impact of vegetative screening to minimize the visual influence of vehicle parking, both for themselves and their neighbors. These core values align with the stated tenets of the rural areas of Albemarle County.

Please let us know if you have any questions or require further clarification of this proposal. The applicant and the design team are available to discuss the project further, upon your request. We look forward to working with you and County staff to bring this plan to realization.

Attached: Concept Site Plan
Architectural Building Exhibit
Recorded plats for the properties