COUNTY OF ALBEMARLE
PLANNING STAFF REPORT SUMMARY

Project Name: SP-2025-00008 The Barns Special Events	**Staff:** Jered Tate, Senior Planner I
Planning Commission hearing: August 25, 2026	**Board of Supervisors hearing:** To be scheduled
Owner: Charles and Nancy Gilman	**Applicant**: Katharine Gilman,
Acreage: 10.46 acres	**Special Use Permit:** Section 10.2.2 (50) for Special Events
TMP(s): 04300-00-00-022E0 and 04300-00-00-022F0 **Location**: Unaddressed parcels on Garth Road approximately 0.25 mi west of Free Union Road	**Zoning/By-right Use:** Rural Areas (RA)- Allows agricultural, forestal, and fishery uses as well as residential uses (maximum density of 0.5 unit/acre in development lots).
Magisterial District: Samuel Miller	**Conditions:** Yes **EC:** No
Proposal: Special Events (Section 5.1.43) at an agricultural operation of up to 150 attendees, 24 times a year.	**Comp. Plan Designation:** Rural Area – preserve and protect agricultural, forestal, open space, and natural, historic and scenic resources; residential (0.5 unit/ acre in development lots).
Character of Property: The property is currently undeveloped agricultural land used for cattle pasturage.	**Use of Surrounding Properties:** Single family uses and other Rural Area uses, including agriculture.
Positive Aspects: 1. The use is consistent with the review criteria for special use permits contained in the Zoning Ordinance. 2. The primary use of the property will be agriculture. 3. No detrimental impacts to adjoining properties are anticipated.	**Concerns:** 1. No concerns have been identified at this time.
Recommendation: Staff recommends approval of SP-2025-00008 The Barns Special Events with the conditions stated in the staff report.	

STAFF CONTACT:	**Jered Tate**
PLANNING COMMISSION:	**August 25, 2026**
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:	**To be scheduled**

CHARACTER OF THE AREA

The two subject parcels total 10.46-acres (the property) and are located on the southern side of Garth Road approximately .025 miles west of the intersection of Garth Rd and Free Union Rd. Both parcels are zoned Rural Areas. The property is currently undeveloped and is used as pasturage for longhorn cattle (Attachment 1).

Adjacent properties on all sides of the parcels are zoned Rural Areas (RA) with a mix of residential and agricultural uses. To the south and west are rural area agricultural uses. To the north and east are low-density single-family residential uses. The adjoining property to the south and west, TMP 43-22, is under a conservation easement held by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

PLANNING AND ZONING HISTORY

Based on County records, there have been no previous legislative proposals for the property. Each parcel retains one development right so up to two single family dwellings could be constructed.

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL

The Barns proposes to establish an agricultural operation to include regenerative meadow plantings, apiculture, free-range chickens, and orchards. While certain usual and customary agricultural operation events and activities are allowed by-right under Section 18-5.1.58, the applicant would like flexibility in the types of events and has applied for a special use permit under Section 5.1.43. Special events under this category are defined as:

> *Special event.* "Special event" means an event authorized by section 10.2.2(50) that is typically conducted on a single day, but which may be conducted for up to three consecutive days, for which attendance is permitted only by invitation or reservation; "special events" include, but are not limited to, meetings, conferences, banquets, dinners, weddings and private parties.

The project narrative includes a discussion of the proposed by-right agricultural use of the property as well as a detailed discussion of the proposed program of weekly and monthly events. The narrative states that the applicant anticipates partnerships in the community that may span beyond the subject of agriculture. Such events may not be determined to be usual and customary uses at agricultural operations under Section 18-5.1.58 and therefor require an approved Special Use Permit prior to commencing. The narrative also states that the applicant intends to limit any noise on the property to the standards set forth in Section 18-4.18 of the Zoning Ordinance.

The applicant proposes up to 24 events each year in association with a by-right agricultural use of the property. The special events may include fundraisers, gatherings such as farm-to-table dinners, film screenings, books readings, etc., and private parties. The maximum number of attendees for these events would be 150 persons, though the applicant anticipates that the majority of special events through the year would be attended by less than 50 persons. Special

event activities would take place between 8:00 AM and 10:00 PM. The applicant has provided a detailed narrative and a concept plan (Attachment 2 and Attachment 3).

The concept plan illustrates the proposed layout for the property including the location of major site elements, location for permanent parking and overflow parking for events, and vegetative screening proposed along Garth Road and the western side of the property. The vegetative buffers are intended to limit the visual impacts of parking vehicular traffic on neighboring properties. Additionally, the concept plan proposed to relocate the site entrance east of its current location in order to improve sight distance for ingress and egress to the site.

COMMUNITY MEETING

The required community meeting for the proposal was held at the Albemarle County Office Building on June 10, 2026. Approximately one dozen neighbors attended. Overall, the neighbors who were in attendance and those who have reached out to Staff directly are supportive of this use citing they believe the proposed use will be a beneficial improvement to the site as well as a strong example of small-scale agriculture in the RA. Two neighbors did voice concerns about the amount of traffic generated and the noise that would be created by larger events.

ANALYSIS OF THE SPECIAL USE PERMIT REQUEST

Special Use Permits are evaluated under reasonable standards, based on zoning principles which include the proposal's compliance with the Comprehensive Plan. Any impacts caused by the proposal may be addressed through conditions which must be reasonably related and roughly proportional to the impacts.

Section 33.8(A) states that the Commission, in making its recommendation, shall consider the following factors:

1. ***No substantial detriment. Whether the proposed special use will be a substantial detriment to adjacent parcels***

   The project narrative states that any noise associated with special events will be limited to meet the standards of Section 18-4.18 of the Zoning Ordinance. Additionally, the applicant has proposed landscape buffers adjacent to Garth Road and along the western boundary of the property. Proposed landscape buffers are illustrated on the concept plan (Attachment 3) If the special use permit is approved, landscape buffers will be installed prior to commencement of the use.

2. ***Character of the nearby area is unchanged. Whether the character of the adjacent parcels and nearby area will be changed by the proposed special use.***

   The proposed use is not expected to change the character of the nearby area, which includes a mix of residential and non-residential RA uses.

   The primary use of the property will be agriculture, which is permitted by right in the Rural Area District. Special Events are permitted in the Rural Areas district with an approved Special Use Permit.

3. ***Harmony. Whether the proposed special use will be in harmony with the purpose and***

intent of this chapter,

The intent of the Rural Areas District is to preserve agricultural and forestal lands and activities, and to provide water supply protection, limited service delivery to the rural areas, and to conserve natural, scenic, and historic resources. Special Events are allowed by special use permit within the Rural Areas District. Potential visual impacts will be mitigated through proposed screening and the applicant has proposes to limit noise to the standards of Sec. 18-4.18 of the Zoning Ordinance. With the proposed conditions of approval, special events are expected to be in harmony with the purpose of the Rural Areas zoning.

with the uses permitted by right in the district,

The uses permitted by right in the Rural Areas zoning district support agriculture, forestry, and land conservation, as well as permit residential uses. The proposed Special Events are not expected to negatively impact adjacent uses. Overall, the proposal is in harmony with by-right uses permitted in the district.

with the regulations provided in Section 5 as applicable,

The proposed agricultural operation is subject to the regulations within Section 5.1.58, and in addition those in Section 18-5.1.43. (Attachment 4) The applicant is seeing two special exception requests to allow use of a new structure for events, and to increase the setback for parking areas for the use as discussed in the special exception section below. All other requirements of Sections 5.1.43 and 5.1.58 will be met for the proposed use.

and with the public health, safety, and general welfare.

The public health, safety, and general welfare of the community are protected throughout the special use permit process, which assures that the proposed use is appropriate in the location requested. Albemarle County Zoning, Engineering, Building Inspections, E911, Transportation Planning, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), Albemarle County Fire Rescue, and Virginia Department of Health (VDH) have all reviewed this application and have provided no objections. VDOT has not identified any concerns with the proposed entrance location. Garth Road is of adequate width and design to accommodate trips from proposed events.

4. Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. Whether the proposed special use will be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

While the County adopted an update to the Comprehensive Plan (AC44) on October 15, 2025, the effective date of the plan was January 1, 2026. This proposal has been evaluated for consistency with the 2015 Comprehensive Plan in effect at the time of submittal.

Rural Area Objective 1 states "*Support a strong agricultural and forestal economy.*"

The primary use of the property will be sustainable agriculture including regenerative meadow plantings, apiculture, free-range chickens, and orchards, thus supporting this objective. Additionally, special events at the property will further support the economic

vitality of the proposed use by allowing both residents and visitors an opportunity to connect with a working farm in the RA.

Objective 2 states "*Protect and preserve 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 proposal supports this objective through the retention of, and reinvestment in, a productive rural property.

Objective 4 states "*Promote rural and historic landscapes that enhance visitors' experience and give historic sites as authentic a setting as possible."*

By providing a space for both members of the community and visitors to connect with the rural landscape of Albemarle County in a direct manor, the proposal supports this objective. Additionally, if the special use is approved, improvements will be made that better enhance visual aesthetics along this corridor.

The proposed use at this location appears to align with the objectives of the 2015 Comprehensive Plan for the Rural Areas.

SUMMARY

Staff has identified the following positive aspects of this request:

1. The use is consistent with the review criteria for special use permits contained in the Zoning Ordinance.
2. The primary use of the property will be agriculture.
3. No detrimental impacts to adjoining properties are anticipated.

Staff has identified the following concern of this request:

1. No concerns have been identified at this time.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings contained within this staff report, staff recommend approval of SP-2025-00008 The Barns Special Events with the following draft conditions:

1. General Accord with Conceptual Plan. Development and use authorized by SP-2025-00008 must be in general accord (as determined by the Director of Planning and the Zoning Administrator) with Concept Plan dated November 25, 2025, last revised June 30, 2026, entitled, "The Barns: Special Use Permit Plans" prepared by Woolley Engineering, formwork, and Nelson Byrd Woltz.

   To be in general accord with the Concept Plan, development and use must reflect the following major elements as shown on the Plan:

   a. Location of proposed building envelopes;
   b. Location of site entrance;

c. Location of proposed permanent and overflow parking envelopes; and
d. Location of proposed landscape screening.

Minor modifications that do not conflict with these elements may be approved to ensure compliance with the Zoning Ordinance.

2. Event and Occupancy Limit. The total number of special events per calendar year is limited to 24. The total number of attendees at a single event must not exceed one hundred fifty (150).

3. Landscaping. Prior to commencing the use, landscape screening must be installed as illustrated in the Concept Plan and must comply with the standards listed in *County Code* § 18-32.7.9.7.

4. Outdoor Amplified Music. Prior to commencing the use, a zoning clearance for sound from outdoor amplified music must be obtained to verify that the sound amplification equipment will comply with the applicable standards of *County Code* § 18-4.18. Sound from outdoor amplified music is regulated as follows:

    a. Maximum Sound Levels: Outdoor amplified music must comply with the applicable maximum sound levels established in *County Code §* 18-4.18.04.

    b. Prohibited Hours: Outdoor amplified music is prohibited between 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. the following morning.

SE-2026-00017 SPECIAL EXCEPTION APPLICATION

The applicant has requested modifications of the ordinance, under applicable sections for the proposed use and associated parking. (Attachment 5)

1. **[5.1.43(d)(1)(i)]** ***Structures used for special events*****.** Each structure used for a special event shall satisfy the following: (i) the structure shall have been in existence on the date of adoption of this section 5.1.43, provided that this requirement shall not apply to accessory structures less than 150 square feet in size

    The proposal does not currently meet the standards of Sec. 18-5.1.43(d)(1)(i) as no structures currently exist on the property. However, the applicant has requested a special exception (SE) to waive this standard with approval by the Board of Supervisors. In this case, the proposed structure will be constructed in association with by-right agriculture, agricultural operations, and events. Staff believes the intent of allowing special events regulations are met and the events will be accessory to an established primary use.

    Staff has no objection to the waiver of this requirement with the recommended condition:

    1. Establish Agricultural Use. The agricultural use(s) as described in the Concept Plan dated November 25, 2025, last revised June 30, 2026, entitled ‘The Barns: Special Use Permit Plans” prepared by Woolley Engineering, formwork, and Nelson Byrd Woltz, must be established on the property prior to commencement of any Special Event as permitted by SP-2025-00008.

2. **[5.1.43(h)(3)]** ***Parking areas, tents, and portable toilets.*** The minimum front, side, and rear yards for parking areas, tents, and portable toilets shall be 125 feet from any abutting lot not under the same ownership as the agricultural operation.

   The applicants concept plan proposes parking areas less than 125' in two locations:

   - The overflow parking area adjacent to Garth Road is proposed at approximately 90' from the edge of the right of way, with landscape buffer and screen in between parking and the road.
   - The gravel parking adjacent to the western property line is proposed at a minimum of 100+ from the the property line, with agricultural uses and screening in between parking and the property line.

Staff believes that with the landscape screening proposed, there will be no detriment to abutting properties with the reduced setback. Staff recommends approval with the following condition:

1. Landscaping. Prior to commencing the use, landscape screening must be installed as illustrated in the Concept Plan and must comply with the standards listed in *County Code* § 18-32.7.9.7.

3. **[4.12.15(a)]** ***Surface materials.*** All parking areas consisting of four or more spaces shall be surfaced. The surface materials for parking areas and access aisles shall be subject to review and approval by the county engineer, based upon the intensity of usage and Virginia Department of Transportation pavement design guidelines and specifications. The county engineer may approve the use of alternative surfaces deemed equivalent in regard to strength, durability, sustainability and long-term maintenance for the intensity of the use.

The County Engineer has no objection to the use of gravel or alternative surfaces for the proposed uses. The regulations for parking in the rural areas allow grass for temporary overflow parking on a well-drained, maintained surface. Flexibility in parking materials will allow a more rural character to the proposed use.

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Commission is not required to make a recommendation on this Special Exception. However, if the Planning Commission chooses to provide comments on the special exception, staff will include those in the Transmittal Summary to the Board of Supervisors.

POSSIBLE PLANNING COMMISSION MOTIONS

A. Should the Planning Commission choose to recommend approval of this special use permit:

   I move to recommend approval of SP-2025-00008 The Barns Special Events with the conditions stated in the staff report.

B. Should the Planning Commission choose to recommend denial of this special use permit:

I move to recommend denial of SP-2025-00008 The Barns Special Events. Should a commissioner motion to recommend denial, he or she should state the reason(s) for recommending denial.

ATTACHMENTS

Attach 1 – SP-2025-00008 The Barns Special Events – Location Map
Attach 2 – SP-2025-00008 The Barns Special Events – Application Narrative
Attach 3 – SP-2025-00008 The Barns Special Events – Concept Plan
Attach 4 – SP-2025-00008 The Barns Special Events – Supplemental Regulations in Section 5.1.43 and Section 5.1.58
Attach 5 – SE-2026-00017 The Barns Special Exception – Narrative