

## **REQUEST FOR SPECIAL EXCEPTION**

### **RENOVATION/REUSE OF EXISTING STRUCTURE**

**4485 OLD AUBURN ROAD**

**HISTORIC AUBURN LLC/BARRY W. & LAUREN S. STARKE**

## **STATEMENT OF JUSTIFICATION**

### **Background**

Over 40 years ago my wife and I purchased the Auburn Mill for the location of our business, Earth Design Associates Incorporated (EDA). The property attracted us because the scenic quality of the area supported our business mission of providing planning and design services to create beauty and harmony in the landscape. Since that time we have made and continue to make substantial improvements to the property and the neighborhood.

Not quite 10 years ago, the absentee owner of the adjacent property (the subject of this application) died leaving the property up for sale. It included two residential buildings – one an 1800+/- sf two-story Victorian house, circa 1890, and the other a 900sf four-room (two up, two down) house. Both buildings were in a serious state of disrepair and neither had indoor toilets.

As the adjacent land owner, the property was of interest to me, because it was a major eye-sore less than 100 feet from Neavil's Mill. My primary interest in its purchase was to eliminate the eye-sore and turn the two buildings into neighborhood assets, thus improving the overall rural character and visual quality of the area.

At the time of purchase, we had not settled on just how the two buildings would be used. Knowing that they would require some viable use to justify the purchase and sizable investment in rehabilitation financially, it was necessary to make sure they could be outfitted with modern plumbing. We applied for and were granted a Fauquier County Health Department Permit for use of the main structure as a

two-bedroom dwelling and the smaller building as a one-bedroom dwelling, or the office equivalent of three bedrooms for both buildings.

Following the purchase, our first inclination was to turn both buildings into office space, so a zoning application and site plan for use of both as office use were submitted. The application and site plan were approved and the Special Permit was issued.

After further investigation with the Building Official, it became apparent that the main house would have to be so significantly altered to meet the building codes for office use that there would be little left of its original integrity and it just wasn't financially viable. So, the decision was then made to rehabilitate it as a residence. A building permit was obtained and the work completed a little over a year later.

After completing the main house, our attention turned to the smaller second dwelling. This building was just a shell, making conversion to office space much more viable in terms of building codes, etc. After applying for a building permit for conversion of this building to office use, we subsequently withdrew the application. This was after several real estate professionals advised us that the bottom had fallen out of the office rental market with no recovery likely for a very long time. With that advice, we decided to go back to a one-bedroom residential use, not realizing this created a zoning problem.

Meanwhile, the building needed stabilization, so we applied for and were issued a building permit to complete the stabilization. A year later, we applied for and were issued a building permit to install a foundation (the original building was built without a foundation), floor slab and rough-in plumbing, which was subsequently completed.

In May of this year we submitted plans an application for a building permit to complete the project, and have been informed by the Zoning Department that a Special Exception is needed to finish the project.

Ever since we purchased Neavil's Mill and began making improvements to the neighborhood over 40 years ago, we have received a continuous stream of

complements regarding these improvements. Even those people who were originally sceptics about a business being located there are now supporters of what we have done and continue to do.

Since purchasing and renovating the main house on the subject property, the positive visual impact on the neighborhood has been immense and people go out of their way to complement and thank us for salvaging this old building and eliminating a neighborhood eye-sore. The only less than positive comment we get is: "When are you going to finish the other building?"

It should be pointed out that the defining characteristics/historic integrity of this building as it contributes to the rural village character of the area, is its size, shape and proximity to the road. The renovation plans submitted to the Fauquier County Building Department, which are a part of this application, retain all of these features without change.

**Advantages to approving this Special Exception request.**

There are several advantages to approving this application, including some that are in the public interest, because it will:

1. Recycle an old building rather adding it to the County landfill.
2. Put this building back on the County tax roll.
3. Further improve the scenic quality and rural village character of the area.
4. Comply with the wishes of people who live in the neighborhood.
5. Allow the owner some return on the substantial investment already made in this building.
6. Provide an additional, small one bedroom housing unit to possibly serve teachers or young professionals. (located close to several County schools)
7. Contribute in a small way to area employment.
8. Encourage others to invest in the reuse of old buildings.