

RAMSAY COTTAGE
7704 Rockfish Gap Turnpike

Special Exception Application Narrative

June 30, 2021

Tom Sargeant (the “Applicant”)¹ requests three special exceptions in association with a potential Homestay Zoning Clearance² at Ramsay Estate in Greenwood. The subject of the request is a three-bedroom cottage located on the 3.60 acres parcel immediately east of the main estate house on Albemarle County Tax Map parcel 07000-00-00-005A, with address 7704 Rockfish Gap Turnpike (the “Property”).

Ramsay Estate is set within 77+ acres of rolling pasture, fields and woods on the north side of State Route 250 West (Rockfish Gap Turnpike). According to its listing on the National Register of Historic Places, the estate “features a Classical Revival-style, two-story frame main house constructed around 1900. In addition to the house, there are 15 other contributing resources on the property. In 1937, 1947, and again in the 1950s, Charlottesville architect Milton L. Grigg sympathetically remodeled the house. Ramsay is also associated with the locally prominent Langhorne and Gibson families and was the retirement home of ‘Gibson Girl’ Irene Langhorne Gibson” (See Dhr.virginia.gov/historic-registers/002-0844). The National Register nomination is attached as Exhibit A. The guest cottage was built around 1950 and was the actual retirement home of Irene Langhorne Gibson.

The Property

The Property is zoned Rural Areas and abuts the 77.25 acre parcel (Tax Map parcel 07000-00-00-00500), where the Applicant resides. The Applicant purchased the two parcels in 2012. The two parcels are on the National Register of Historic Places, are the subject of a conservation easement granted to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation by deed dated November 12, 2004³, and are within the Greenwood-Afton Rural Historic District. The parcels lie on the north side of Route 250 West, which is an Entrance Corridor.

The Property is partially wooded and is surrounded by large parcels in pasture, fields, and forest with dwellings situated far apart. Between the cottage and I-64, which is approximately 4,000 feet to the north, lie fields and forested areas. Immediately across Route 250 is a gas station/food store. Emmanuel Episcopal Church and St. Nicholas Orthodox Church and related buildings are located farther east on the side of Route 250. Other than the home on the parcel abutting the Property to the east (TMP 70-7), the closest residences are approximately 2,400’ to the northwest (Meadowbrook, TMP 70-4), 3,500’ to the southwest (Tiverton, TMP 70-14), 1,000’ to the

¹ Thomas J. Sargeant is the grantor to the owner, The Thomas Jeffrey Sargeant 2011 Irrevocable Trust; record owner is Vivian Reae Porter Sargeant, Trustee of The Thomas Jeffrey Sargeant 2011 Irrevocable Trust, dated December 19, 2011. For the purposes of this application, the owner/operator is Tom Sargeant.

² Staff has advised the applicant to seek the special exceptions before applying for the zoning clearance.

³ Recorded in the Clerk’s Office of the Circuit Court for Albemarle County in Deed Book 2884, page 29.

southeast (TMP 70-11), 2,000' to the northeast (Milburn), and 4,000' to the northwest (Ridgely Farm).

A gravel driveway on the Property provides direct access from Route 250 to the cottage. A full-time estate manager lives in an accessory studio on the Property, closer to Route 250, and uses the kitchen and laundry facilities of the Property.

The Cottage -- Proposed Homestay

The cottage is situated approximately 200' east of the main house and has stunning views of the Blue Ridge to the north. It contains three bedrooms (see Exhibit B – floorplan) and ample parking to accommodate three vehicles (see Exhibit C – parking area). The house is configured to be rented as a whole, not by bedroom. The cottage has been used for short-term rentals since before the current owners purchased it in 2012. The Applicant is aware of no complaints from neighbors about any aspect of the use. Guests are typically parents of University of Virginia students or visitors to the local wineries and breweries. Since there are no commercial hotels, motels, or bed and breakfast operations in the western part of the county, homestays provide needed lodging to visitors enjoying Western Albemarle's many attractions, which are an important part of the economy. Homestays also provide the County with an additional source of tax revenue.

Based on a plat of survey prepared by B. Aubrey Huffman & Associated, Ltd., dated July 7, 1999 (Exhibit D), the cottage is 97'-3" from the eastern boundary line shared with TMP 70-7 (7644 Rockfish Gap Turnpike). TMP 70-7 is a 23.20-acre parcel that is completely wooded except for a home, which is approximately 125' from the cottage.

The Property's owners live in the main house, immediately to the west on the larger parcel that abuts to the north and west. The main house contains no homestay uses. The Applicant is filing an application for Homestay Zoning Clearance for a farmhouse and carriage house on the larger parcel simultaneously with this Special Exception application, but the homestays on the larger parcel require no special exceptions. Though the owners live in the main house, not on the Property itself, their estate manager resides on the Property and will be present during all homestays. Income from the homestays not only helps the owners maintain the historic estate, farm, and structures, but also allows them to employ a full-time estate manager and housekeeper. Drew Thomasson, who is a licensed real estate broker and Charlottesville resident, will be the Responsible Agent for the homestays on both parcels.

Special Exception Request

Albemarle County Zoning Ordinance Section 5.1.48 (Homestays) permits special exceptions to modify four of the Section's regulations. The Applicant requests special exceptions of the following:

- i) More than two guest rooms and/or the use of an accessory structure in association with a homestay on parcels in the Residential or Planned Development districts, or Rural Areas district parcels of less than five acres;

The Applicant requests approval to increase the number of guest rooms permitted in the cottage from two to three. The cottage is a three-bedroom

dwelling, compliant with the Building Code, and has parking for three cars immediately in front of the house, and additional spaces in a small lot used by the estate manager between the cottage and the estate manager's residence. The additional guests will not create any appreciable impacts to the surrounding neighborhood.

- ii) Reduction in minimum applicable yards for a structure or parking used in whole or in part for a homestay.

The distance from the eastern boundary of the Property to the parcel to the east (TMP 70-5A) is less than 125'. However, the parcel to the east is heavily wooded, and the residence is approximately 215' southeast of the cottage, so the reduction in setback should have no negative impact on the neighbors. The Applicant has never received any complaints about the homestay uses from the neighbor; and, the housekeeper, a long-term employee of the previous and current owners, stated that she was aware of no complaints during the time of the previous owners.

- iii) Resident Manager occupancy instead of owner occupancy as required by 5.1.48(j)(1)(iv).

The estate manager lives in the secondary residence on the Property and is intimately familiar with the Property. The Responsible Agent will be Drew Thomasson, who lives in Charlottesville and will be available to address any emergency, nuisance, or other issues. Further, the owners' residence on the abutting parcel is only about 200' from the cottage.

Pursuant to Zoning Ordinance Sec. 33.9 (Special Exceptions; Relevant Factors to be Considered; Conditions; Revocation), "the Board of Supervisors will consider the factors, standards, criteria, and findings, however denominated, in the applicable sections" of the Zoning Ordinance when determining whether to grant a special exception. The regulations of the Homestay Section are intended to prevent the homestay use from having a negative impact on neighbors based on the intensity of the use, the proximity of the use to residential uses, traffic, and the supervision of the use.

Because of the rural nature of the Property, the large distances between homes in the area, tree coverage between the proposed uses and the nearest home, and the direct access to Route 250 serving the Property, the modifications requested above should cause no impacts, such as additional noise or traffic, to surrounding properties. Further, the on-site residence and 24/7 availability of the estate manager along with the Responsible Agent will provide security against nuisance or emergency concerns. The homestay will provide beautiful accommodations in scenic Greenwood to visitors to Western Albemarle, which will further enhance the local economy without the impact of a commercial hotel.

The Applicant respectfully requests the three special exceptions outlined above.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

