



# STAFF REPORT

## MORGAN COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

**PETITION FOR: CONDITIONAL USE – CHURCH**

Property location:	1051 Meadow Lane
Property tax parcel:	042-003G
Acreage:	19.79 acres
Applicant:	Ellis and Crystal Johnson
Applicant's Agent:	N/A
Property Owner:	Ellis and Crystal Johnson
Existing Use:	Farmhouse Inn, conference center, event facility
Proposed Use:	Farm house Inn, conference center, event facility, church

### Summary



Ellis and Crystal Johnson are requesting conditional use approval to operate a church on the Farmhouse Inn property located at 1051 Meadow Lane. Farmhouse Inn, also known as Hundred Acre Farm, is a bed and breakfast, conference center and event facility. The church building was moved to the site to be used as part of the event facility.

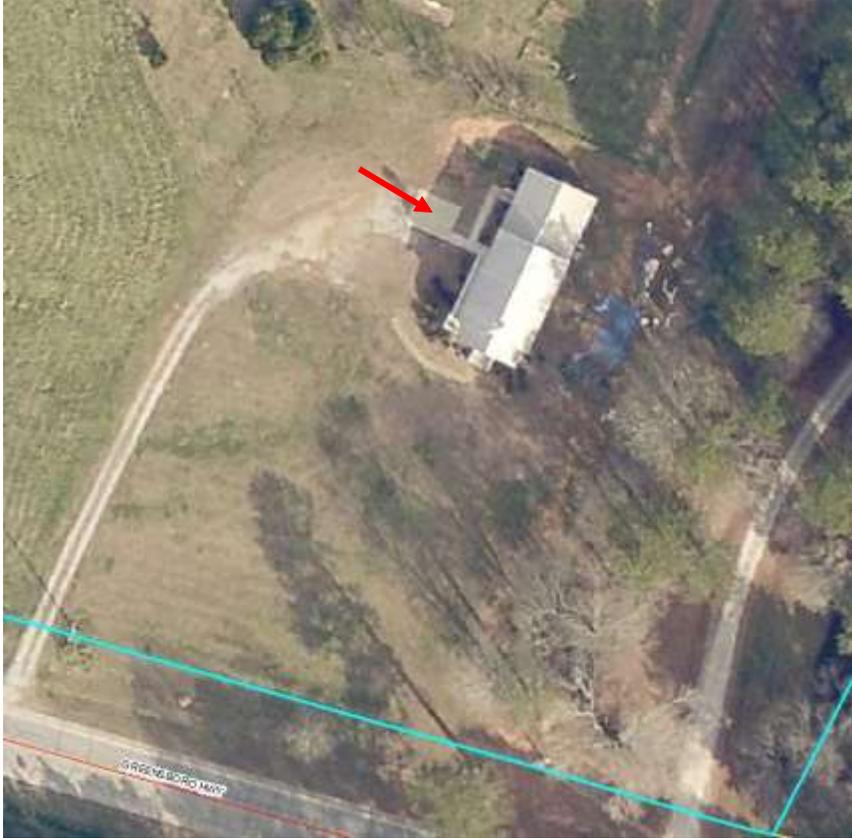
The church building is the former Sugar Creek Baptist Church. In late 2015, the pastor for the church requested a demolition permit for the historic church building, which was constructed in the 19-teens. The Planning office tried to talk him out of it and delayed the demolition permit numerous times. When the pastor persisted, Planning recruited the Madison Morgan Conservancy to take over the rescue. The MMC convinced the pastor to allow the church to be moved. Ellis and Crystal Johnson welcomed the church building to Hundred Acre Farm as part of their event and wedding venue. There was no intention at the time for the structure to be used for regular church services.



The Sugar Creek Baptist Church in 2006 when it was located at the corner of Sugar Creek Church Road and Highway 278.



The relocated and remodeled church building at the current location. The applicant and builder did a fine job with moving and remodeling the church, even if it is a little more ornate than the original building. Given the choice of moving or losing one of Morgan County's historic churches, Planning staff joined the MMC and the community in celebrating a preservation victory.



The church, as part of the event facility, was allowed to have a grass parking area (as all of our event facilities do). The Building Inspector did require one paved handicapped parking space, which was installed (arrow). However, if the church is to be used as a regular Sunday service church, then it has to meet the requirements for parking, same as any other new church. Historic churches usually have gravel parking lots because they were in existence prior to the creation of the zoning ordinance. Because this church building is not longer in its original location, it loses that

exemption. The occupant load for the church is 160 persons, which would require 40 parking spaces, including 2 handicapped parking spaces. The Planning Commission may recommend to the Board of Commissioners that a variance be extended to the applicant because of the history of the church, which would set a precedent for parking lots and historic, relocated church buildings.



A view of the current parking area for the church, showing the handicapped parking space.



This sign was noticed earlier this year. Staff had not heard of regular services until the recently changed Center Pointe Church requested to use the space for Sunday services. The applicant notes in her letter that a local church with approximately 20 members want to rent the church for services. As a church-for-rent, the building would be considered a for-profit business and not eligible for tax exempt status.





Section 7.19.1 Stand-Alone Churches

When permitted or approved as a conditional use in a zoning district, stand-alone churches and their customary accessory buildings shall:

- Be located on a lot with a minimum of two (2) acres that fronts on a public right of way or a private street that connects with a public right of way;
- Be set back a minimum of fifty (50) feet from all property lines;
- Have a minimum ten (10) foot wide natural or planted buffer provided within the required setback;
- Meet the parking requirements for the occupancy load;
- Require a conditional use permit for any new church or accessory use such as fellowship halls, ball fields, shelters, pavilions, schools, class room buildings, etc.

## Criteria for Consideration

### Section 21.3.1 Required Findings from Conditional Use Approval from the Morgan County Zoning Ordinance:

1. Adequate provision is made by the applicant to reduce any adverse environmental impacts of the proposed use to an acceptable level;
2. Vehicular traffic and pedestrian movement on adjacent streets will not be substantially hindered or endangered;
3. Off-street parking and loading, and the entrance to and exit from such parking and loading, will be adequate in terms of location, amount and design to service the use;
4. Public facilities and utilities are capable of adequately serving the proposed use;
5. Granting the request would not be an illogical extension of a use which would introduce damaging volumes of (1) agricultural, (2) commercial, (3) industrial, or (4) high density apartment use into a stable neighborhood of well-maintained single family homes, and likely lead to decreasing surrounding property values, neighborhood deterioration, spreading of blight, and additional requests of a similar nature which would expand the problem;
6. Granting the request would not lead to congestion, noise and traffic hazards or overload public facilities, current or planned;
7. Granting the request would conform to the general expectation for the area population growth and distribution according to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan;
8. Granting the request would not lead to a major negative change in existing (1) levels of public service, (2) government employees or (3) fiscal stability;
9. Granting the request would not have a "domino effect," in that it becomes the opening wedge for further rapid growth, urbanization or other land-use change beyond what is indicated in the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

## Staff Comments

The property is the location of a frequently used event facility, so traffic is not a concern. In fact, the driveway for the church has better visibility on Highway 278 than Meadow Lane, which is used for most of the events at Hundred Acre Farm.

The church being on the same property as the other uses poses a minor problem. The ordinance requires a conditional use when another structure is added to a church property. If Hundred Acre Farm requests a building permit for a structure that could be used in conjunction with the church building, (either as a solely church-affiliated building or as a general purpose building that may be used by both the church and the Farm House Inn) Staff suggests a condition that additional conditional use approval should be sought per Section 7.19.1.

The issue of the parking pavement must be addressed. The question is whether the building should be treated as a historic church and allowed gravel parking, or as a new church with paving requirements.

August 29, 2019

To: Morgan County Planning & Development

Re: Application for Conditional Use (Receipt Number R-2019-153)

From: Farmhouse Inn and Hundred Acre Farm 1051 Meadow Lane Madison, GA 30650

To Whom it May Concern:

We would like to request a Conditional Use in order to rent the Sugar Creek Chapel on our property to a local church for them to hold Sunday services. The Chapel would be in use for this purpose for approximately two hours each Sunday, 10:00 AM-12:00 PM. There are approximately 20 people who will be attending the services

Our response to the Criteria for Conditional Use required by the Morgan County Zoning Ordinance is as follows:

1. The applicant will make adequate provision to reduce any adverse environmental impacts of the proposed use to an acceptable level. There is no adverse impact expected.
2. Vehicular traffic and pedestrian movement on adjacent streets will not be hindered or endangered. There will be little impact on the highway fronting the Chapel (Highway 278/Greensboro Road); traffic will consist of a maximum of 15 cars entering the Chapel driveway before services begin, and the same exiting the driveway after services.
3. There is adequate existing parking available on the grounds adjacent to the Chapel, accessed by the existing driveway which intersects with Highway 278/Greensboro Road.
4. There are adequate existing public facilities and utilities for the proposed use.
5. The proposed use would not introduce any of the concerns listed in section 5 of the Criteria for Conditional Use.
6. The proposed use would not lead to congestion, noise and traffic hazards or overload public facilities, current or planned.
7. The proposed use would conform to the general expectation for the area population growth and distribution according to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.
8. The proposed use would not lead to a major negative change in levels of public service, government employees, or fiscal stability.
9. The proposed use would not have a "domino effect," as described in section 9 of the Criteria for Conditional Use.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Crystal Johnson/Owner