



# STAFF REPORT

## MORGAN COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

**PETITION FOR: CONDITIONAL USE – ZOO FACILITY**

Property location:	3071 Atlanta Highway
Property tax parcel:	0328-056 and 028-056A
Acreage:	3.67 acres
Applicant:	Ellen Cowan
Applicant's Agent:	N/A
Property Owner:	Ellen Cowan
Existing Use:	Residential
Proposed Use:	Residential and Bed & Breakfast

### Summary

Ellen Cowan is requesting conditional use approval to operate a bed and breakfast at 3071 Atlanta Highway. The house was constructed c. 1940 and contains 3 bedrooms. The applicant has stated that she intends to remodel the space above the currently detached garage into 3 bedrooms, and connect the structure to the house. She states in her letters that she has already applied for a septic tank to handle the additional bedrooms.



The property consists of two parcels for a combined total of 3.67 acres. There is no minimum acreage required for a bed & breakfast.

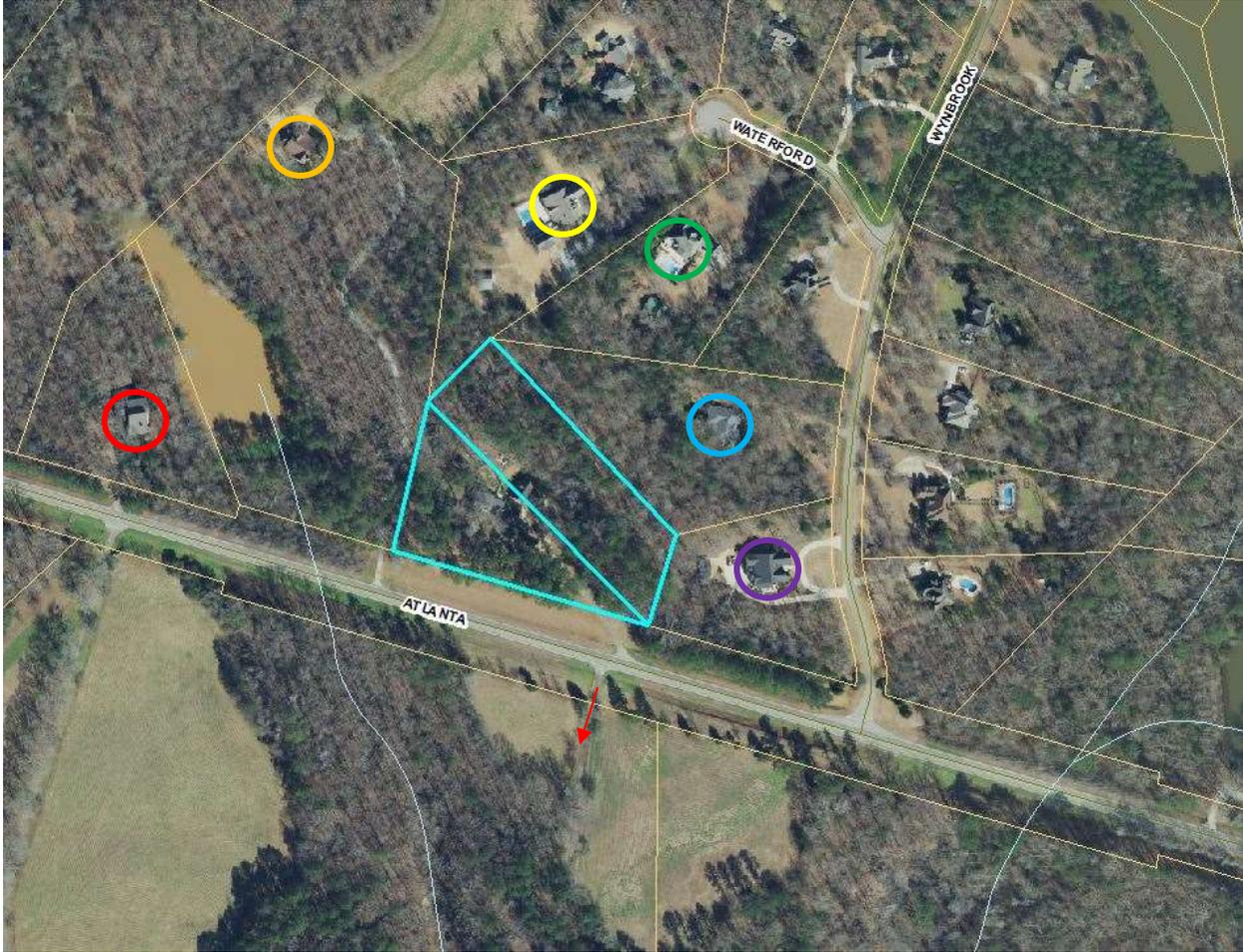


The applicant states in her letters that she has successfully operated bed and breakfast facilities before, and has included reviews from her previous business, which was operational last year (see attached). She also submitted an application for a text amendment to allow instructional classes in her home. Staff realized that the text amendment would need to address others in the county currently operating, or hoping to operate, similar ventures and changed the text amendment from a citizen application to a Staff generated proposal. The applicant mentions several of the educational opportunities she hopes to offer at her home.



She also mentions events, which she said would be family events, such as her daughter's upcoming wedding. Staff explained that events required an event facility permit and her property cannot qualify for an event facility due to the zoning designation.

The property is zoned Low Density Residential (R1). Bed and Breakfast is a Conditional Use in all residentially zoned districts. At left, the two properties are outlined in red. The property is surrounded by R1, which is shown as yellow.



The property is located on Atlanta Highway, between Madison and Rutledge, just past the Wynbrooke subdivision, which can be seen on the above aerial.

Distances to surrounding houses (starting at left and going clockwise):

- Red – 650 feet
- Orange – 729 feet
- Yellow – 500 feet
- Green – 523 feet
- Blue – 375 feet
- Purple – 450 feet

The large properties across the highway also contain houses. The house with the driveway directly across from the applicant's (red arrow) is 1,250 feet away and is the closest of the residences on the south side of Atlanta Highway.

## Chapter 7.6 Bed and Breakfasts

In those zoning districts in which bed and breakfasts are permitted, the following conditions must also be met:

- The acceptance of paying guests shall be an accessory use to the dwelling unit;
- The only uses permitted shall be the renting of rooms and/or the serving of foods to guests renting said rooms (accessory uses commonly associated with hotels and motels, i.e. laundry services, banquet halls, barber and beauty shops, shall not be permitted);
- All parking shall be off-street;
- All guest rooms associated with a bed and breakfast must be located within the primary dwelling;
- The bed and breakfast facility must meet all applicable provisions of the ADA code and applicable building, electrical and life safety codes for lodging;
- A bed and breakfast may only serve guests one (1) meal per day

### 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 applicant has stated that the remodel of the currently detached garage will include a connection to the main house. This is important because the ordinance requires all guest rooms to be in the main residence. Such wording excludes accessory buildings. However, the building code considers any structures connected by roof, such as with a covered or enclosed breezeway, to be single structure. As such, the connection will satisfy the requirement of the ordinance.

The second requirement listed in the ordinance is related to uses typically found in commercial lodging and are prohibited at a bed and breakfast. However, this language is not meant to exclude the property owner from any other additional uses of their home. This is mentioned in consideration of the applicant's proposed art classes, etc.

The number of rooms to be offered, which varies in the submitted materials between 3 and 5, should not generate enough traffic to be noticeable, and adequate space is available for parking on the property.

The use is an extension of tourism, which is encouraged in the Comprehensive Plan.

Firefly Farm at Madison  
3071 Atlanta Highway  
Madison, Georgia 30650  
Fireflymadison.com

January 8, 2018

Morgan County Planning and Development  
Morgan County Planning Commission  
Re: Firefly Farm at Madison

Ellie Cowan is requesting approval for a conditional use permit for the property located at 3071 Atlanta Highway, Madison, Georgia as a small scale 3-5 room bed and breakfast. The private property, on 3.7 wooded acres set back from highway 278, about 4 miles west of downtown Madison and buffered from neighboring properties by trees, consists of a vintage 1940 3 bedroom 2.5 bath brick farmhouse and connected 3 bedroom 3 bath addition, and art studio/workshop space. Gardens are also planned, at a future stage.

I have operated several successful bed and breakfasts, earning 5 stars as well as superhost status based on 100% positive feedback from a wide variety of guests, many of whom became friends.

The intent is to offer comfortable upscale and family accommodation to visitors for the various activities and attractions that make Madison such an attractive destination, as well as to serve the local community with art classes and workshops, writer's retreats, healthy cooking demonstrations, movie and music nights by the firepit, as well as photography opportunities and the occasional intimate wedding location. I would also like to serve informal family style farm to table breakfasts and provide a coffee station to guests as part of the accommodation.

My hope is to create a gathering place for friends and families in conjunction with the Morgan County Chamber of Commerce and various other local entities involved in promoting tourism and quality of life for our neighbors. I so appreciate your attention and thank you for your interest in knowing more about this labor of love, and believe that you will find my request for a permit to operate as a bed and breakfast to meet all necessary criteria for approval.

Many Thanks,

Ellie Cowan

**Major Areas to Consider:**

1. Traffic and parking: The average occupancy of a successful bed and breakfast is 40%. The fact that I will be offering a maximum of 3-4 bedrooms at any one time would create a maximum of 4-5 cars on the property at it's busiest and that mainly on weekends and during festivals and events in town. Cars would mainly be parked while guests were in for the night, so there would not be any foreseeable congestion as adequate parking space is available.
2. Utilities: The property has a septic system which serves the private residence and a permit has been applied for and soil survey done to add another septic system sufficient for 4 additional bedrooms. The property is served by public water, natural gas and electricity.
3. I believe the use applied for would be a logical and comfortable extension of local southern hospitality and would create good will and positive relations with other local businesses, conforming and contributing to the overall small town ambiance and family friendly farmstead lifestyle, with an artistic and creative aspect.

I have always strived to be a good neighbor and been respectful of the peaceful enjoyment of the properties nearby, and will continue to do so. I have every intention of abiding by all the regulations and restrictions put forth by Morgan County. I am committed to work with the county to meet all requirements and create a friendly and cooperative relationship that benefits my own endeavor as well as the community, with the understanding that healthy relationships with neighbors and the community as a whole benefits us all.

Thank you for your kind consideration and I look forward to a happy working relationship.

**Project Outline:**

Ellie Cowan is requesting a conditional use permit to operate a small bed and breakfast (Firefly Farm at Madison) in reference to the Morgan County Zoning Ordinance, Section 21.3.1 Required Findings for Conditional Use Approval. The property, on 3.7 wooded acres, is located at 3071 Atlanta Highway, Madison, Georgia 30650. The applicant intends for the property to be utilized as a family style lodging facility and instructional classroom/gathering place for neighbors with interests in artistic and creative pursuits.

The property currently consists of two structures which were previously a house and 3 car garage with open space above but which is being remodeled into three additional small apartments with common area and a large sun filled studio space. It is visible from the road and easily accessible but has a large front porch and long curved driveway leading to a double circular drive with abundant parking space.

My plan is to continue renovations to accommodate up to 3 families/groups at one time, and connect the two structures with a covered and eventually enclosed breezeway. I also plan to plant raised bed gardens and add a small koi pond, brick pathways, and flower beds, to add to the natural beauty and peace of the place. I envision colorful rockers on the porch, twinkling lights in the trees, and beautiful winding walking paths worthy of setting up an easel to paint or taking colorful photography.

**Property includes:**

Primary residence with 12x36' front porch and pergola, paved patio  
Large fenced yard with granite fire pit and garden spaces

Approximately 2500 square foot two story garage structure plus 18x30' studio space

Large treed lawn in front of residence, approximately 2 acres of mixed hardwood and pine woods beside and behind the structures

Long driveway and double circular drive with adequate parking

Modest entrance to be added. Tasteful sign and flower border.



Michelle  
March 2017

This was a great place to stay! We had the entire house to ourselves. Everything was updated and very clean. The front of the house is so pretty, with a huge porch, complete with a swing. There is a nice entry that leads to the family room, kitchen and dining room, all open concept. These look out onto a sunporch, a deck and the beautiful backyard. Off the kitchen, is a huge master bedroom and a very large updated en suite bathroom with a huge tub and a wonderful separate shower. The bed was very comfortable. There is also a sofa and a table and chairs in this room, as well as a door out onto the sunporch. On the other side of the house are 2 bedrooms, one is an en suite. The other has a bathroom directly across the hall. Also off of the family room is another living area that can accommodate more people on either the sofa or air mattress. Out back there is a deck, a sunporch, and an area with a fire pit, as well as land that you can walk. The trees are huge and everything was really nice. Ellie was excellent about communication. We plan to return!



Patrick  
March 2017

This was my second stay at Serenity Place Farm, and as before, I enjoyed a peaceful, restful night in this beautiful home. I was able to get to my early morning appointment feeling rested and refreshed. I would like to point out the convenience of the location to people who have business in the Gainesville, GA area. This location is less than a half hour away from that city which is home to various major poultry companies, Brenau University, and Northeast Georgia Medical Center, making it an outstanding place to spend a quiet, comfortable night before the next day's meeting or medical appointment. Although this home is located conveniently near the main highway, it is tucked in to a wooded area, making it feel miles away. Ellie has obviously spent considerable effort making this a comfortable and inviting environment. She has also made the house very user friendly, with convenient storage, great kitchen and bathrooms, and broadband Internet service. I was especially delighted to discover a breakfast quiche she made with fresh eggs from her own chickens, waiting in the refrigerator! The next time I find myself needing to travel to the Gainesville area, Serenity Place Farm will be my first choice!



Kris  
March 2017

It was lovely! Thanks



Samantha  
March 2017

R

Ellie's home is wonderful! In a quiet neighborhood, the house is spacious for several guests to fit comfortably. The kitchen includes all the necessities, and the fire place makes everything extra cozy. I recently stayed with 7 of my friends, and we had an absolute blast. I'd highly recommend staying in Ellie's home! There was even a breakfast quiche left for us in the morning!



Karen Korky  
January 2017

Ellie was extremely welcoming and a pleasure to work with in securing a home for our needs. We had three people in our party that benefitted from the one-level living space and limited steps. Elli welcomed our son's service dog warmly. She greeted us and showed us around her home, making us feel comfortable, and answering our questions. She provided ample instructions and information on the home's very nice amenities and appliances. She left us some special New Year's Eve treats for our kids and even farm-fresh eggs for breakfast! Speaking of cooking, with three cooks in our family, we enjoyed the nicely appointed kitchen, cooking many of our meals there. The gas fireplace was really lovely as it was very cold and rainy. We spent most of the time playing games and putting together a puzzle in the den and cozy library. The large, flat-screen t.v. with an Amazon Fire-Stick gave us plenty of options for a family movie at night and a variety of music choices during our game play. The huge soaking tub in the master bedroom was a hit as well! I wish I could take that whole bathroom and put it in my house! There are multiple common rooms to enjoy in this home as well as ample space in the bedrooms, especially the master, to hide away and have some quiet time. We enjoyed her recommendation of the nearby creamery as a simple outing. Of course Helen was a fabulous outing as well and just down the road. I would recommend this home to friends and family who want to have a very comfortable, peaceful place to stay in a lovely neighborhood, near many North GA destinations. We would like to return in the spring or fall to enjoy the multiple outdoor seating areas as they looked inviting.



Vanessa  
December 2016

Ellie's lovely home was very warm and inviting the minute we walked on the porch with the welcoming Christmas tree. Knowing she had only recently moved in, she also went the extra mile of having a beautiful tree also inside. The spacious home met all the needs of my family and we loved every room of the house. This was a special time for me and my daughter to spend undivided time with my grandchildren: aged 7 & 2 and this home provided exactly what we needed. We cooked, relaxed watching movies & visited a couple of small towns in the area. I had the pleasure of sleeping in the master bedroom and thoroughly enjoyed that awesome bedding. We would love to return in the future. If you're planning a visit to the area, you will not be disappointed in the selection of her home.



James  
December 2016

# 18 Reviews

Q Search reviews

Accuracy

★★★★★

★★★★★

Communication

★★★★★

Cleanliness

★★★★★

Location

★★★★★

Check In

★★★★★

Value



Brea  
June 2017



Ellie was great! The house was so lovely and she even helped us out getting rides to the local vineyards. Would definitely recommend.



Alex  
June 2017



My group of 6 women stayed at Elle's vacation home which is 3 bedrooms, 3 baths. Everyone could have slept on a real bed but one of us opted for the airbed to spread out more. There is a large den area that doesn't have a real bed in it but is suitable for sleeping. The kitchen, ...  
Read more



Taiye  
June 2017



Ellie's place is a must stay for individuals, couples or families that want to experience a true stay-cation. My family and I spend Memorial Day week at her home and I really cannot find the words to describe how scenic and relaxing her home is. Thanks Ellie for being such a fan...Read more



Response from Ellie:

It was my pleasure Taiye. Just met Bunmi's family this afternoon, such amazing people! sent them to my favorite Tuscan villa winery for dinner.

June 2017



Priya  
May 2017

Ellie's house is lovely and very well done. Ellie's artistic taste reflects in the decor! She is extremely cooperative and very easy to communicate. We had a 8 month old baby with us so we wanted to check in a but early. She went out of her way to make it happen. The house is ve...  
Read more



Kristen  
May 2017

The house was adorable and very relaxing. It was great for our getaway. Ellie was very hospitable and kind. She provided a cooking demonstration for us for dinner and breakfast for the morning. Unfortunately due to storms in the area, Ellie shared that she couldn't make it home ...Read more



Stephen  
May 2017

Quiet house in woodsy neighborhood. Hostess is quite warm and considerate. Plenty of space an a master bath that is really up to date.



Patrick  
April 2017

I had an MD appointment in Gainesville last Tuesday morning. Even with short notice and my late arrival, the place was ready and in its typically clean, comfortable, relaxing atmosphere. Be sure not to pass up the soaking tub; it's great for unwinding after a long drive!

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Patrick  
April 2017

P

I was fortunate that Serenity Place Farm was available for the night before an early morning appointment in Gainesville. The home was, as I have come to expect and appreciate, clean, comfortable, and ready. I have another appointment next week so I'd better go ahead and check t...Read more



Sarah  
April 2017

P

The neighborhood was beautiful, peaceful and secluded. The house was very spacious and comfortable. The location was perfect as we were a short drive away from hiking trails and Dahlonega.



Alicia  
April 2017

P

This is a wonderful house. Everything is cared for and thoughtfully provided. Ellie left me a delicious breakfast for the morning.