

# Letter of Intent Revised 12/10/20

## **Owner/Applicant**

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## **Site Information**

10755 Howells Rd, 10655 Howells Rd,  
3820 Old Ranch Rd, 3890 Old Ranch Rd.  
Black Forest, CO, 80908  
Site Size: 20 Acres  
Current Zoning: RR-5

## **The Vision**

We are seeking a variance of use to allow for the creation of a unique enterprise called The Shire at Old Ranch (TSOR). Our intent is to energize opportunities for positive connections between people and the natural world we share and adore. Our vision of The Shire at Old Ranch includes infrastructure to facilitate connection around the topics of agriculture, community, energy, and education.

## **Overview**

Comprised of four 5-acre parcels (each zoned RR-5), the 20-acre site is ideally located to serve as a transition from suburban Cordera and Northfork to rural Black Forest neighborhoods. The property is bordered on three sides by Old Ranch (south), Howells (west), and Ridgeway (north). There is currently one residence and an out-building/detached garage on each of the 5-acre parcels. The land is mostly prairie with patches of shrubs and trees and small herds of antelope. The structures and facilities are described below, and locations, sizes, and types shown in Site Plan version 19.2.

The **Visitor's Center** shares the story of The Shire at Old Ranch and houses The Shire at Old Ranch's administration.

The **Plant Nursery** offers regionally appropriate plants, products, and knowledge.

The **Café** provides comfort, food, and beverage.

The **Indoor Gathering Space** hosts events and workshops to quench people's curiosity.

**Energy Independent Habitations** exhibits alternative building styles and houses both permanent and temporary residents.

The **Health and Wellness Space** provides holistic health products and services.

**SEE (Sustainable Educational Experience 501c3)** is a non-profit organization focused on educating about land stewardship, agriculture, and the arts.

**Support structures** including equipment barn and silos provide storage space for necessary resources.

### **Hours**

9:00 to 6:00 for all EXCEPT

- Cafe: 6:00 A.M. - 8:00 P.M. M-F, Sa 7:00-8:00, Su 9:00-8:00
- Indoor Gathering Space: 8:00 A.M. - 10:00 P.M. 7 days/week
- Energy Independent Habitation exhibit: 9:00-6:00
- Retail Nursery: 9:00-6:00
- SEE : 8:00-5:00 M-S, Su 10:00-5:00, same hours for playground and animal barn
- Health and Wellness: 6:00-10:00 M-F, 8:00 A.M.-10:00 P.M.
- Wholesale Nursery: 8:00-5:00 M-F, 8:00-12:00 Sa
- Equipment Barn: 8:00-5:00 M-F, 8:00-12:00 Sa
- Bath House: open only to residents, 24/7

### **The Site**

The property will feature a main-drive loop, service-drive loop (accessible only to tenants, vendors, and employees), and a network of trails. The drive and service road will be one-way loops with strategic landscape buffering. Trails will be open to neighbors and guests by day and will offer a scenic alternative for folks walking the surrounding roadways. Through intensively planted (30' wide) buffers, a moderate slope downhill to the west, and thoughtful siting of structures, our Black Forest neighbors to the east and north will have enhanced peak/foothill views with the transition to Northfork and Cordera softened. The following areas are all *PROPOSED STRUCTURES* (unless otherwise noted).

### **Visitor's Center**

The Visitor's Center will be centrally located and serve as a resource center for both staff members and guests. The space will feature an open exhibit and learning area to showcase the design process, philosophy, both designed and natural systems, and showcase the commercial tenants who make up The Shire at Old Ranch. This space will also house The Shire at Old Ranch's (TSOR) administration.

### **Plant Nursery**

The Plant Nursery consists of the *COOP* with attached *Retail Greenhouse*, a northern *Propagation Greenhouses*, and *Propagation Greenhouses* near the *COOP* for growing on plants to be sold in the *Retail Greenhouse*, as well as field growing operations. By nestling buildings into the topography of the site, growing structure roof lines will be held well below the perimeter landscape height and the mountain horizon line. Plant Nursery elements will utilize intensive conservation techniques including grey water recycling, drip irrigation, deep mulching, and regionally appropriate plant selection. Conservation philosophy will be evident in the thoughtful selection of native, adaptable (sustainable with 14" average rainfall), and edible plants. Field growing operations will utilize low-tunnel plastic-house and hail structures for seasonal plant protection. Water availability will be a key driver of plant inventory since quantities will be limited by current water rights and innovative water management techniques.

**The Cafe** will be a small, cozy, quaint space for people to enjoy food and beverages inspired by the local, seasonal produce of the site and surrounding areas. The cafe will offer grab-and-go style offerings of prepared goods and made to order beverages.

**Indoor Gathering Space** will serve as a community and organizational meeting space for a variety of gatherings in an open format.

**SEE (Sustainable Educational Experience)** is a 501c3 non-profit organization focused on offering both children and adults hands-on learning experiences relating to sustainable practices in gardening, animal and livestock care, and the arts of woodworking, metallurgy, and clay works. SEE's administrative offices will occupy the existing residence at 3820 Old Ranch Rd, located on the southwest corner of the property, with the existing detached garage serving as storage. SEE's efforts extend to other facilities including a teaching garden, animal barn, outdoor classroom, and the commercial kitchen of the Cafe.

**Energy Independent Habitations** will offer simple accommodations while serving as sustainable building demonstrations. The grouping would feature six structures ranging from 300-1200 square feet. We anticipate use of these structures to extend year-round.

**The Yurt Area** would feature four Yurts varying in size from 16' diameter to 30' diameter (1 @ 16', 2 @ 24', and 1 @ 30'). These structures would serve as housing for overnight guests in a camp setting. These facilities are clustered near the restroom facility. Anticipated stay duration for the Yurts would range from one night up to one month and be constrained to warm months (approx ½ the year).

**The Health and Wellness** space will feature an apothecary and private offices for alternative healthcare practitioners including massage, acupuncture, and therapy. Office spaces will be leased separately.

**Support Structures** will include water storage tanks, windmills, restrooms, bath/shower facilities, and an equipment barn.

### **Staffing/Job Creation**

We project The Shire at Old Ranch will create about 50 jobs across retail, agriculture, healthcare, education, and hospitality sectors. This figure is subject to seasonal fluctuation, and we anticipate a portion of workers will reside onsite either in the existing residences, Energy Independent Habitations, or in Yurts thereby decreasing the traffic load on-site.

### **The Livable Landscape**

More than 7 acres will be maintained as beautiful plantings, accessible by pathway, for educational and recreational use. The livable landscape will feature small sitting areas, educational signage, and featured garden vignettes, and local art throughout. The livable landscape will be designed to subsist only on rainfall, based on designs utilizing native and drought-tolerant plants.

### **Water Plan**

The Shire at Old Ranch recognizes that water “is life” and is the most important resource to protect and conserve. Many goals and policies of El Paso County’s Water Master Plan align with The Shire at Old Ranch’s principles and intentions regarding water use and stewardship. Through careful application of freshwater, non potable water (captured and redirected precipitation), and greywater reuse (El Paso County Water Master Plan Goal 6.2, Policy 6.2.1.1, Policy 6.2.1.3, Policy 6.2.1.4), we propose to furnish enough water to meet our needs, while returning the required amount of water to the earth and aquifer. Inclusion of blackwater treatment, as well as bioswales to capture, slow, and sink water on site will serve to recharge groundwater (Policy 6.2.1.5). We anticipate sequestering all stormwater runoff generated by the site, on the site, through stormwater channeling and redirected into plants and landscape (Goal 6.2.2). Water conservation efforts on The Shire at Old Ranch are demonstrated using permaculture design, regenerative agriculture, best management practices for irrigation, and promotion of low water landscape plants (Policy 6.0.4, Policy 6.0.9). The Shire at Old Ranch’s water plan’s aspiration and implementation will be showcased in the Visitor’s Center to educate the public on innovations in water conservation (Goal 1.3, Policy 2.1.2). Permits for the existing wells will be forwarded under separate cover.

### **Blackwater Waste Plan**

Human waste will ideally be processed through aerobic decomposition, sterilized, and utilized as fertilizer on non-food crops. Alternatively, human waste will be directed to a traditional septic system with leach fields. Available permit information for the existing systems will be forwarded under separate cover.

### **Traffic Plan**

Traffic would access the site from Howells Rd. on the east side of the property with the center of the driveway approximately 330’ from the center of Old Ranch Rd. This access point would serve to access all of the site with the exception of existing driveways serving the residents at 10755 Howells Road, 10655 Howells Road, and 3890 Old Ranch Rd.

The main drive and service drive will consist of compacted aggregate of sufficient depth to convey heavy truck traffic. One-way drives will mitigate congestion with a central traffic circle to allow lapping during heavy use.

The northern portion of the property will be accessed internally (no access from anywhere other than Howells Rd. is projected or solicited) from the Main drive loop. Service drive access will be controlled with a gate to halt unnecessary visitor traffic to the Northern portion of the site.

Parking will be oriented nose-in along the main drive and service drive to eliminate parking lots. Dense plantings will be utilized to screen vehicles from offsite observers. The semi-permeable, crowned, compacted aggregate roadways and drives will direct stormwater runoff to bioswales where it will be slowed and sunk into the earth to recharge local aquifers.

There will be no vehicular connection between the drives of existing residences and the Main drive or Service drives serving The Shire at Old Ranch.

### **Hours of Operation and Seasonality of Use**

The Shire at Old Ranch will be a year round, seasonal business. We anticipate peak use of the site to occur from 9am to 5pm. The seasonal nature of the business will generate higher traffic between May and August when school is not in session.

### **Projected Phasing Buildout**

Development of The Shire at Old Ranch will proceed as dictated by: funding, SEE's 501c3 Board direction, and use/necessity. The final buildout may take anywhere from 3 to 10 years. All other buildings will be constructed as soon as funding allows and after the site infrastructure is in place.

### **Compliance with Variance of Use Criteria**

**The strict application of any of the provisions of this Code would not result in peculiar and exceptional practical difficulties or undue hardship.**

Serving as a "green buffer," The Shire at Old Ranch is a transition from the City of Colorado Springs to the rural flavor of Black Forest. The support of Phelan Gardens and Earth Expressions Landscape in designing a naturescaped buffer with native, xeric, and adapted plants will enhance local biodiversity and habitat, offer an exceptional demonstration of beautiful xeriscape in Black Forest @ 7000'. Since nearly 7 acres (35% of whole site) will be maintained as naturescape, buildings are single story, and minimal earthwork will be required, the site would be easy to reclaim for future development's sake. Through careful consideration of the land and the local impact of the project, this development would serve nearby and distant inhabitants as an environmentally conscious, conservation-oriented space which emphasizes educational and environmental aims.

**The proposed use is compatible with the surrounding area, harmonious with the character of the neighborhood, not detrimental to the surrounding area, not detrimental to the future development of the area, and not detrimental to the health, safety, or welfare of the inhabitants of the area and County.**

By designing to minimize negative externalities from the outset, we have crafted a proposed use that naturally results in a supremely healthful environment at completion and throughout the construction process. By contracting with both an ecologically and environmentally savvy architect and engineer throughout site design and phased buildout, we strive to make the

construction as unobtrusive as possible for neighbors and passersby as we possibly can while continuing to develop a growing community.

**The proposed use will comply with all applicable requirements of this Code and all applicable County, State and federal regulations except those portions varied by this action.**

The proposed use will operate in compliance with applicable county, state, and federal regulations as well as applicable development guidelines.

**The proposed use will not adversely affect wildlife or wetlands**

In 2015 as nearby development ramped up and hundreds of acres were scraped bare, we removed barb-wire fencing on three sides of the 20 acres to allow for the local antelope herd to safely escape the roadway. Wildlife habitat has been a focus from the beginning of this project and continues as an ever-present motivating design consideration. Our educational efforts around conservation and preservation make us a community resource on the topics of habitat, suburban encroachment, and the intersection between people and nature. Minimal generation and careful management of stormwater will mitigate negative offsite impacts to wetlands and watershed. Our development of the site will improve habitat for not only wildlife, beneficial insects such as bees and butterflies, and people.

**The applicant has addressed all off-site impacts.**

When designing The Shire at Old Ranch we considered impacts relating to: water, traffic, noise, light, view to Pikes Peak, views to the foothills, stormwater, fire danger, dust, and unsavory people.

With a conservation mindset and progressive water reclamation and treatment techniques, an augmented well in the Denver aquifer serving the site with approximately six acre-feet of water will not threaten water security outside of normally accepted tolerances.

Traffic will access the site via paved portion of Howells Rd. and then flow through a one-way main drive with a roundabout to facilitate freedom of movement. Parking will be nose in along the main drive to spread vehicles along the drive rather than clustering them into hard to screen parking lots. The main drive is intentionally set far away from neighbor's homes to maintain peace and quiet. A service drive controlled by an access gate will allow access for residents and employees to the northern acreage.

Sound will be attenuated onsite by locating the density of activity in the center of the site and creating heavily planted buffers.

Lighting on the site will adopt a dark-skies approach through removal of bright/unshrouded power pole mounted lights, implementation of downlighting and motion lighting, and thickly planted buffers dense with evergreens. Additionally, highlighting the intentional "dark-skies" approach in a display at the Visitor's center will offer examples for visitors to replicate at home.

Neighbor's views of Pikes Peak and the foothills will remain open by design with downward sloping topography and modest single-story structures.

Careful management of stormwater generation and runoff will stop and sink water onsite. Systems of swales, check dams, and catchment basins will slow and sink water into the highly porous sandy soil onsite.

Fire danger is a serious concern we share with our neighbors. By breaking up wooded areas with meadows and implementing good cultural practices with respect to landscape management we will mitigate wildfire danger. These cultural practices, especially pruning, will be showcased for public consumption and implementation via pedestal signs along pathways.

Dust caused by construction and traffic will be managed through phased construction, BMPs for dust control during construction, and maintenance of a rock wearing surface atop a compacted aggregate road-base.

By implementing a system of security cameras, motion lights, stringent guidelines for use of the site, and rigorous vetting of residents, we expect to maintain a level of quality-people consistent with our expectations shared with neighbor's.

**The site plan for the proposed variance of use will provide for adequate parking, traffic circulation, open space, fencing, screening, and landscaping.**

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**Sewer, water, storm water drainage, fire protection, police protection, and roads will be available and adequate to serve the needs of the proposed variance of use as designed and proposed.**

The facility is designed so that it can operate in a manner which will allow for adequate service by fire and police protection. Water and septic resources will be adequate to serve the needs of the proposed variance as designed and proposed. The site is designed to slow, stop, and sink all stormwater that falls onsite.

**Public Improvement District**

If allowable, a Public Improvement District will be created to defray the initial costs of infrastructure construction.