

## Proposed events venue in Westover gets past first hurdle

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**An artist's conception of the main center at Chantel's Serenity proposed for Old Westover Road, a place "Where Moments Blossom into Forever."**

PRINCESS ANNE — Plans to build a place for community events or intimate special occasions in the heart of Westover jumped its first hurdle after the Somerset County Board of Zoning Appeals granted a special exception for what is proposed to become "Chantel's Serenity."

Dennis Stanley Sr., owner of Chantel's Cakes and Pastries in Sterling, Virginia purchased last November the Gould family home and 13-acre property at 8575 Old Westover Road.

Mr. Stanley researched the area, talked to caterers and chamber leaders and what he found lacking was a rental events facility that would be one of a kind for the county with a full-scale kitchen and seating for up to 350 people in a rural, secluded setting.

The house would be available for use as well, for example, for a bridal party, and listed through Airbnb.

“A lot of money from Somerset County is going to other places out of the area,” and even out of state, he said. For example, golf tournaments are held in Cambridge due to its connection with the Hyatt, while this location is just a short distance from Great Hope Golf Course “and it would keep that money in the county.”

The site could be used for educational seminars and classes — and as promoter of nonprofits Mr. Stanley said it could serve as a central meeting place for volunteer fire companies or be host site for Unity Day involving local church members.

The property is zoned Medium Density Residential R-2 which allows by special exception several activities including day cares and surgical centers to retirement homes or even a tourism information center. However, an event venue is not distinctly defined in the code, so board approval for something “not addressed” was necessary.

Mary Phillips, the county’s zoning administrator, said site plan approval is required by the Planning and Zoning Commission, and a zoning certificate and building permit will also be required.

All improvements would have to meet applicable local, state and federal law, she said, as well as regulatory requirements dictated by the Health Department.

“The vision aims to create a place that would not only have local community and treasured events but also serve as a destination for those seeking to immerse themselves in the picturesque charm of Somerset County,” said Mr. Stanley’s business partner, Robert McFadden.

“Chantel’s Serenity is going to offer tranquility and enchantment where each moment spent there is a cherished memory.”

BZA Chair Brian Laird called it “A nice looking place” and wished the principals good luck with their project. The board’s vote July 21 to grant the special exception was unanimous with member Andy Baines absent.

After the hearing Mr. Stanley said he wants to meet with Mrs. Phillips this week to get full details on what it will take to get this project approved and built.

Chantel’s Cakes and Pastries which is Mr. Stanley’s primary business has been around since 1991 and it prides itself in specializing in “alternative” confections that cater to those who may be diabetic or have food allergies such as egg, dairy, sugar or flour. He said customers range from schools and specialty shops to individual orders that are shipped all over the country.