

Approval Standards for Conditional Use
(McHenry County Unified Development Ordinance §16.20.040E)

This form must be completed for requests for Conditional Use(s). Yes and No answers are insufficient, please provide a minimum of one (1) or two (2) sentence explanation. If there is insufficient room, please provide a separate response page.

1. Please describe how the conditional use meets all applicable standards of UDO §16.56 (Use Standards) and §16.60 (Site Development Standards).

Employee Housing (C.1 on Site Plan) is defined as: DWELLING UNIT(S) provided for housing agricultural employees on a year-round or seasonal basis.

Housing for employees will be provided in an existing single-story structure referred to on the site plan as the Cottages. The building contains three individual units, each with a private entrance, kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. Originally constructed in the 1950s to house farm workers, the Cottages will be restored for that same purpose. The structure is currently served by gas, electricity, and a functioning well water and septic system. Located in the interior of the property, it complies with all applicable site development standards.

Private Event Rentals (C.2 on Site Plan) ~ Reception Facility is defined as: A BUSINESS that provides the hosting and rental services of a banquet hall or similar FACILITY for private events including, but not limited to, wedding receptions, holiday parties and fundraisers, with food and beverages that are prepared on site or by a caterer and served to invited guests during intermittent dates and hours of operation. A RECEPTION FACILITY may have overnight guest rooms for the use of persons attending events. A RECEPTION FACILITY is not operated as a RESTAURANT with regular hours of operation nor as a HOTEL offering overnight accommodations to persons other than persons attending events.

The proposed Reception Facility use will take place within existing structures on the property, with activities centered around the two historic barns. The East Barn will include a new kitchen addition and a dining room, while the West Barn will feature an open-plan assembly space. When weather permits, the courtyard between the barns will also serve as a venue for outdoor gatherings and programming.

While there are no specific use standards for Reception Facilities, all proposed activities will occur within existing buildings and designated outdoor areas that fully comply with current A-1 zoning setbacks and requirements. The site will be served by well water and supported by newly installed, properly designed septic systems.

Craft and art Classes, yoga classes, lectures, partnerships with area colleges (C.3 on Site Plan)~ Community Center is defined as: COMMUNITY CENTER. A FACILITY for recreational, social, educational, and cultural activities owned and operated by a public or non-profit group or agency. A COMMUNITY CENTER may include retail sales of related items and RESTAURANTS as ACCESSORY USES.

Similar to the Reception Facility use, the proposed Community Center use will be integrated into existing structures on the property, with many activities centered around the East and West Barns. Most culinary classes will be held in the East Barn, while the West Barn will host lectures and other educational programming; in a future phase, the Hog Sheds will be renovated into art studios. Outdoor areas, including the central courtyard and potager, will support seasonal and hands-on classes when weather permits.

Although there are no specific use standards for Community Centers, all activities will occur within existing buildings and outdoor spaces that conform to A-1 zoning setbacks and development standards. The site will be served by well water and newly designed septic systems to meet operational needs.

Summer Day Camp (C.4 on Site Plan) ~ Day Camp is defined as: FACILITIES providing recreational and education activities during the day within a CAMPGROUND, CONSERVATION AREA, school, PLACE OF WORSHIP, or other public or institutional FACILITY.

The proposed Day Camp will utilize most areas of the site, including gardens and existing buildings. It will be operated in full compliance with all applicable state and county regulations and codes. The site currently meets all yard requirements and development standards.

Art Gallery Installation (C.5 on Site Plan) - Art Gallery is defined as: A BUSINESS engaged in the sale, loan, and/or display of paintings, sculpture, photographs, video art, or other works of art. ART GALLERY does not include a CULTURAL FACILITY, such as a library or museum, which may also display paintings, sculpture, photographs, video art, or other works.

While there are no specific use standards for Art Galleries, the project will incorporate this use within existing structures that fully comply with current site use and development standards.

Short Term Rental (C.6 on Site Plan)~ Vacation Rental is defined as: A furnished DWELLING UNIT, or portion thereof, that is rented or offered for rent for more than twelve (12) rental periods per calendar year or more than ninety (90) days per calendar year to guests on a nightly, daily, weekly, or any other occupancy period of less than thirty (30) consecutive days regardless of whether or not the DWELLING UNIT is occupied as a full time residence or whether or not the full time resident remains on the premise during the time that the DWELLING UNIT is utilized by guests, but where the operator does not provide guests with any additional services such as breakfast. A VACATION RENTAL serves the purpose of providing the opportunity for tourism or recreation to guests similar to a HOTEL/MOTEL or BED AND BREAKFAST. A VACATION RENTAL does not serve the purpose of allowing guests to establish a permanent or short term residence. (See BOARDING HOUSE.)

While there are no specific use standards for Vacation Rentals, this use will be accommodated within the existing four-square farmhouse, which currently complies with all applicable site use and development standards. The farmhouse will undergo renovations to include en suite bathrooms for each of the three bedrooms. The main level will offer a shared kitchen, dining area, and living room—providing a comfortable, self-contained experience for short-term guests.

The vacation rental will primarily serve guests who are participating in on-site programming, offering them the opportunity to extend their visit in an immersive, farm-centered environment. Adequate guest parking will be provided near the farmhouse itself, ensuring it does not impact the main parking lot.

Additionally, once renovated, the Cottages may also be used for overnight accommodations when not needed as worker housing.

2. Is the conditional use compatible with the existing or planned future development of the area?

The proposed conditional uses are compatible with the existing and future development of the area, which includes a mix of agricultural and low-density residential zoning. In fact, they enhance the landscape by preserving open space, revitalizing historic structures, and introducing low-impact, community-oriented programming. Additionally, the uses complement the neighboring Citizens for Conservation land, offering aligned programming that reinforces CFC's mission of ecological stewardship.

All activities are rooted in fostering deeper connections to land, food, and community through educational and hands-on experiences. Programming includes wellness lectures, children's day camps centered on gardening and food systems, and nature-based art classes—such as botanical painting, natural dyeing, and outdoor photography.

Short-term vacation rentals will primarily serve guests participating in on-site experiences who wish to extend their visit in an immersive setting. Private group rentals will be limited to mission-aligned uses that engage meaningfully with the farmstead's offerings.

Given our mission to serve the local community, proximity to nearby residential areas makes the farmstead accessible while maintaining a rural character. Programming is intentionally small in scale: most gatherings will host fewer than 50 guests, with occasional events up to 300. All activities are designed to be respectful of the area's quiet, natural setting.

3. Is the conditional use detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, morals, comfort or general welfare of the area?

No, the proposed conditional uses will not be detrimental to public health, safety, morals, comfort, or general welfare. Each use—and the broader mission of our organization—is thoughtfully designed to contribute positively to the community. Educational offerings—including art classes, lectures, and partnerships with area colleges—promote creativity, learning, and community engagement. Wellness-focused programming like yoga classes and summer day camps supports physical and emotional well-being for all ages. Short-term rentals and staff housing ensure that guests and employees can engage conveniently and sustainably.

4. Will the conditional use be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the area?

No, the proposed conditional uses will not be injurious to the use or enjoyment of nearby properties. Unlike more disruptive commercial agri-entertainment activities—such as hayrides, corn mazes, or pumpkin cannons—our programming is peaceful, purposeful, and rooted in education, wellness, and land stewardship. We have personally spoken with all adjacent property owners, and they have expressed support for our overall vision and plans for the property. The boutique scale and intentional nature of our activities are designed to enhance, not detract from, the surrounding environment and community.

5. Will the conditional use substantially diminish and impair property value in the area?

No, the proposed conditional uses will not diminish or impair property values in the area. On the contrary, introducing a vibrant agri-business is likely to enhance the appeal of the neighborhood and contribute to local economic vitality, which can positively influence nearby property values.

Much of the surrounding land is already zoned agricultural, and our proposed uses are fully compatible with that designation. In addition, most of our programming will be set back from property lines, further reducing any impact on neighbors. The entire northern section of our property will be dedicated to market gardens with minimal guest traffic, while primary gathering spaces are located in our two large barns on the southern end. Because the southern boundary borders conservation land, there is no possibility of residential development along that side of the property.

6. Are adequate utilities, access roads, drainage, and other necessary facilities provided?

Yes, the property is equipped with adequate utilities, access roads, drainage, and supporting infrastructure to accommodate the proposed uses. Electrical, gas, and well water systems are already in place, and any necessary upgrades will be made to meet operational needs and comply with current code requirements.

Two existing access points off Ridge Road will be reused to provide familiar, safe, and direct entry to the site, with internal circulation designed to efficiently serve guest, staff, and service vehicles.

Drainage has been thoughtfully integrated into the site plan. Much of the core area is currently paved with impervious surfaces, contributing to runoff. To mitigate this, existing concrete paving and compacted gravel will be reduced and replaced with permeable materials—such as ground covers and native plants—to slow, spread, and infiltrate water into the soil. We also plan to harvest rainwater from rooftops for storage in tanks to support garden irrigation. In a future phase, ponds and swales will be added in the northern growing areas to establish a self-irrigating system that will also help recharge groundwater supplies.

Additional improvements—including defined parking areas and appropriate lighting—will further support safe, efficient, and accessible use of the property by guests, staff, and service providers.

7. Has conditional use operation been designed to provide ingress and egress to minimize traffic congestion and hazard on the public streets?

Yes, the proposed plan maintains the property's two historic access points, ensuring continuity for the surrounding community and preserving familiar traffic patterns.

Staff and service vehicles will use the southern access drive, which features clear sightlines, safe turning radii, and internal circulation routes designed to prevent backups onto Ridge Road.

Guests will enter via the eastern access drive and park in a newly designated lot, effectively separating vehicle flows to reduce congestion and support safe operations.

Events are intentionally small in scale—with most gatherings under 50 guests—and are scheduled in a staggered manner to minimize traffic impact on public streets.

8. Will the conditional use conform to the applicable standards of the underlying zoning district?

Yes, the proposed conditional uses are consistent with the intent and character of the A-1 Agricultural zoning district. Each use is either directly related to agriculture or supports public engagement with the land in a low-impact, educational, or seasonal capacity. Activities such as summer day camps and gardening classes promote land-based learning and community connection, which reflect the purpose and spirit of agricultural zoning.

Private event rentals (i.e., team building retreats, fundraising events), vacation rentals, and staff housing will take place within existing buildings and are thoughtfully scaled to fit the site without altering the agricultural character of the land. These uses provide essential support for the viability of the farm operation and are managed in a way that respects the surrounding environment and zoning standards.

No new structures are being introduced that conflict with agricultural land use, and all site improvements will comply with applicable setbacks, building codes, and development regulations under the A-1 district.

9. Will the conditional use be reasonably in the interest of the public welfare?

Yes, the proposed uses serve the public welfare by providing enriching programs that promote wellness, education, and cultural engagement. Arts and yoga classes, lectures, and day camps encourage health, lifelong learning, and community connection. Partnerships with area colleges and rotating art installations contribute to the region's cultural vitality. On-site staff housing and short-term rentals will ensure smooth operations and enhance guest comfort, further strengthening the site's ability to serve the public in a safe, welcoming, and sustainable way.

10. Will there be adequate measures taken to provide protection to groundwater recharge and groundwater quality?

Yes, adequate measures will be taken to protect groundwater recharge and quality. The property, shaped by a series of ridges, functions largely as a self-contained watershed. This natural topography allows for the collection of stormwater in strategically placed ponds and bioswales,

which will support groundwater recharge while also filtering runoff and reducing erosion. Collected water will be reused for purposes such as irrigation, emergency storage, educational and recreational programming, and wildlife habitat.

Approval Standards for Variation
(McHenry County Unified Development Ordinance §16.20.020F)

This form must be completed for requests for variation(s). Yes and No answers are insufficient, please provide a minimum one (1) or two (2) sentence explanation. If there is insufficient room, please provide a separate response page.

1. What hardship is placed upon the property owner due to the particular surroundings, shape, or topographic conditions of the property if the strict letter of the zoning regulations were carried out?

Though the property is 13.5 acres—below the 20-acre minimum required for Agritourism Intensive zoning—it has historically served as the central farmstead of a much larger agricultural operation. With its historic barns, open fields, and established infrastructure, it is uniquely suited for agritourism.

Strict application of the acreage requirement would create a hardship by preventing the property from being used in a manner consistent with its agricultural heritage and existing character. The current parcel size resulted from a subdivision following the sale of 240+ surrounding acres to Citizens for Conservation, which will remain permanently undeveloped. This conserved land effectively preserves the open space and rural context intended by the 20-acre threshold.

Without the variance, the owners would be unable to implement a low-impact, community-focused business plan that includes farm dinners, classes, tours, and seasonal events—all well-matched to the site's scale and existing features.

2. How is the hardship described in question 1 unique to this property and not applicable to all properties within the same zoning district?

The hardship is unique to this 13.5-acre property due to its historical role, existing infrastructure, central location within preserved open space, and public visibility. Formerly the heart of a larger agricultural operation, the property retains two prominent historic barns, open fields, and a layout well-suited to small-scale agritourism uses such as market gardening, limited livestock, and walkable educational programming. Unlike other parcels in the same zoning district, it is surrounded by 240+ acres of permanently protected land owned by Citizens for Conservation, preserving its rural context and enhancing its potential as a public-facing site. Its visibility from County Line Road—anchored by its iconic barns—further distinguishes it as an ideal location for agritourism. Denying the variance would prevent the productive use of a uniquely suited and historically significant property, a hardship not shared by most parcels in the district.

3. Other than increased monetary gain, what is the purpose of the variation?

The purpose of this variance request is not financial gain. Rather, the owners aim to honor the property's long-standing agricultural legacy by opening it up to the community through meaningful, land-based programming. This historic farmstead—held in the same family for around 60 years—was among the first clusters of farm buildings in the area and has operated as a dairy, hog,

and thoroughbred horse farm. Today, the owners are committed to preserving and revitalizing the site by renovating its two 1920s-era dairy barns, the 1890's foursquare farmhouse, and the surrounding grounds for hands-on classes, farm dinners, and mission-aligned community gatherings.

In addition to preserving the character of the property, the owners wish to continue and deepen their partnership with Citizens for Conservation (CFC), who currently use the parcel for visitor parking during birding walks through adjacent conservation land. There may be further opportunities for collaboration with CFC as the farmstead evolves, reinforcing a shared commitment to stewardship, education, and public access to natural spaces.

4. Did the property owner or past owners create the difficulty or hardship that the variation seeks to relieve?

No, the hardship was not created by the current or previous property owners. The 13.5-acre parcel was originally part of Hill 'n Dale Farm, a larger family-owned agricultural property, and was subdivided during a sale to Citizens for Conservation (CFC) for land preservation purposes. The parcel was later purchased back from CFC by members of the original farm family. At the time of sale, CFC was unable to sell additional acreage due to grant conditions requiring them to retain ownership of a minimum number of acres.

As a result, the current owners acquired a parcel that—while historically functioning as the core of the original farm—falls just below the 20-acre minimum required for Agritourism Intensive zoning. The requested variance would allow this uniquely suited property to honor its agricultural legacy and serve the broader community without compromising the original conservation goals of the land transfer.

5. Will the variation be detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to other property or improvements in the neighborhood?

No, the proposed variation will not be detrimental to the public welfare or injurious to surrounding properties. The planned uses—such as farm store sales, cooking and gardening classes, and seasonal events—are intentionally modest in scale and designed to foster education, community engagement, and appreciation for local agriculture. Events like wellness lectures, ticketed meals, and community gatherings will be carefully managed to maintain a respectful volume and frequency, with most activities occurring during daytime or early evening hours and all programming concluding by 10pm.

Adequate onsite parking and intentional site design will help minimize traffic, noise, and visual impact on neighbors. Rather than disrupt the surrounding area, these uses are intended to enrich it—offering meaningful experiences that draw the community into closer connection with the land.

6. Will the variation: impair an adequate supply of light and air to adjoining property, increase congestion on the public streets, increase the risk of fire to adjacent property, or substantially diminish or impair property values within the neighborhood?

The proposed variation will not impair access to light or air for adjacent properties. All buildings on the site are existing structures; no new construction is planned that would block views or alter access to natural light and air. Renovations are focused on revitalizing current buildings in a way that preserves the site's pastoral character and supports the surrounding environment, including land, air, and wildlife.

The project will not increase the risk of fire. All applicable fire codes will be met or exceeded, including the installation of a fire suppression system in the new commercial kitchen. Additional safety measures include regular grease management, strategically placed fire extinguishers, and staff training in fire response procedures.

Traffic impacts will be minimal. The site is designed with defined entrances and exits to promote safe traffic flow, along with adequate onsite parking to accommodate guests and minimize congestion on public roads.

Finally, the addition of a vibrant agri-business—with mid- to high-end retail, farm dinners, and educational experiences—is expected to enhance nearby property values by making the area more desirable and contributing to local economic vitality.

7. Will this variation confer special privilege to the property owner that is denied to other owners with property in the same zoning district?

No, granting this variation does not confer an unfair special privilege. The property is already zoned for agricultural use and, at 13.5 acres, is relatively close to the 20-acre minimum required for Agritourism Intensive zoning. Its historic role as a working farmstead—with existing barns, open land, and numerous outbuildings—makes it uniquely suited for agritourism. Few parcels under 20 acres in the area share the same combination of size, layout, infrastructure, and long-standing agricultural use. This request reflects a thoughtful and appropriate use of the land and does not set a precedent for broader exceptions.