

PLANNING APPLICATION COVER SHEET**PROJECT TYPE: Future Land Use Map Amendment****NO. FLA26-000001****APPLICATION DATE: 06/29/2026****PROPERTY OWNER: JAMES M ARKEMA****APPLICANT: JAMES ARKEMA****WORK DESCRIPTION: Glass Barn - Wedding and Event Center****SITE ADDRESS: 5359 Highway 6 SE****PROPERTY INFORMATION****0934402001****Current Future Land Use Map Designation****AGRICULTURAL****Requested Future Land Use Map Designation****COMMERCIAL****Planning, Development and Sustainability****913 S. Dubuque St. Iowa City, IA 52240****planning@johnsoncountyiowa.gov. 319-356-6083****<https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/pds>**

To the Johnson County Planning, Development and Sustainability Office:

This narrative supports the requested change of designation for land parcel 0934402001 from Agricultural to Commercial, for the purpose of establishing a wedding and event venue.

My husband James and I purchased this property in 2017 and have worked diligently to renovate it while preserving the beauty and functionality of this farm site, which sits on just over four acres. We are passionate about agriculture, the arts, and the joy of celebration. We have held a vision for this acreage since before we purchased it, and to move that vision forward, we now need a new designation.

Why the change is being requested

We have already been blessed with a high tunnel grant from the United States Department of Agriculture, and we have been growing food and flowers on our property. We desire to turn that into a much larger production and to bring awareness and access to our neighbors. We wish to educate the community about the benefits of locally grown produce through workshops and farm-to-table dinners that create a shared experience. We also envision extensive cottage gardens planted with native flowers and grasses that support local wildlife — especially birds, bees, and butterflies — bringing both ecological value and beauty to the property.

Central to this application, we wish to build a wedding and event venue — the Glass Barn — that draws these visions together into an idyllic backdrop, bringing our community together while allowing our family the opportunity to build a legacy business that can sustain itself for generations to come. The Glass Barn will be just what its name suggests: a barn built almost entirely of glass. We are not aware of anything like it in our area, and we believe it will offer a truly distinctive setting, its glass walls and ceiling inviting guests to take in the beauty of the Iowa landscape and our surrounding gardens from within.

The current Agricultural designation cannot accommodate a venue of this kind. We considered a limited-use license, but its restrictions on the number of large events would not support the financial demands of this endeavor. A change in designation is therefore the only path by which this property can support the use we envision.

How the requested designation fits the goals and strategies of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan

Our property sits at the intersection of two busy, paved highways — Highway 6 and American Legion Road. This location is well suited to the traffic-generating use the Commercial category is intended for, and it reflects the plan's Land Use goal of directing commercial development to sites that already have the infrastructure to support it. Although our home sits close to Highway 6, the nearest neighboring residence is more than a quarter mile away, keeping event noise, light, and traffic well away from neighbors.

The venue will support the local economy through partnerships with businesses that serve the wedding, event, and food industries, consistent with the plan's emphasis on strengthening the local economy. Importantly, no active agricultural land will be removed from production: the areas to be developed are currently lawn within our existing yard, while our food and flower production — the high tunnel and

cottage gardens — will be retained and expanded as part of this venture. These plantings, along with our native species for pollinators and wildlife, reflect the plan's goals around protecting natural resources and encouraging good environmental stewardship.

With respect to the Chapter 5 development guidelines, we believe this proposal can satisfy the elements the county considers for a commercial rezoning. The site fronts paved highways that meet county road and access standards and has adequate access to sheriff, fire, and EMS protection. We will abide by the Johnson County Public Health Department's water and wastewater requirements, and we will design the site to comply with applicable development and environmental regulations and to minimize impacts on neighboring properties through thoughtful site design. Because the parcel lies within the Agricultural area, we note that the proposal removes no active farmland from production and is not likely to create conflict with neighboring agricultural operations.

How the requested designation addresses the Section 6.4 criteria for map amendments

We offer the following with respect to the evaluation criteria for map amendments in Section 6.4:

Our four acres are bordered by corn and soybean fields on three sides and by Highway 6 on the fourth, and the closest neighboring building or residence is over one-quarter mile away. This setting suits a low-impact venue well: events would be buffered from neighbors by both distance and the surrounding fields. Given that distance and the parcel's direct frontage on paved highways, both the impact on adjacent properties and the burden on public infrastructure would be minimal. The property cannot reach its full potential under the current Agricultural designation, which does not support the proposed use. This area has been in agricultural use since the region was first settled, and our proposal allows that heritage to continue — through our retained and expanded food and flower production — alongside a new community asset. The venue offers clear benefits to the public health, safety, and welfare of the community: a gathering place, access to locally grown food, and educational opportunities. Compared to leaving the property under its current designation, the requested change brings the parcel into closer conformance with the plan's goals for supporting the local economy, directing commercial uses to well-served locations, and preserving agriculture and natural resources.

We had considered other parcels but, due to their high costs, their own zoning limitations, our personal attachment, our intimate knowledge of this land, and our conviction to lessen our carbon footprint, we believe our property remains the ideal home for this gathering place.

James and I are vested in Iowa City and are well connected in the community. James is a mechanical engineer and a graduate of the University of Iowa's engineering program, and I am a nurse practitioner practicing locally. We are actively involved in local events and have a deep passion for our rural community.

We thank you for taking the time to consider this application. A more detailed description of our site plans will of course be made available as we move forward with this venture.

Sincerely,

James and Lynette Arkema