

Vertuccio Farms

Special Use Permit Narrative

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Submitted by:



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**Vertuccio Farms
NEC Power Road and Rembrandt Avenue
Mesa, Arizona
Special Use Permit Project Narrative**

Introduction

Pew & Lake, PLC, on behalf of Mr. Cono Vertuccio and the Vertuccio Family Limited Partnership, is pleased to present this project narrative in support of an application to the City of Mesa for a Special Use Permit to allow for outdoor commercial entertainment at Vertuccio Farms, one of the East Valley's premier destinations for agriculturally-based family entertainment. The approximately 25-acre site is located at 4011 South Power Road in Mesa. It is shown in Figure 1.0, below, and is comprised of five Maricopa County Assessor parcel numbers: 304-17-003A, 304-17-003H, 304-17-003J, 304-17-003K, and 304-17-003L.

Figure 1.0 - Aerial Map



Request

Our request to the City of Mesa is:

1. A Special Use Permit to allow for a Special Event longer in duration and frequency than that permitted in Section 11-31-27(A) of the City of Mesa Ordinance. The Special Event will run from September 30, 2019 through January 11, 2020 and include two events: the Fall Festival and the Holiday Event.

Existing Land Use Designation and Zoning Classification

The site is subject to a pending zoning case (ZON19-00507). Because of public hearing notification requirements and revisions to the zoning application made by the owner, this case will not be completed prior to commencement of the Fall Festival which begins September 30, 2019. A Special Use Permit was previously approved for this site and the proposed purposes in 2018 under BOA18-00663. This application is intended to mirror the approved 2018 case and bridge the gap between the commencement of the Fall Festival and the date the rezoning ordinance becomes effective.

As shown in Figures 2.0 and 3.0 below, the property is currently designated in the City of Mesa General Plan as Mixed Use Activity/Employment, and classified as both Limited Commercial and Light Industrial on the Mesa Zoning Map.

Figure 2.0- City of Mesa General Plan Land Use Map



Figure 3.0- City of Mesa Zoning Map



Surrounding Land Uses and Zoning

As shown in Figure 4.0, the property is bound on the east by a canal, on the north and west by vacant agricultural property and on the south by office condominiums.

Figure-4.0 - Surrounding Land Uses and Zoning

DIRECTION	EXISTING USE	ZONING	GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION
North	Agricultural	LI/GI	Mixed Use Activity/Employment
South	Office Condominiums	LI	Mixed Use Activity/Employment
East	RWCD Canal; East Maricopa Floodway	RU-43 (Maricopa County)	None
West	Agricultural	General Commercial (Town of Gilbert)	General Commercial (Town of Gilbert)
Subject Property	Vertuccio Farms	LC/LI	Mixed Use Activity/Employment

About Vertuccio Farms

Vertuccio Farms started farming at this location in Mesa in 1993. Initial crops at the farm were melons, tomatoes, corn and citrus. In 1994, the Vertuccio family began its “u-pick” peach operation in which customers are invited to property to explore the orchard, pick peaches and pay a by-the-pound price. In 1998, the family introduced a Farmer’s Market and Corn Maze and in 1998 Christmas tree sales began on the site. At present, there are five separate endeavors on the property. They are: seasonal U-Pick crops; a year-round Farmers Market along with plant and pottery sales and educational Field Trips. These endeavors are discussed in **Appendix A**. This SUP request is to allow the Fall Festival and Holiday Festival to continue. The details of the Fall Festival and Holiday Festival are discussed below.

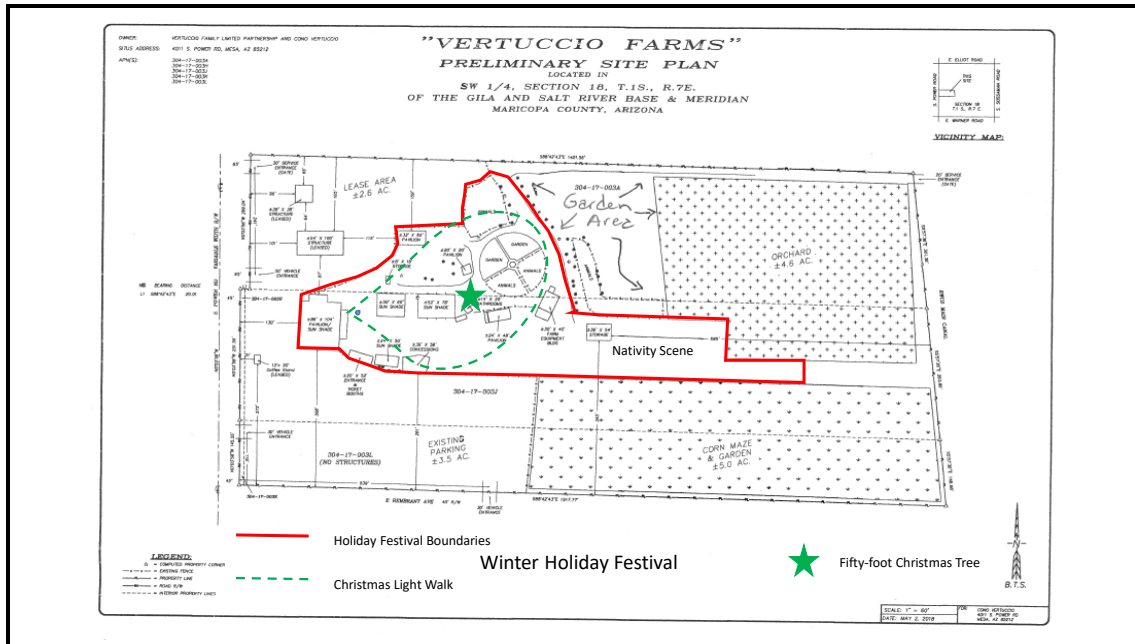
Fall Festival

In 1998, Vertuccio Farms planted the first corn maze. Operated in conjunction with a Fall Festival, the Corn Maze/Fall Festival runs for five weeks from the beginning of October to the first part of November, depending on the weather. This event has become quite popular with the public—in 2017 forty thousand people attended during the five-week period. The Vertuccio Farms motto is "Affordable, Family Fun". Every year the corn maze features a different theme. The Fall Festival has grown to feature a wagon ride that circles the orchard, a barrel train that circles the garden, an inflatable jump pad and air pillow, a big slide and tube rollers, and a mini zip line. There are also pumpkins and kettle corn for sale, and a couple of food trucks serve food on site. The Fall Festival will run from 9am to 9pm, Monday through Thursday, from 9am to 10

Figure 5.0 - Corn Maze and Fall Festival Areas

Christmas trees have been sold on the site since 1998. Beginning with the 2018 Christmas season, the farm features a large, lighted Christmas tree, and a special farm-themed walk-through Christmas Light display. Similar to the light display at the Phoenix Zoo, the property will be decorated with large cutouts and brightly lit displays featuring thousands of LED, computer-controlled lights that will be choreographed to holiday music. In keeping with the affordable family fun motto, the farm will be providing families with a wonderful holiday experience in a wholesome, affordable venue. The holiday season at Vertuccio Farms opens immediately after Thanksgiving and runs until just after the New Year. The hope is that 30 to 40,000 people will visit the site during this time period. It will be open daily from 5:30pm to 10pm, and six employees will be on the premises each night. Figure 6.0 indicates the area that will be used for the Christmas festival.

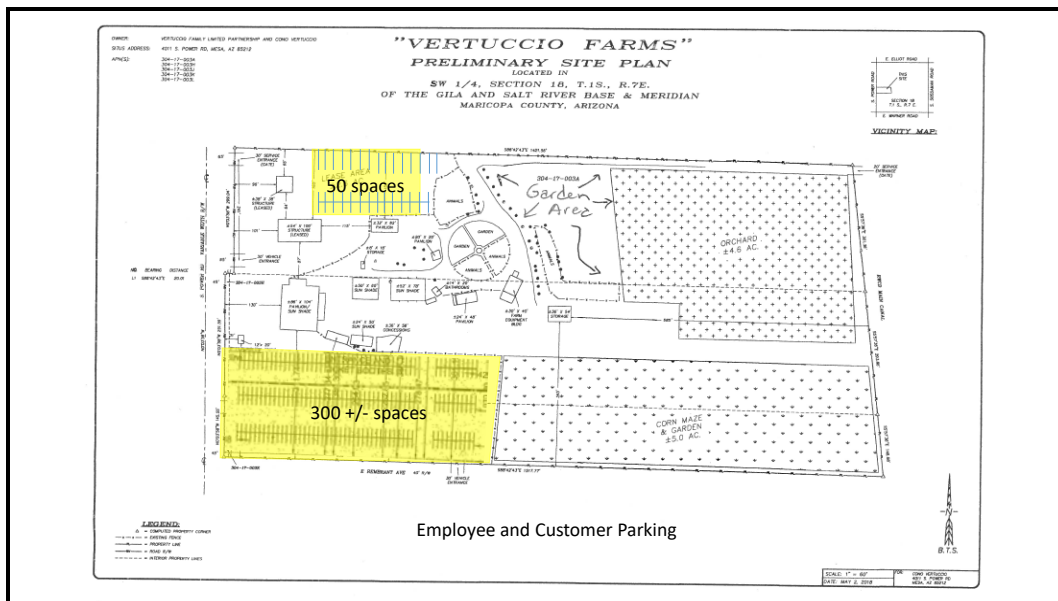
Figure 6.0 - Holiday Festival



Parking

There are two primary parking areas on the site. The smaller area is on the north side of the property and accommodates approximately 50 cars. This area is largely used for employee or overflow parking. The larger parking area is on the southwest corner of the property and can accommodate approximately 300 cars. These parking surfaces are dust-controlled with decomposed granite and asphalt millings. Water trucks periodically spray the unimproved walkways paths and non-dust-proofed surfaces throughout the farm to minimize blowing dust.

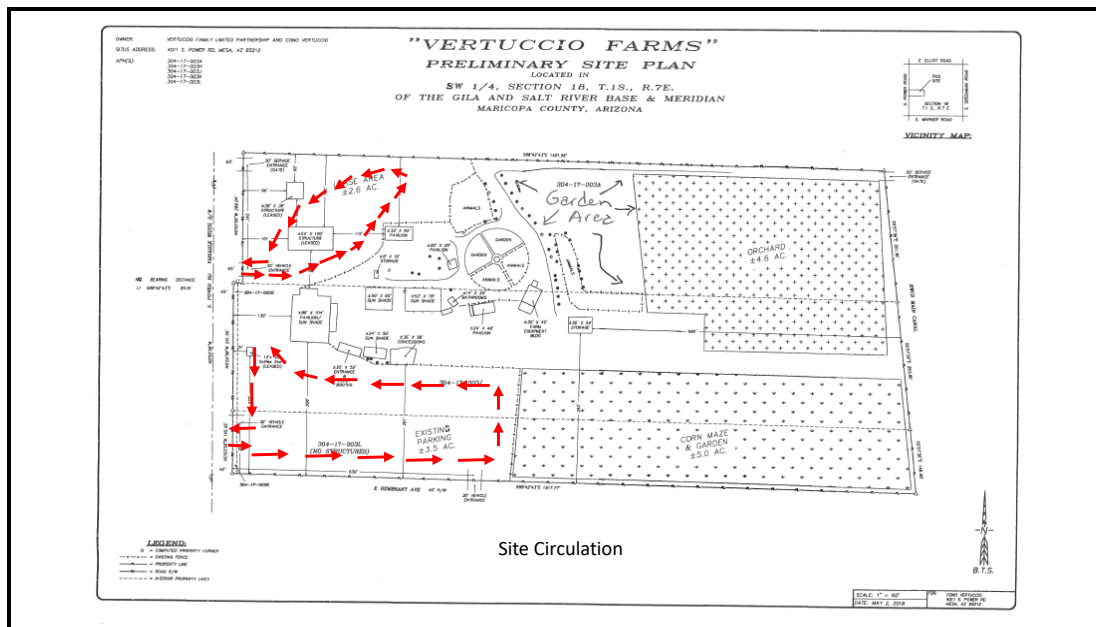
Figure 7.0 - Parking Areas



Circulation

As shown in the diagram in Figure 8.0, there are two points of access to the property from Power Road. Typically, visitors are either entering the large, southern parking lot, or the smaller parking lot near the retail buildings. During large events, there are personnel on the site directing visitors to the designated parking areas, similar to parking at a sporting event. Parking rows are delineated with bollards and pennant strings.

Figure 8.0 - Site Circulation



Special Use Permit Request Criteria

As outlined in Section. 11-70-5 of the City of Mesa Zoning Ordinance, an SUP may only be granted if a project conforms to certain criteria. The criteria are listed below in *italics*, and the manner in which they are met is shown in **bold** text.

1. *Approval of the proposed project will advance the goals and objectives of and is consistent with the policies of the General Plan and any other applicable City plan and/or policies.*

The City of Mesa 2040 General Plan defines Mixed Use Activity District character types as areas that are "generally larger than 25 acres that serve the larger community; primary retail areas and entertainment centers..." As a 25-acre, destination entertainments site, Vertuccio Farms fits the precise definition of this character area. While most often thought of as a character area featuring large scale shopping centers, the Mixed Use Activity area has a goal to "create strong and viable centers of commercial activity that attract people to unique shopping and entertainment experiences." Vertuccio Farms provides a unique agricultural entertainment experience for people from all over the Valley and therefore is an appropriate type of operation within this character area.

2. *The location, size, design and operating characteristics of the proposed project are consistent with the purposes of the district where it is located and conform with the General Plan and with any other applicable City plan or policies.*

As stated above, Vertuccio Farms conforms with the General Plan character area in which it is located. Moreover, the retail and commercial entertainment uses on the property are allowed in the Light Industrial zoning district and allowed with a Special Use Permit in the Limited Commercial district found on the property. The property owner is currently applying for a single zoning district to this property.

3. *The proposed project will not be injurious or detrimental to the adjacent or surrounding properties in the area, nor will the proposed project or improvements be injurious or detrimental to the neighborhood or to the general welfare of the City.*

Vertuccio Farms has been operating for the past twenty-one years without complaint or impact to surrounding property owners. Its continued operation will not be injurious or detrimental to adjacent or surrounding properties in the area.

4. *Adequate public services, public facilities and public infrastructure are available to serve the proposed project.*

There are adequate public facilities and infrastructure available to serve Vertuccio Farms in the manner in which it has operated over the past 21 years.

Special Event Safety Criteria

As outlined in Section. 11-31-27 of the City of Mesa Zoning Ordinance, a Special Event must demonstrate that:

11-31-27.A.5: The event will not present a safety hazard or public disturbance and will not cause substantial adverse impacts on surrounding properties or land uses by creating excessive noise, glare, heat, dust, odors, or pollutants as determined by the Director and Fire Marshall; and

11-31-27.C: Facilities, structures and utilities shall be installed and maintained in conformance with all applicable building, fire, traffic and zoning regulations.

In an ongoing effort to work with City Staff to ensure that the above criteria will be met, there were four site visits to Vertuccio Farms in 2018—two by Building Officials, and two from representatives from the Mesa Fire Department. On September 25, 2018, the City of Mesa Development Services issued a “Certificate of Completion”, which signifies that safety hazards have been remedied. The property owner worked diligently to address all of the items on the list. Vertuccio Farms may be considered to be in compliance with the applicable building and fire regulations. Moreover, with the completion of these items, the events will not pose an imminent danger or safety hazard to the public.

Conclusion

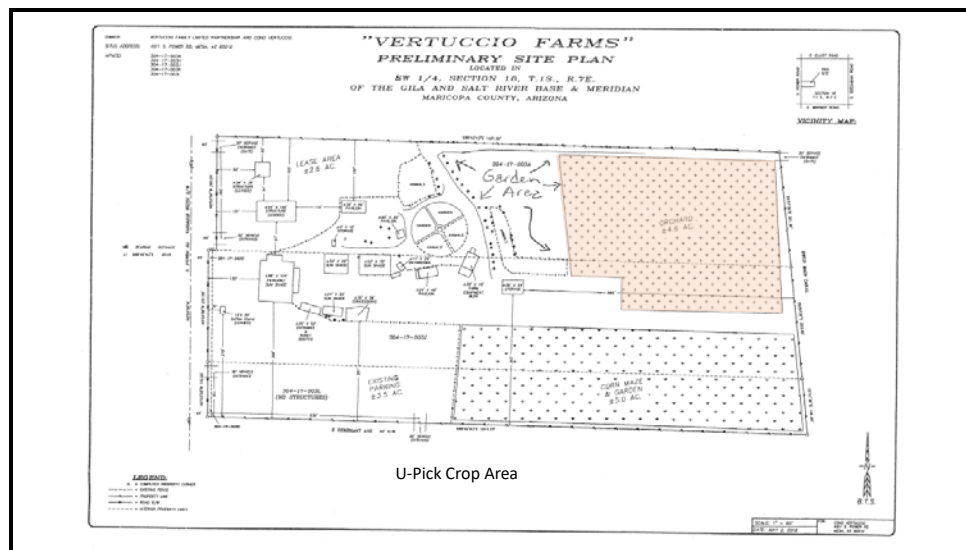
Vertuccio Farms has been providing wholesome, affordable, family fun at this location for nearly 20 years in the City of Mesa. With approval of this Special Use Permit, the continued operations of Vertuccio Farms will be secured and additional time will be afforded for the rezoning of the property. The property owner is pleased to continue working with City of Mesa staff to codify the uses already established on the property not only for the next several months, but for the long-term future as well.

Appendix A: Additional Operational Information

Seasonal U-Pick Crops

Approximately 4.6 acres of the property are devoted to fruit bearing trees. This area, shown in the peach shaded area on Figure 5.0, indicates the area where, when the fruit is in season, customers are invited to the property to pick fruit and pay a by-the-pound price for their fruit. The U-Pick operation typically runs from Mid-May through June. The hours are from 6am to 2pm, Monday through Sunday and there are two employees required to run this activity on the property.

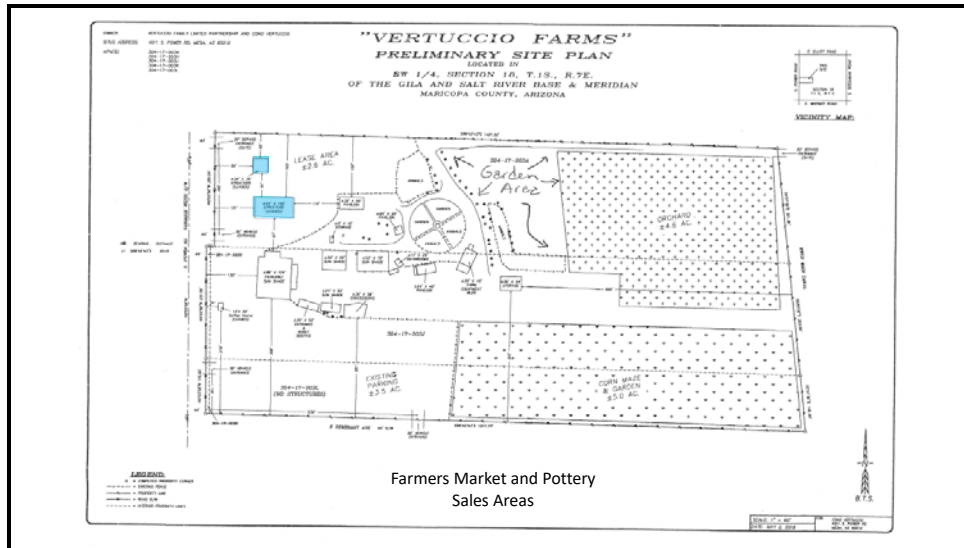
Figure 9.0- U-Pick Crop Area



Farmers Market, Plant and Pottery Sales

As shown in blue on Figure 10.0, there are two ongoing retail operations on the property. The larger of the two is a Farmer's Market stand at the front of the property. This farm stand sells produce grown on the property, or brought in from other local growers. The Farmers Market is open year-round, from 9am to 6pm, Monday through Saturday, and from 10am to 4pm on Sundays. During the week, five employees work at the stand in various shifts. The smaller space is devoted to the year-round sale of pottery and plants. Hours of operation are Monday through Saturday from 9am to 5pm, Sundays from 10am to 4pm., and there are two employees at this space at any given time.

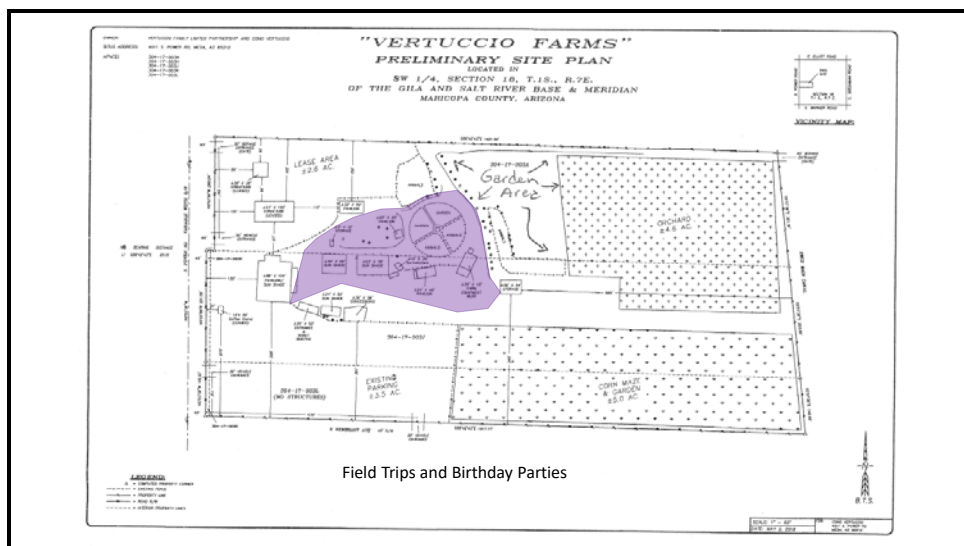
Figure 10.0- Retail Operations



Educational Field Trips and Birthday Parties

Since 2007, Vertuccio Farms has been hosting elementary school field trips. The focus of these field trips is to educate children on where their food comes from. The “pizza farm” on the property is circular and divided into 8 sections, or slices, just like a pizza. Each slice features a different crop that is commonly found in pizza like wheat, basil, tomatoes, etc. From October through November, approximately 4,000 school children visit the site and they often report that it is one of their favorite field trips of the school year. Similarly, children can have their birthday parties at Vertuccio Farms and bring small groups to hear the same presentation made for the field trips. These events are contained in a smaller portion of the property as shown in Figure 11.0. Field trips and birthday parties are conducted between February and April and are held between the hours of 9am to Noon, Monday through Friday. Four employees are required for these events.

Figure 11.0- Educational Field Trips and Birthday Parties



Signage

There are a dozen signs at the entrance to the property as shown on the Figure 12.0. Each of the signs measure approximately 8' x 6', and are in the shape of a barn. Their purpose is to advertise the various prices of the produce for sale at the Farmer's Market. These signs are similar to those found at most farm stands in rural areas.

Figure 12.0- Sign Locations

