

Wednesday, May 26, 2021 3:47 PM

26 May 2021

The Honorable Michael R. Graney Deputy
Cabinet Secretary, Department of Commerce
West Virginia Development Office
State Capitol Complex – Building 3, Suite 600
1900 Kanawha Blvd E. Charleston, WV 25305

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL TO jack.m.rife@wv.gov AND U.S. POSTAL SERVICE CERTIFIED MAIL

RE: Support for the Tourism Development District Application

Dear Mr Graney:

The Corporation of Harpers Ferry is pleased that the SWaN Hill Top House Hotel, LLC, has submitted its Tourism Development District Application to the West Virginia Department of Commerce.

SWaN and the Corporation of Harpers Ferry recognize that a business's profitability is most critical for it to survive and thrive in the long term. We affirm the critical nature of changes or refinements of the 2018 Concept Plan, including:

- Eliminating the underground meeting rooms beneath the Event Lawn overlooking the Potomac River.
- Delaying construction of the "Outfitters Building" and moving its functions to the existing old barbershop.
- Expanding meeting space in the Hotel Annex building and consolidating all restaurant dining to the Hotel's main dining room.
- Refining the design of the main Hotel building that will reduce overall interior square footage.
- Screening the northwest corner of the outdoor terrace to complement the historic existing layout of the building.

We are pleased to see SWaN plans to complete the Promontory Overlook Trail prior to the opening of the Hotel. Residents and visitors will be excited to visit the Overlook again.

The Town Council of the Corporation of Harpers Ferry feels that the revised 2018 Concept Plan maintains the principal tenets of the Harper Ferry Street Agreement approved on April 5, 2021; therefore, we support the Tourism Development District Application submitted by SWaN. The Town has some apprehension about the State having full oversight authority of the Hill Top House Hotel project; however, we look forward to open communication and dialogue with the West Virginia Development Office as the project progresses.

Sincerely,

Kevin Carden

Recorder

On behalf of the Town Council of the Corporation of Harpers Ferry

Saturday, May 29, 2021 12:18 PM

Hello,

I am in support of SWaN's application to establish the Hill Top House Hotel Tourism Development District in Harpers Ferry. This project will benefit our community as well as the entire state of West Virginia and has been delayed for too long. We believe the State's involvement will benefit the project and help bring it to completion.

Thank you. I hope you are accepting letters of support from individuals, not just organizations.

Lynn Vaughn

Sunday, May 30, 2021 10:03 AM

We're writing to express our support for the State of WV moving forward with the Hilltop project.

We run a B&B in Harpers Ferry and have for 22 years.

The town is in dire need of a good world-class hotel such as Swan has proposed. This little town cannot get beyond the bickering.

Please help move the project forward.

Rgds,

Phillip and Deborah Hale

The Jackson Rose Bed & Breakfast

Sunday, May 30, 2021 11:56 AM

Mr. Jack Rife—

This letter is to contribute public comment in favor of the proposed Hill Top House Hotel project.

My husband and I live outside the town proper but within the greater Harpers Ferry address. As of this month, we have resided at this address 37-years. Almost daily we go into town for services such as the Post Office, library or a restaurant meal. As he does nearly every day, my husband has just left for a walk in town or on a nearby National Park trail or Appalachian Trail.

For too many years—decades now—we've lamented the woeful neglect of the Hilltop House. The years of wasted opportunity have been truly senseless. The SWAN organization should be credited for the patient persistence to fulfill their vision. The design they've developed is remarkable for numerous

reasons: It embraces the unique features for which the town is so notable: its momentous history and geographic splendor. It's a breathtaking celebration of the world class overlook of the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers. The mindfully crafted concept honors the design of the original hotel, which should capture the interest not only of nearby guests but also international visitors. Strategically located, it can take advantage of nearby transportation corridors and visitation from the Baltimore / Washington metropolitan region.

SWAN has amply demonstrated respect for and intent to address the needs and modifications sought by nearby residents to conform to limits imposed by the constraints of such a small town. The anticipated infusion of revenue and job openings can benefit West Virginia statewide, but will fill a tremendous need for the town to realize an overdue water system upgrade, additional infrastructure improvements and enhance services such as law enforcement—all vital town needs far too costly to be born by a population of under 400.

Hill Top House Hotel will be a destination to rival the stately grandeur of Greenbriar Hotel. It will be a crown jewel not just for the town of Harpers Ferry. This is a treasure for neighboring Bolivar...nearby Charles Town... the whole of Jefferson County... and a shining welcome beacon at the eastern entry to West Virginia.

This is an unsurpassed opportunity. We earnestly appeal to the Tourism Development Office to provide any available support to advance the SWAN Hilltop House project from the first groundbreaking spade of dirt through to a celebratory culmination ribbon cutting.

Thank you very much,

Susanne OKoenig

Susanne and Jim Koenig

Sunday, May 30, 2021 8:00 PM

Dear Mr. Rife,

I am happy to write in support of the new Hilltop House project in Harpers Ferry. My family moved to Harpers Ferry in 1966, when my husband was one of the first employees of the new Job Corps Center there. Soon we bought a house in Bolivar. Our daughter was married at Hill Top House in 2001.

Harpers Ferry and West Virginia are close to my heart. I have watched the unfolding of the project and the political difficulties regarding the new hotel with interest and concern. Finally it seems that it may come to be. I am happy that SWaN has promised the overlooks will remain open to all. I believe SWaN's design and plans will provide a much needed anchor and place to be proud of for the two towns, with benefit in so many ways. And for the County, the Panhandle, and West Virginia, as well.

Thank you so much for your attention to this proposal and all best wishes for the future.

Mary Haynes

Sunday, May 30, 2021 8:55 PM

I am writing in support of the Hill Top House TDD application. After 14 years of mixed messages from the town governance, I believe that the developer, Swan, needs a clear up or down answer on moving forward with development of the Hill Top House Hotel. I believe that the hotel will be a great asset to the town, the county, the region and the state. Having sat on the Harpers Ferry Planning Commission when the Concept Plan was presented, I believe that Swan has addressed the key concerns of the community and, through the street use agreement negotiated with the Harpers Ferry Town Council, they have pledged to adhere to the spirit of the Concept Plan. I would be delighted to see this project move forward under the oversight of the state.

Regards,

Ed Wheelless

Sunday, May 30, 2021 11:51 PM

Dear Mr. Rife,

via Jack.M.Rife@wv.gov

It was 45 years ago. The Hill Top House Hotel was known to me previously as a quite special location. I decided that, given the opportunity, I would seek to utilize it for some excellent purpose.

At the time, I was serving as the Chief Research Attorney for a high-level National Commission of the American Bar Association. From around the country, a prestigious group of legal scholars, jurists, governors and other public figures, professors (including one from my alma mater, Harvard Law), etc. were brought together to meet at the Hill Top House Hotel for one of its group meetings.

Many of those persons also brought along their spouses. Some drove to Harpers Ferry from the airport, while others took the train from Washington, DC. We all spent several productive days in day-time meetings at the Hotel. The participants also toured the hill-side town, enjoyed going to the historical sites, made various food, etc. stops, and stopped to shop in the local stores.

On one of those evenings, I arranged for a hosted reception –with excellent hors d’oeuvres– on the front lawn of the Hilltop House Hotel. This superb site overlooked various vistas including the conjunction of the rivers, and mountains. (I understand that if approved, that site will remain open to the public, for their use and enjoyment.) I also very well remember an attendee’s comment: “It’s a great reception. But you outdid yourself in ordering up a Full Moon this Fall night.” While I had to chuckle, I deferred the “credit” to the Hill Top House.

When I was back to Harpers Ferry a number of years ago, I was surprised to see the obvious state of disrepair that this once fine hotel had sunken to. I also could see the “war of signs” in support of, or against, the proposal. I followed events occasionally through postings of area’s newspapers. There has been a great deal of economic short-sightedness. But more disappointing is how “democracy” is practiced –or perhaps not at all– by some politicians in this otherwise wise and wonderful WV town.

Remembering back –some “two score+” years ago– I am encouraged to hear that this facility might be reinvigorated and completely restored by a group of investors. Hill Top House Hotel should be restored to its former glory. It could be a tremendous asset, and an economic gain for all, once again.

If the effort for restoration is successful, this great facility will become the “new” premier resort for West Virginia. Hill Top House Hotel can, and assuredly will, once again attract an upscale clientele, with much-needed shots in the arms for the local and the State economy. There will be substantial economic benefits to result. There can be no question about proceeding further. ...Or to lose it all.

Sincerely,

Randall Scott

RANDALL W. Scott

*As a matter of disclosure, I want to make it clear that I do not know any of the investors or principals personally. I have never met them, talked to them, nor do I have any investment interest in their undertaking. Quite simply, I volunteered a couple of years ago –via email– that, if the time ever came that they sought some support, I would be glad to lend my voice.

Monday, May 31, 2021 10:38 AM

Dear Mr. Rife,

We are wholly in support of the Hill Top House project, which will bring numerous benefits to the Harper’s Ferry community. In addition to restoring a currently underutilized location and maintaining a significant piece of the town’s history, the social and economic benefits will be important for the town’s future.

A hospitality project of this caliber will draw customers and improve opportunities for existing and future businesses in the town and in the surrounding West Virginia communities. The public access scenic overlooks will ensure the beauty of one of the significant locations in American history can be appreciated by all.

The project also fills a gap in the accommodations available in town. It is hard for us to host family guests in town for holiday gatherings due to the limited options available in close proximity. A hotel that would be open in town over the holidays will be very welcome for our family.

It also is unclear what use, if any, would even be possible for the site if a project this well designed and resourced can’t move forward. We worry that the site would never be able to draw a project this well thought out and aesthetically pleasing and would remain derelict and an eyesore.

We hope that the Hill Top House project can proceed, for the benefit of the town and the whole area.

Kind regards,

Garry Stone and Natalie Hodapp

Monday, May 31, 2021 10:53 AM

Dear Mr. Rife: I am writing to ask for your support for the Tourism Development District Act. I truly believe that the TDD is vital to the future of Harpers Ferry, Jefferson County and the state of West Virginia. I own the Ledge House Bed and Breakfast in Harpers Ferry and I have been witness to the obstructionists to the Hill Top Hotel Redevelopment. Opponents of this project have repeatedly lied and even cheated in our elections. There is no way to manage the Hill Top Hotel Redevelopment within our small town as we simply don't have the manpower and we have had officials willing to put their own personal interests above the common good. We need the state's help to make this happen.

- The Town of Harpers Ferry has been unable to find a pathway forward in 14 years due to oscillating opinions of two-year termed elected officials.
- SWaN has taken into consideration the historic preservation of Hill Top resources and has developed a design that will echo architectural elements of the past hotel and the historic town.
- The refined 2018 design has reduced gross square footage by almost 30%.
- Two scenic overlooks will be available for public access 24/7.
- The Town of Harper Ferry needs an operating hotel for increased tax revenue and customer base.

Everything that we asked for as a town has been supported by the Hill Top Redevelopment but the goal post keeps moving. We cannot let the economic engine that is Harpers Ferry die because a small group would like to turn it into a retirement community.

--

Carrie Ellen Gauthier

Monday, May 31, 2021 11:15 AM

Mr. Rife,

My name is Mike Buscher. I have lived in Harpers Ferry for 31 years and have been actively involved in the town government as the Head/member of the Board of Zoning Appeals for almost a decade. The town of Harpers Ferry lacks the expertise to oversee or manage a project as large and complex as the development of the Hill Top House Hotel. Given this fact and the recent history of election fraud involving the current mayor and some members of the town council and indications that they will continue to attempt to stall the project with frivolous lawsuits, I welcome the involvement of the West Virginia Development Office.

Thank you very much,

Michael J Buscher

Monday, May 31, 2021 11:20 AM

Dear Sir and WVDO Staff,

I have been a home-owning resident of Harpers Ferry for thirty years. For more than one third of these years, SWaN has been trying to build a new hotel on the bluff where our grand old Hilltop House Hotel has disintegrated into a heap of sticks and rubble. I support their and your efforts to remedy this sad situation with a lovely new old-fashioned-looking, stone hotel to grace that scenic bluff.

I have served Harpers Ferry, over the years, as a Council woman, president of the Planning Commission, and as a member of the Historic Landmarks Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeals. I have been involved in trying to preserve the historic atmosphere and breathtakingly beautiful natural setting. I have worked closely with SWaN, and with the 20% of town citizens who are trying to block the hotel from ever being built. I was on that side for the first few years, but SWaN has made endless generous concessions and those angry citizens have made zero concessions. I support SWaN's efforts and I support the State of West Virginia's Development Office in trying to help this torn-apart small village accommodate such an important and impactful development project.

This town, this county, this state, needs the new Hill Top House Hotel and the tourism and revenue it will bring, The opposing citizens are short-sighted NIMBYs who, despite themselves, will also enjoy the hotel's amenities and the many benefits of the increased revenue from the new hotel.

Please stand with Harpers Ferry and SWaN and help the new hotel, which honors the history and complements the natural beauty of Harpers Ferry, to finally be realized on that site, a gateway to our state for visitors from other states and countries.

Thank you very much for your diligence on our behalf,

Annette Hale

Monday, May 31, 2021 3:23 PM

Dear Mr. Rife,

Via Jack.M.Rife@wv.gov

My family has operated a small hotel for the past 35 years in Bolivar just 1 mile from the Hill Top House Hotel. We serve mainly guests who are hike the Appalachian Trail, cycling guests on the C&O Canal Towpath and National Historical Park visitors.

Since 1986, we have seen a consistent decline in business due to many factors; decline in National Park resources, decline of in-person training at the Mather Training Center, fewer visitors to Lower town Harpers Ferry and a decrease in visitors to traditional annual events such as Olde Tyme Christmas.

We believe that a restoration of the Hill Top House Hotel will not only generate more interest to Harpers Ferry and surrounding area, but it will also invigorate and bring different demographics of visitors to this wonderful historic town for special events.

The Town of Harpers Ferry has been unable to find a pathway forward these past 14 years due to varying insular nature of opinions, and resistance to change, but we believe that moving forward is the best path economically to help ensure future viability of the Town. One need only look at the

dilapidated building after 14 years of inaction to see the potential being squandered; a promise of renewed interest for future generations to explore beautiful and historic Harpers Ferry.

The second version 2018 design has reduced gross square footage of almost 30% and would be a welcome addition. The two scenic overlooks would continue to be available to the public 24/7.

In addition, the increased tax revenue, customer base and creation of hundreds of jobs would be an overall benefit for residents and local businesses.

In summary, my family and I fully support the rebuilding of the Hill Top House.

Thank you,

Yinching Lin-Chen

General Manager, Owner Representative

Quality Inn Harpers Ferry, WV

*As a matter of disclosure, I want to make it clear that I do not know of any of the investors or principals personally. I have never met them, talked to them, nor do I have any investment interest in their undertaking.

Monday, May 31, 2021 7:50 PM

Dear Mr. Rife,

I very much am in support for the rebuilding of the old hotel. My wife Barbara and I have fond memories of staying there over many weekends, and also having family dinners there for quite a few Mothers Day.

I also believe it would be a huge boost for the merchants of Harpers Ferry. This town is a favorite of hours to visit and we would be very happy to see the Hilltop rebuilt in all the majesty the plans express.

Our hope is to one day see this dream come true - to relive all of our happy memories of the Hilltop House Hotel via the new planned hotel. Built upon the old site it will become like the Phoenix rising from the ashes in all of its new splendor and glory. What a tribute to the old historical site and what a gift to the town of Harpers Ferry. We must do all we can to ensure that this historical gem stays healthy and thriving.

Most Sincerely,

Paul and Barbara Adamez

Glen Burnie, Md

Monday, May 31, 2021 8:33 PM

May 29, 2021

Jack M. Rife

West Virginia Development Office

1900 Kanawha Blvd East

Building 3 suite 600

Charleston, WV 25305

Dear Mr. Rife,

The Harpers Ferry – Bolivar Merchants Association has long been proponents of the SWaN group's vision to rebuild the historic Hill Top House Hotel. We have watched the hotel's continued deterioration while also watching the deterioration of our infrastructure, the rising cost of our water, as well as dwindling customer visitation rates since the Hill Top House closed its doors nearly 15 years ago.

Members of the Merchants Association have struggled to keep their doors open--through a pandemic, aftermath of fire, bad weather, and winters with few visitors--with the hope that the Town and SWaN could work together so that the Hill Top House Hotel would once again attract guests who would spend time and money in our businesses. To our chagrin, the Town of Harpers Ferry has been unable to find a pathway forward in nearly two decades due to oscillating opinions of two-year termed elected officials.

SWaN's vision of a new Hill Top House Hotel could potentially translate into \$360,000 in new annual revenue for the town of Harpers Ferry. That is money the town would have to spend on parks, the arts, beautification projects such as greenways, trails, highlight our paper streets, cultural events, and so many other needs. The spike in hotel-motel taxes from a new Hill Top could also mean another \$360,000 annually to spend on promoting tourism benefiting the entire county.

Swan's investment will provide an additional \$1 Million a year in tax revenue that can be used to maintain and improve our deteriorating public streets, sidewalks, and other infrastructure throughout our town.

The Merchants Association, which represents over 30 area businesses, requests your approval of SWaN's Tourism Development District application.

Respectfully,

Catherine Baldau on behalf of the HFBMA President

Monday, May 31, 2021 8:44 PM

Dear Mr. Rife,

Please count this letter in support of a Tourism Development District for the Hill Top House in Harpers Ferry.

I own a house about two blocks from the proposed hotel and am greatly in favor of the project. My two 20-something children would have loved to live in Harpers Ferry but there is no work for them there.

The Hill Top will bring much-needed jobs, save the overlook from being a dangerous eyesore, and revitalize a badly aging town.

We need this hotel.

thanks and best,

Patricia

Patricia Weil Coates

Thursday, June 3, 2021 3:02 PM

Dear Mr. Rife. I am writing as a Bolivar Town Council member to share my full support of the SWaN Hill Top Hotel project.

The Town of Harpers Ferry has been unable to find a pathway forward in 14 years due to oscillating opinions of two-year termed elected officials. Gaining state support will provide the continuity needed to get the project completed.

SWaN has taken into consideration the historic preservation of Hill Top resources and has developed a design that will echo architectural elements of the past hotel and the historic town. In addition, the refined 2018 design has reduced gross square footage by almost 30%. They have also guaranteed that two scenic overlooks will be available for public access 24/7.

The towns of Harpers Ferry and Bolivar will be positively transformed with the opening of this hotel. I believe that small businesses in both towns will flourish with the increased visitation. In addition, increased tax revenue will help support an aging infrastructure. As the gateway community to greater West Virginia this hotel will set a new standard for our recreational economy.

Please approve SWaN's Tourism Development District application.

Sandi Marra