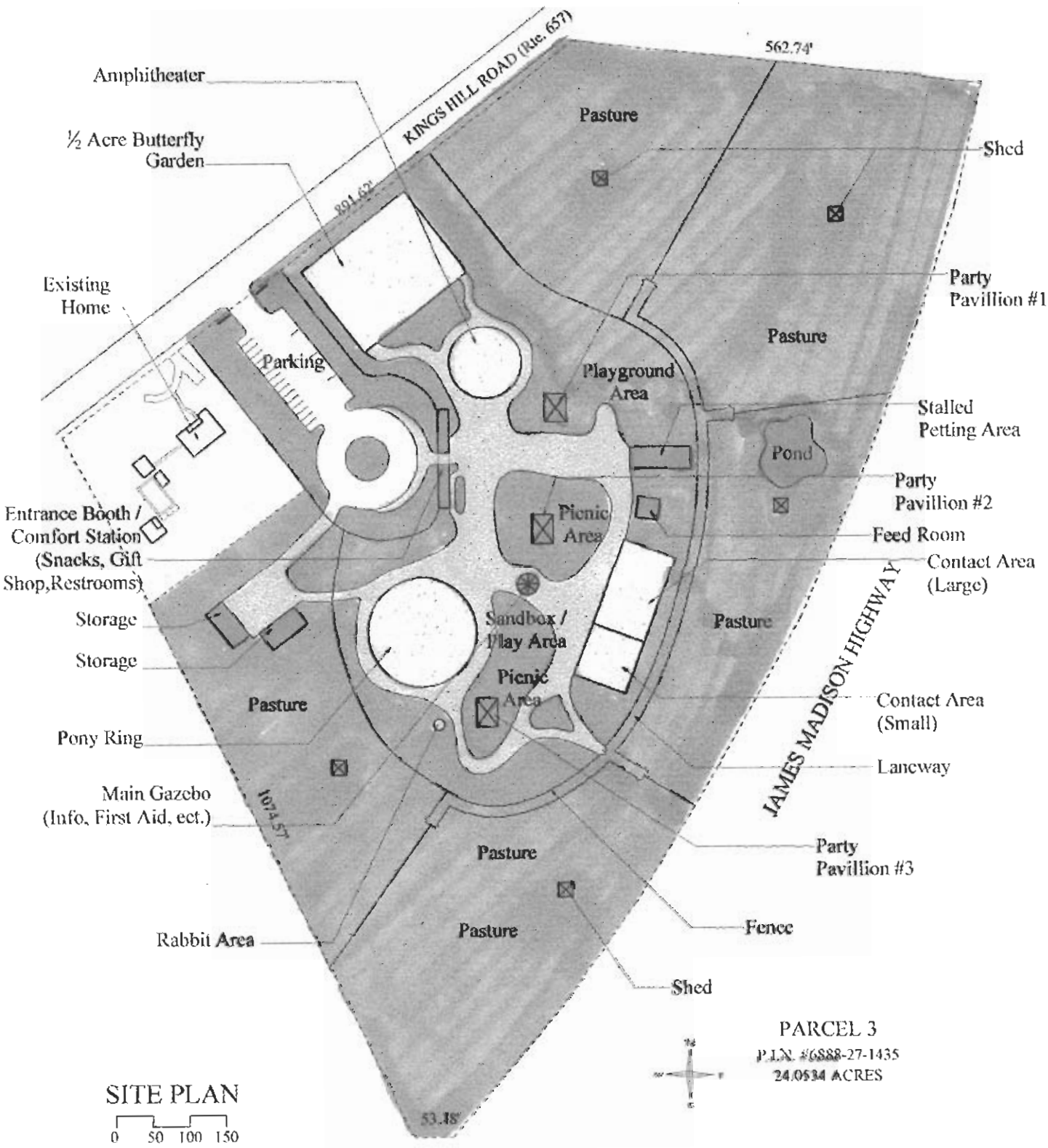

ANIMAL FARM

SLA

Times-Democrat Staff Photo/Mark F. Sypher

FIRST STEPS: Before Ruta and Ali Qureshi can create a petting zoo on their Bealeton farm, a zoning ordinance must be amended.

Planners consider petting zoo

By Cheryl K. Chumley
Times-Democrat Staff Writer

On one hand, it's just a petting zoo, so what's the big deal? But on the other, it's a binding legal action that must be executed with precision, with long-term land planning in mind.

At issue is whether Fauquier County Planning Commission members should amend the zoning ordinance to allow for petting zoos on rural agricultural lands that span at least 20 acres.

The idea was broached after Ali and Ruta Qureshi requested a permit to operate such a business at their 24-acre Kings Hill Road residence, located near the intersection of U.S. 29 and Route 28 in Bealeton. Current zoning law does not allow for the operation.

But before commissioners can consider the Qureshis' business venture, they first must amend the ordinance — an exacting undertaking, given

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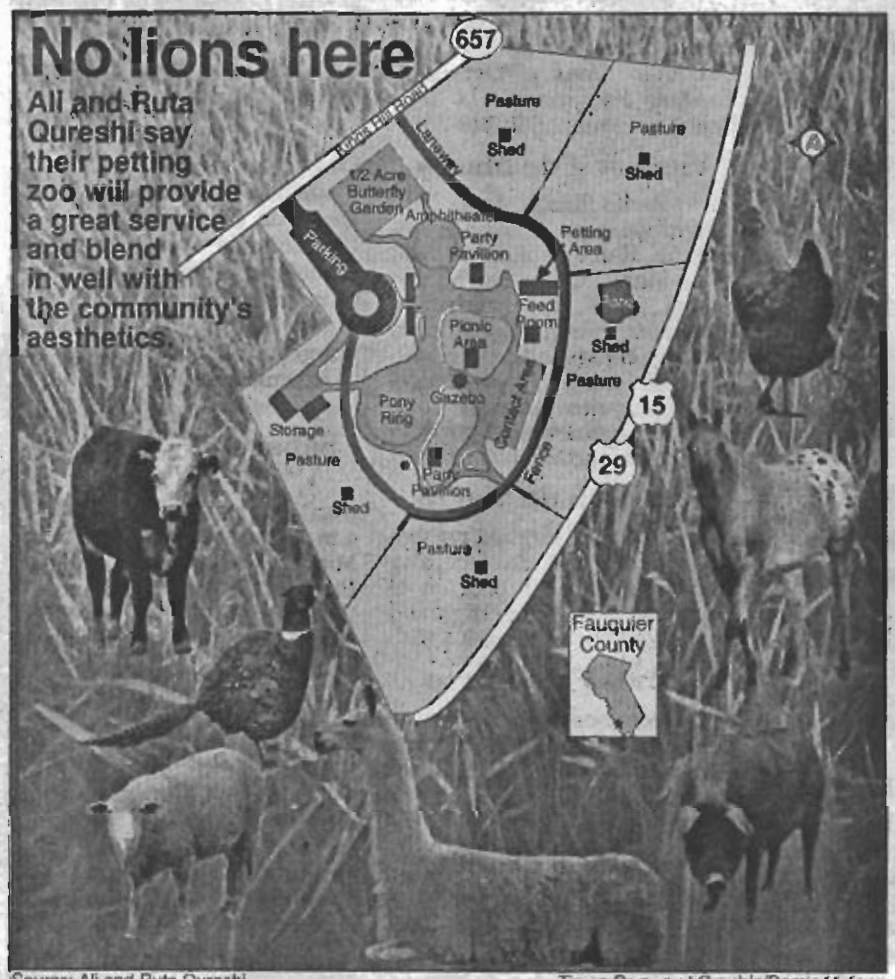
Country Cookin
Small Change



Source: Ali and Ruta Qureshi

Times-Democrat Graphic/Damie Malone

Zoo

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the need to predict and control which animals future zookeepers might request.

"We're not the National Zoo," Ruta Qureshi told Planning Commission members, on Jan. 27. "It's going to be a petting farm, and obviously this is going to be more for the younger kids."

Ruta Qureshi possesses extensive experience with animals. She is the manager at Leesburg Animal Park, and is a member of several wildlife and zoo organizations, including the Wildlife Conservation Society and the American Association of Zookeepers Inc.

Ali Qureshi, meanwhile, has a background in business development and marketing.

Requested animals for the Bealeton site range from chickens and goats to donkeys and turkeys, with emus and llamas about the most exotic.

"We can do educational activities," Ruta Qureshi continued, "like introduce kids to farm life ... and help special needs kids, involve them. We also have a specific area assigned for the 4-H Club ... and we can include programs to go along with SOLs (Standards of Learning) for the schools."

As a lighthearted aside, the Planning Commission itself unwittingly drove home the need for animal education in the community, after one member asked for clarification on two listed species.

"A peafowl ... is a peacock," Qureshi answered, "and the guinea fowl, you'd know them as ... hens."

Pausing, she continued: "See, we can include all that as part of the education" offered at the zoo.

The text amendment proposal was delayed 30 days, to give commission members more time to consider the language.

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