

No housing on old farm in Red Hook

■ The Fraleigh property has been bought by the owners of a local diner and will be used for an equestrian center and an inn.

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Gazette Advertiser

RED HOOK — When the old Fraleigh Farm on state Route 199 first went on the market, many Red Hook residents feared the beautiful open space just east of the village would give way to another housing subdivision. But Sam and Arleen Harkins had a different plan.

The Harkinses, who own the historic Red Hook Diner, bought 139 of the available acres and plan on turning the existing brick Victorian home and barns on the land into the Sunset Crest Manor and Equestrian Center.

"We live right across the street from the farm and couldn't bear to see 30 houses instead of open fields," Sam Harkins said. "We were lucky to get the jump on developers."

At the Jan. 28 meeting of the town of Red Hook Planning Board, Harkins submitted plans to subdivide the acreage into three lots: 80 acres for the inn and equestrian center, 44 acres to be sold intact as an estate parcel and 14 acres that may be subdivided into four lots in the future.

Harkins was granted sketch plan approval and preliminary site plan approval for the complex. He also received a special-use permit to operate the

inn.

"Current zoning allows for that use of the land," said Planning Board Chairwoman Marcella Appell. "We're very pleased that local people purchased the property and are going to do something nice with it."

Harkins said the first step is to get the inn up and running.

"The house was built in 1825 and has beautiful workmanship," he said. "We plan on having four rooms with private baths upstairs and two large sitting rooms and a kitchen downstairs."

The home has a weathered brick façade and numerous fireplaces. It sits on a rise above Route 199 at the eastern gateway to the village.

A barn complex sits behind the house. Harkins said he plans to tear down the old barns and build stables and an indoor riding ring — and "we're saving the wood and the weather vanes to see what we can salvage and reuse," he said.

The Harkinses plan to hire a riding instructor to offer lessons and also will board horses for local residents and weekenders.

In time, the Harkins said, he and his wife would like to add a dining facility. "The foundation of the house is constructed with piled stone, and the basement would make a beautiful spot for a small pub and restaurant," Harkins said.

If all goes smoothly, the Harkinses hope to open the inn in June.