



Howard and Lauren Foer bought Poplar Springs in 1995 and grew their catering business to 55 full-time employees.

Staff Photo/Tom Warren

Planned resort and restaurant 'just fine' with Casanova residents

Poplar Springs investment may total \$8 million

By Dale Sinner
Staff Writer

It seems the perfect venue for weddings.

The English-style manor house at Poplar Springs cries out to be photographed with its stately brownstone walls and elegant 1920s architecture.

The airy, high-walled interior already has hosted events drawing up to 500 people.

Owners Howard and Lauren Foer of Bethesda, Md., want to convert the property into a resort — complete with restaurant, conference center and guest suites.

"The change, in a nutshell, is to make it a five-star boutique resort. Casanova is a quaint town, and its accessibility to the metro area makes it a natural setting for a getaway retreat," Mr. Foer said in an interview last Thursday.

"A make-yourself-feel-good place,"

wife and partner Lauren Foer added.

The Foers bought Poplar Springs in 1995 for \$1.1 million and envision the 70-year-old manor house as a 150-seat restaurant.

Construction of a 300-seat conference center would be the first phase of their 5-year renovation.

From 80 to 100 guest rooms would be constructed in later phases, along with a spa, swimming pool, tennis courts, riding trails and workout room.

Everything will be built in architectural harmony with the existing buildings and land — "no neon Motel 6 signs," Mr. Foer said. "Our long term vision is to create a soothing country retreat."

Before they can move ahead with the project, Foers must obtain a special exception permit from the county.

The planning commission on April 29 postponed a recommendation on the permit until the Foers' architect submits detailed drainfield plans.

After planning commission recommendation, final approval rests with the board of supervisors.

But how do the residents of Casanova, people who relish the serenity of their southern Fauquier hamlet, feel about this

THE PROPOSAL

■ **What:** To construct a full-service conference facility and resort on 200-acre grounds of Poplar Springs

■ **Where:** 9245 Rouges Road, Casanova

■ **Who:** Howard and Lauren Foer

■ **Purchase price:** \$1.15 million (1995)

■ **Details:** Plans call for conversion of the manor house into a 150-seat restaurant, the construction of up to a total of 100 guest suites (in several separate buildings), a 15,000-square-foot conference center, spa, tennis courts, stables and owner's residence

■ **What's needed:** A special exception permit from the board of supervisors

■ **Construction:** Could start this fall

■ **Completion:** Fall 2004

■ **Estimated cost:** \$5 million to \$8 million

intrusion into their quiet village?

A March 25 public hearing on the proposal drew no opponents, and Casanova residents said if the Foers continue as the good neighbors they've been for the past three years, the community won't object to the resort.

"I think it's just fine. I can't think of a better use for [the property]. It's a lot better than having it chopped up into a subdivision. I think [the Foers] are interested in the community. And we have a real vested interest in the community," said Joyce Fendly, a 20-year resident of Casanova and joint master of the Casanova Hunt.

"I'd hate to see a subdivision. What they're [the Foer's] are doing sounds right to me," said Samuel Richards, a 30-year resident of the village.

Tom Zelko said if the Foers stick to the plans they have explained to neighbors, he has no objections.

"I don't mind it. I think they've done a good job renovating [the property]. They did it properly. If they do what they say, I wouldn't mind that kind of growth."

Dee Garrett, who serves as Casanova postmaster, said the Foers have been good