

**Albemarle County Planning Commission
Work Session and Regular Meeting
Final Minutes March 11, 2025**

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public meeting on Tuesday, March 11, 2025, at 4:00 p.m.

Members attending were Fred Missel, Chair; Luis Carrazana, Vice-Chair; Julian Bivins; Corey Clayborne; Karen Firehock; Nathan Moore; Lonnie Murray.

Other officials present were Michael Barnes, Director of Planning; Ben Holt; David Benish; Emily Kilroy; Rebecca Ragsdale; Scott Clark; Andy Herrick, County Attorney; and Carolyn Shaffer, Clerk to the Planning Commission.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Ms. Shaffer called the roll.

Mr. Missel established a quorum.

Mr. Missel said that Ms. Firehock was joining in remotely. He asked Ms. Firehock to state her location and reason for remote participation.

Ms. Firehock said that she was joining them remotely from Providence, Rhode Island, where she was currently on a business trip, collaborating with cities to restore tree cover.

(Ms. Firehock did not participate in the vote.)

Mr. Clayborne motioned that the Planning Commission allow Ms. Firehock to participate remotely in the meeting. Mr. Murray seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (5-0).

Mr. Missel said that before they began the work session, he would like to mention a strategy for approaching this. He said that there would be two staff presentations. He said that the first presentation would be followed by a brief opportunity for the Commission to ask questions.

Mr. Missel said that if they had specific questions regarding the presentation, rather than comments on the document itself, he encouraged them to ask questions during this time. He said that he believed Mr. Holt would be presenting first, then Ms. Kilroy would present the next portion.

Public Hearings

SP202400022 Living Earth School

Scott Clark, Conservation Program Manager, said that this presentation was about a proposed special use permit for a camp use. He said that the site was located off of Red Hill Road, adjacent to Walnut Creek Park. He said that the request was for a camp that could accommodate a maximum of 250 attendees for various year-round activities, plus events up to six times per year for a maximum of 500 attendees. He said that the proposed development included camp facilities, staff residences, camping areas, and a pavilion.

Mr. Clark said that the parcels outlined in red on the map were the property for the proposal. He said that they could see the site at the north end of the map, where it touched Red Hill Road,

which would be the entrance on the western boundary. He said that the green area was Walnut Creek Park, directly adjacent. He said that for the remainder of the presentation, the maps they see would have the north at the right, rather than at the top, to fit the plan on the screen well.

Mr. Clark said that in summary, this use would consist of eight weeks per year of summer camp with up to 250 campers. He said that the remaining 44 weeks of the year would have other day and overnight camp activities for up to 100 campers, primarily environmental education and nature-related camps. He said that in addition to the main camp activities, there would be up to 12 programs per year for 200 or fewer attendees, and up to six events for fundraisers and related events from 201 to 500 attendees.

Mr. Clark said that he would show the plan in a moment, but to summarize, the structures on the site would include a welcome pavilion, a main camp hall, cabins, up to six staff residences, miscellaneous structures such as a nature library, a pavilion near the South Fork Hardware floodplain, and greenhouses. He said that a central water and septic system was also proposed for the use.

Mr. Clark said that this proposal had been submitted and was currently under review by the Board of Supervisors. He said that provided was the applicant's conceptual plan. He said that there was one staff residence area located at the front of the property, utilizing an area previously used for a residence, although it was currently vacant.

Mr. Clark said that further back in the property, near White Oak Creek, there was a welcome area featuring a pavilion, parking area, and maintenance building. He said that the main camp area was located beyond White Oak Creek and up the hill, where the camp hall, cabins, and other structures would be situated. He said that at the far southern end, above the floodplain of the South Fork Hardware, there was a pavilion designated for educational activities.

Mr. Clark said that the conceptual plan, which included a separate sheet on vegetation management, divided the property into four zones. He said that Zone 1, marked in the lightest green, was the most intensive area, covering approximately 10 acres. He said that Zones 2 and 3, which were more wooded, allowed for structures such as educational buildings, staff residences, and primitive tent camping areas.

Mr. Clark said that Zone 3 prioritized retaining the forest canopy while permitting limited uses on the ground for tents and tent platforms. He said that the remaining 203 acres fell within Zone 4, an area that would remain forested and not be impacted by structures. He said that the application plan included mitigation measures for potential impacts on adjacent properties, particularly near the welcome area, which featured the welcome pavilion, parking area for drop-off/pick-up, as well as a maintenance building, a greenhouse, and orchard trees.

Mr. Clark said that this maintenance building was the closest point to a dwelling from the Welcome area, approximately 500 feet away. He said that it was also worth noting that the building was 40 feet lower than the dwelling, resulting in no direct line of sight. He said that the applicants had relocated the driveway shown, and the old existing farm road was close to this property line and not screened from the dwelling. He said that by moving the proposed driveway farther into the property, they had increased the setback in the screening, as most of the area between that and the dwelling was wooded.

Mr. Clark said that in the inset on the right, the area near the entrance at the north end of the property showed where one of the staff dwellings would be. He said that there was also screening shown to protect the adjacent property at the bottom from the impacts of the driveway being used.

He said that the dwelling at the bottom was the garage, and the house was slightly farther away. He said that this would provide some screening between the two properties.

Mr. Clark said that under the criterion for character of the nearby area, the aerial photos and conceptual plan showed that the area was generally composed of large, forested parcels with significant open areas, particularly to the north and east, and the public park to the west, which matched this pattern. He said that the park's camp layout also largely matched the surrounding area. He said that to address safety concerns, the property would be accessed by Red Hill Road, a well-maintained road about 24 feet wide with a well-paved center line.

Mr. Clark said that VDOT had no objections to the proposed use. He said that the applicants had requested a critical slopes waiver to allow for the bank to be stabilized along Red Hill Road. He said that specifically, they were asking for a waiver to open up a sight line from the entrance for approximately 2,600 square feet or 0.06 of an acre.

Mr. Clark said that regarding road safety, staff had proposed a condition that the larger six events would require the use of shuttle vehicles instead of individual vehicles to reduce the overall traffic load. He said that under emergency access, the Fire Rescue Department, had reviewed this application and expressed concerns, particularly with the property's length and distance to activity areas, that a clear route be established for emergency vehicles to access the property.

Mr. Clark said that therefore, the applicant had requested a 20-foot improved road surface to accommodate two-way traffic, allowing for simultaneous entry and exit. He said that this requirement was now shown on the plan. He said that they also requested an emergency access plan before use began, which was one of the recommended conditions. He said that as he understood it, this was also required for the applicant's insurance, so it would be implemented before any use commenced.

Mr. Clark said that in terms of consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, this use complied with several criteria, including public awareness of biodiversity in nature, retention of important land cover, especially near rivers and streams, protection of historic and archaeological resources, and provision of information to the public about the rural area. He said that however, this was a form of development in the rural areas which was generally not in compliance with the comp plan. He said that typically, they compared the impacts of a proposed use to what was possible under by-right residential development.

Mr. Clark said that this property could potentially build up to 23 dwellings, with no limits on structure size or road/driveway lengths, and limited control over vegetation changes. He said that in contrast, the camp use had defined vegetation management areas that protected most of the forest cover on the site. He said that to compare traffic impacts between residential and camp uses, he would like to refer to the provided table, specifically the two rows in the middle, which indicated the eight-week period when up to 250 campers could be on site for summer camp.

Mr. Clark said that their worst-case scenarios for traffic generation assumed that every single camper was staying overnight for the entire week. He said that this meant that all campers arrived on Sunday evening and departed on Friday, resulting in peak traffic times that were larger than those for residential development. He said that the second scenario assumed that all 250 campers attended day-by-day, arriving and departing Monday to Friday, which also resulted in higher peak traffic levels than residential development.

Mr. Clark said that these were worst-case scenarios; in reality, it was rare for any given summer camp to be entirely overnight or entirely day campers. He said that as a result, these peak traffic

times were spread out more, rather than concentrated on specific days like Sunday and Friday or every weekday. He said that the remaining 44 weeks were day camps, limited to 100 people, resulting in lower weekday trip levels compared to the 23 dwellings on the site.

Mr. Clark said that in summary, they found two major positive factors: the use limits development impacts compared to what was possible under by-right development, and environmental education aligned with several comprehensive plan goals. He said that they were recommending approval with conditions listed in the staff report. He said that however, they had two changes to those conditions he would like to review with them.

Mr. Clark said that the first change was to Condition 3, which was originally taken from draft conditions from the applicant's previous application at a different location. He said that they were recommending that sections A and B be removed, as they were not applicable to this site. He said that after discussions with the applicants, they were recommending that Condition 8 be deleted. He said that this was a condition requiring Health Department approval before zoning clearance could be granted or approved to initiate use.

Mr. Clark said that this requirement was already addressed in existing sections of the zoning ordinance. He said that there was a concern that including this condition would create the expectation that all systems for all buildings must be built and approved prior to commencing use, which was not the intended outcome. He said that therefore, staff recommended deleting Condition 8.

Mr. Murray asked if a site survey of the streams on this property had been conducted. He said that he noticed a discrepancy when quickly comparing the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) map of streams to the County map of streams. He said that there appeared to be differences in the locations of intermittent streams. He said that he wondered if anyone had site verified the exact locations of the streams. He said that he observed some discrepancies in the topography on the maps that suggested there may be streams not accurately represented on the maps.

Mr. Clark said that he was not aware of any detailed on-site surveys conducted to identify intermittent streams on the property. He said that it was possible that the applicants had conducted more extensive investigations, but he said that he was not aware of any official County surveys that had been conducted to determine stream locations.

Mr. Carrazana said that he had a quick question regarding the requirement for a 20-foot-wide road to accommodate a fire truck in the event of an emergency. He said that he wondered if this requirement would apply to the entire length of the road, and he inquired about alternative solutions, such as hammerheads or other design elements, that would allow for safe turns.

Mr. Clark said that they had had previous discussions about this topic. He said that the site plan stage would resolve this issue once the exact layout was known. He said that the Fire Marshal's Office mentioned that a hammerhead or turnaround might be necessary, but it was unclear at this time. He said that once they had a more defined location for those structures, when the site plan was finalized, Fire Rescue would review the plan and that would be addressed.

Mr. Bivins asked if day camps could be considered equivalent to students who attend on a homeschooling schedule. He said that it was the applicant's narrative that indicated they did homeschooling and had children who attended the day camp every day. He said that he was seeking clarification on whether this terminology was synonymous with what he referred to as a day camp.

Mr. Clark said that the facility was used for day camp activities, which accounted for 44 weeks of the year. He said that it may also host adult groups for environmental education, making it a multi-purpose venue rather than solely dedicated to homeschool groups.

Mr. Bivins said that given that information, he would like to refer back to one of their earlier slides that listed the number of activities taking place at the facility. He said that he would ask the applicant to unpack that data. He said that when they mentioned the weekly camps, he wanted to clarify that he was referring to the regular camps, not the occasional special events or other activities on the property. He said that specifically, he mentioned 44 weeks per year and up to 100 campers per day or per week.

Mr. Clark said that there was a set maximum capacity. He said that he did not believe they anticipated hosting 100 campers every single day. He said that this was a cap for potential activities. He said that the actual number of events per week and hours per day would depend on the group being hosted.

Mr. Bivins said that he would like to ask the applicant to elaborate on that point because it differed from their original statement and this narrative, which suggested a greater number of people attending the event.

Mr. Missel asked if the Planning Commission was making a recommendation on the special use permit but not on the special exception.

Mr. Clark said that that was correct; the special exception was for the critical slopes waiver. He said that if the Commission wished to provide feedback to the Board, they would carry that forward to them, but they were not required to make a motion on this matter.

Mr. Missel opened the public hearing. He asked if the applicant had a presentation.

Kelsey Schlein said that she was a planner with Shimp Engineering. She said that she was assisting Living Earth Sanctuary with their special use permit application. She said that she would now pull up their slides. She said that she would like to thank Mr. Clark for the staff report and his presentation. She said that she would like to turn the presentation over to Hub Knott, who was one of the founders and executive director of Living Earth School.

Hub Knott said that he wanted to extend his gratitude to the Planning Commission for the thoughtful questions they posed, which helped to clarify what would be beneficial for their community. He said that he also wanted to express his sincere appreciation to Scott Clark, who had patiently endured his numerous visits and discussions over the years. He said that he was deeply grateful to the families, who had supported them for 23 years and had given their children the opportunity to participate in their camp programs.

Mr. Knott said that it was truly remarkable to see the spark in their eyes when they returned from their experiences in the woods, and it was a unique and special thing in today's world, where technology often dominated people's experiences. He said that he could address the question the Planning Commission had been asking about unpacking the 44 weeks.

Mr. Knott said that he also provided adult programs, and had observed a remarkable phenomenon, which was that regardless of age, participants returned feeling like children again, and a youthfulness was restored through their reconnections with nature. He said that this

experience had led him to stand there today not for personal reasons, but primarily to continue providing services like theirs in the community.

Mr. Knott said that he had spent considerable time exploring the 287-acre site, including navigating its terrain in various weather conditions, and he had developed a deep appreciation for the land. He said that he had created and studied the species lists, which included 36 species of trees, and he had observed the presence of unique fish in White Oak Creek. He said that he had also seen bobcats and other animals, and he had noticed how their routes impacted their plans for the site.

Mr. Knott said that this unique ecology was home to plants that were found nowhere else, as well as historic sites that offered valuable lessons. He said that a neighbor had shared with him a Native American grinding stone along the river, which had only added to his appreciation for this site. He said that it was a rich and educational resource, and he believed it was essential to preserve its natural beauty and historical significance.

Mr. Knott said that after 23 years of patching together properties, they had built a robust program that took people of all ages on nature walks, teaching them about the importance of interacting with the natural world. He said that they educated them on how to handle encounters with wildlife, such as copperheads and bears, and how to appreciate the beauty of the woods. He said that this experience had a profound impact on the participants, and it brought a sense of ease and wonder to their souls.

Mr. Knott said that this why he was here today - to create a lasting legacy that would extend beyond his own lifetime, and to ensure that this land was protected for the next hundred years. He said that the people who had helped purchase this land were conservationists who had set aside several thousand acres in easement. He said that their goal was to safeguard this land for the long term, and he was committed to making that happen.

Mr. Knott said that they had to protect their resources, but also utilize them to educate the next generation, inspiring them to care for the earth and people. He said that he had seen firsthand how their work had impacted the lives of the children they had worked with, who had credited their programs with influencing their career choices and giving them a sense of belonging. He said that their core values were centered around earth care and people care, which guided everything they taught.

Mr. Knott said that they were thrilled about the prospect of sharing this land with the community and creating a place that Charlottesville could be proud of, where people of all ages could come together to learn and care for the land. He said that he had been working with a group of elders recently, and it had been rewarding to see the connections they made across generations, from young children to older adults, who felt a sense of home and belonging. He said that they were committed to caring for the land, and that was why he was there.

Mr. Knott said that he wished that the Commissioners could see when the children returned to camp, witnessing the transformation that occurred when they were immersed in this experience. He said that they often came to them feeling disconnected due to being on their phones so often, but these programs brought them back to life. He said that he was grateful for the hard work of his staff, who made this possible, and the dedication from the community. He said that he must admit that patching together solutions was exhausting, and children needed a stable, nurturing environment.

Ms. Schlein said that she believed the property was truly special and unique. She said that it was not only suitable for the proposed use, but also from an ecological, transportation, and access perspective. She said that the large 287-acre site allowed them to concentrate the uses and programming in a way that minimized impact on the neighbors. She said that in her opinion, the property checked many boxes from an impacts and planning standpoint.

Ms. Schlein said that they had provided some site photos. She said that on the left, the most prominent photo showed a meadow as one entered the property near the welcome area. She said that the middle photo featured the Hardware River at the rear of the property. She said that the right photo showed some of the historic stone walls that Mr. Clark mentioned in his staff report, which would be preserved in areas with minimal human impact.

Ms. Schlein said that there were a few more photos, including the central meadow area where the main camp and proposed structures would be located. She said that as they moved into the site plan, she would like to highlight how they had laid out the site. She said that they were fortunate that the high point on the site, with the open meadow, was centrally located and could support the proposed structures, as well as the necessary septic systems for a full build-out of the campus.

Ms. Schlein said that they had developed systems necessary to support a full build-out of this camp, with the greatest impact at the site's core and the least impact around the periphery, adjacent to neighbors. She said that this approach was cited in their primitive camp areas. She said that however, despite proposed improvements on the site, they were still approximately 500 feet from the nearest residence, and this was visible at the welcome center as you approached the site.

Ms. Schlein said that the craft and maintenance barn, garden center, and other envisioned features were located near White Oak Creek, where the majority of buildings were proposed in the open central meadow. She said that the staff residence area, primitive camp areas, and additional primitive camp areas were also located in this area, near the rear of the property, providing access and shade for children enjoying the Hardware River.

Ms. Schlein said that their concept plan defined specific areas and programmed the site for use, directly tied to their vegetative management plan. She said that Mr. Knott and his team had been working closely with the Department of Forestry on a stewardship plan, which was one of the most comprehensive forest management plans the Department of Forestry prepared. She said that as a result, Mr. Knott had been working closely with them to develop a comprehensive plan for long-term forest management on this property.

Ms. Schlein said that as it could be seen, they had included more detailed information in their concept plan and materials about what was permitted on these sites. She said that notably, 83% of the site would remain unchanged, with minimal primitive trails and septic systems kept out of those areas, while utilizing the most suitable soils for improvements. She said that they were also mindful of distances to nearby residences, with their closest structure approximately 500 feet away and the main camp area nearly 2,000 feet away.

Ms. Schlein said that their proposed staff residence area was approximately 1,500 to 2,300 square feet. She said that given the site's layout, they believed it could be developed with minimal impact on adjacent property owners. She said that as Mr. Clark had mentioned, the property could be developed with 23 single-family dwelling units.

Ms. Schlein said that in terms of impacts, they believed this proposed use had significantly less impact than the buy-right use. She said that furthermore, they thought this site had the potential to be a great community asset, allowing people to enjoy nature rather than maintaining a highly privatized environment.

Ms. Schlein said that for the revised conditions, Mr. Clark had already addressed two items. She said that she would like to note that they had previously included a request for shuttle services for larger events, such as community and fundraiser events. She said that specifically, they would like the shuttle service to be implemented after 200 people arrive, allowing up to 200 individuals to access the site in their personal vehicles. She said that they also requested amplified sound in the welcome area. She said that they were willing to commit to a restricted set of hours for the shuttle service, if needed.

Mr. Bivins said that in the applicant's narrative, there was a mention of the space being used for homeschooled children. He said that he would like to know how many of those children would be using the space on a daily basis, in order to gain a better understanding of what to expect in terms of usage and flow onto the property.

Mr. Knott said that currently, they offered homeschool programs. He said that in the Charlottesville area, they hosted two days a week, accommodating a maximum of 36 children. He said that occasionally, other groups reached out to request programs for 20 children, which created a scheduling challenge. He said that they were trying to figure out how to accommodate these requests without setting specific days for programs, while still allowing for flexibility. He said that currently, they did not have a system in place for this.

Mr. Knott said that they offered homeschool programs in Goochland and Staunton, and they also provided adult programs, which had shown demand during the week. He said that they had not been able to offer these programs due to inadequate site space. He said that developing their elder program was a priority, and they were looking for ways to create more spaciousness. He said that most weeks, they did not have a full schedule, with only four or five days of activity.

Mr. Murray asked if the applicant conducted a site survey of the streams on the property.

Ms. Schlein said that while a comprehensive site survey of the streams had not been completed yet, Mr. Knott had had the opportunity to walk the property on multiple occasions, and he could provide more insight into that.

Mr. Knott said that there was no official data, but he was aware that the Hardware River had undergone numerous studies. He said that he had also conducted his own surveys, although he acknowledged that these may not carry significant weight in this context. He said that he did have knowledge of the fish species present in the creeks and could identify which ones were indicative of healthy streams and which ones were not.

Mr. Murray said that his concern lies in the requirement for a 100-foot buffer on perennial and intermittent streams. He said that specifically, he was wondering if there had been instances in Albemarle County's rural area where undocumented streams were present on the County map. He said that this was a relatively frequent occurrence in the rural area. He said that when comparing the County map to the DCR's map, discrepancies in stream locations were noticeable. He said that he was concerned that site verification would not occur before development took place, ensuring the accurate presence of streams.

Mr. Knott said that, according to the site plan, that was part of the process. He said that he was familiar with the location and could identify the perennial streams on the map. He said that last summer had been a dry season, but there were still many of the undulations in the area, and he noticed that many of those were dry at this time of year.

Mr. Murray said that if they looked directly above zone one on the topography map, they would see a very steep, V-shaped area. He said that this V-shape appeared to be very easily erodible, and it was possible that a stream could be there, as well as one that flowed down below it.

Mr. Knott said that the slope was steep, but it was dry and had always been dry. He said that even though there were rushes and sedges that indicated wet zones, he did not see any in that particular area. He said that during the hurricane when the river rose 16 feet, that area did not flow, even though it had rained heavily.

Mr. Murray said that as a follow-up, he wanted to mention that the property appeared to be fully vegetated, but he assumed that the owner was already aware that there was a bacterial Total Maximum Daily Load designation for contamination of the Hardware River.

Mr. Knott said that from his research, he had found that their section of the North Fork was mostly considered a healthier part of the overall watershed. He said that he had concerns about the impaired section, particularly since he had children who participated in this program. He said that as their supervisor, his top priority was ensuring their safety and well-being. He said that so far, they had been successful in this regard. He said that he had looked into the impaired section because he was concerned about the potential risks, especially since children were naturally drawn to water. He said that he had taken steps to investigate this further.

Mr. Murray said that the applicant might consider including stream monitoring as one of his activities.

Mr. Knott said that they had been discussing with UVA the possibility of bringing their PhD students to conduct bio blitzes, focusing on mussel research, stream monitoring, and assessing the overall health of the area. He said that their goal was to start creating lists of key data points to track over time, not only to measure their camp's impact but also to educate the next generation about stream health and how to improve it, as it was crucial in their region. He said that one notable example was the significant amount of impaired streams in their area.

Mr. Knott said that he had personally walked a mile of the Hardware on this property and was surprised to find almost no trash, with the exception of a single tire. He said that he was grateful for the relatively clean condition of the property, especially considering the extensive length he had walked. He said that however, they did plan to address invasive species as part of their forestry management plan.

Mr. Moore said that he was reviewing the GIS web data on these parcels and noticed that they were already in the use value taxation program. He said that he was curious to know if this program would be continued, or as a non-profit school, did they qualify for a property tax exemption.

Mr. Knott said that he was unsure if they would be able to purchase the property, as it was currently owned by an LLC. He said that they hoped to buy it out from the individual who purchased it for them, who had done so with the intention of giving them time to establish themselves. She said that she believed in their mission and wanted to support them, and her plan was to purchase the property and help them get established. He said that their goal was to put

the property under easement and work with the Nature Conservancy to preserve it. He said that the Nature Conservancy had expressed interest in supporting their efforts, and he was hopeful that they could continue the current land use.

Mr. Knott said that the Virginia Department of Forestry had also been involved, and after walking the property with him, and noted that it was a relatively healthy patch of forest, with some problem areas, but overall, it was a unique and valuable asset. He said that he was particularly impressed by the fact that it had been largely forgotten, having been owned by a family since the 1950s, and that they did not reside in the state, making it a fortunate circumstance for them.

Ms. Firehock said that she wanted to express her gratitude for the wonderful use of the land, which she believed was compatible with their County park. She said that one of their constituents had asked her about the number of people who would be living in the houses, and he had mentioned the number of houses and counselors. She said that she would like to clarify how many people would be living full-time on the site.

Ms. Firehock said that she was wondering if they planned to host events that were fundraisers but not directly related to their core mission, such as weddings. She said that she was concerned about the potential impact of these events, as they could raise money but were not typically connected to nature study.

Ms. Firehock said that she had a question regarding the new road location, specifically that he had mentioned moving it away from the neighbor, but she was curious if they had conducted a survey and engineering to determine the suitability of the lower land area. She said that she was particularly concerned about the soils, stability, and potential need for blasting, and whether this location was crucial at this stage of the application and would impact the overall feasibility of the project.

Mr. Knott said that regarding the road, he recently walked the new site with a road builder who had experience in the North Garden area, particularly on rural farms. He said that although he was not an engineer, he had built many roads in the area. He said that the site they looked at was different from the rocky zone they visited, as it was located in an area that was already partially cleared, resembling a meadow but with many invasive species. He said that they would need to remove the invasives. He said that the slope and pitch of the site would be suitable for a road that met their 20-foot width requirements.

Mr. Knott said that with the site plan, there was still much to be determined regarding its feasibility. He said that the staff residences would be set up as single-family homes, providing a more comfortable living arrangement for their staff. He said that this was particularly important in this area, where housing was a significant issue, especially for a nature program like theirs. He said that they were not a tech company with a high income, so providing housing was a valuable incentive to retain quality staff.

Mr. Knott said that the staff residences would be designed to accommodate single families or one staff member per bedroom, not large group housing. He said that during the summer, they typically had a dozen or so staff members staying on site for overnight camps, often in canvas tents or camp cabins for a few weeks before returning home. He said that they were not looking to establish a permanent residence for 30 people year-round.

Ms. Firehock said that she believed that his response was the best answer available for now. She said that she would still like to hear about whether he would be hosting unrelated events, such as weddings, in addition to the events he was currently planning.

Ms. Schlein said that for events with up to 200 people, they had mentioned in their application that these could be made available to outside parties, including corporate groups, weddings, and limited to 12 per year. She said that for larger events, they described them as community and fundraiser events. She said that it was something they had discussed at length, and it was an additional revenue stream that would greatly benefit the school. She said that they were trying to strike a balance between a scale that had minimal impact, while also enabling the school to generate rental income.

Ms. Firehock asked if Ms. Schlein could repeat her response. She asked if she could clarify regarding the number of events that would be approximately 200, and the number of events that would be larger, around 500.

Ms. Schlein said that there would be up to 12 events per year with a maximum of 200 attendees, and up to six events per year with a maximum of 500 attendees.

Ms. Firehock said that she assumed they would have all current provisions against outdoor amplified sound, as well as other relevant regulations, in place for those events.

Ms. Schlein said that that was correct; it was subject to the County noise ordinance.

Mr. Knott said that to elaborate, it was similar to many of the camps he had spoken with, such as Camp Holiday Trails. He said that while some of these facilities relied heavily on accessory revenue, the primary purpose of their facility was not to generate that income. He said that they would have an excellent facility that could be used for other purposes, such as retreats or events, which would help sustain it when it was not in use. He said that this would be a valuable asset, but it was not something they would prioritize initially due to limited space.

Mr. Missel said that he had a couple of quick comments. He said that he would like to express his gratitude for their efforts. He said that he believed that this project was perfect for the rural area, as it presented an opportunity to engage with and appreciate the natural surroundings. He said that he thought that what they were doing was commendable. He said that although they would not be making a motion on the special exception, this proposal did raise questions about critical slopes, and he noticed some other critical slopes on the map. He said that he was curious to know if they had considered strategic approaches to building on the land, such as lightly constructing on the site while respecting the natural terrain. He said that he would like to know if they had any plans for phasing the project, including which areas they might start with and how that would work.

Ms. Schlein said that one of the first conversations Mr. Knott and she had after visiting the property was about the construction. She said that there were several nice groves of mature hardwoods that were spaced out well, and they had discussed using shallow foundations, minimizing footprints, and strategically placing buildings among the trees. She said that this was one of the first conversations they had after she had walked the entire site and they discussed how they wanted to lay out the project.

Mr. Knott said that he was extremely excited about this project. He said that he had been meeting with various builders in town, including the individual who specialized in Geobarns and other environmentally conscious builders known for their thoughtful landscape designs. He said that to him, this was crucial, not just for this site, but also for the community, as people tended to repeat what they saw.

Mr. Knott said that if they showcased well-designed buildings with a good flow, that were light on the land, people would take notice, be inspired by it, and hopefully replicate it. He said that he believed that even the smallest details, such as the buildings, the trash, and everything else, presented an opportunity to teach and set a positive example. He said that this site could be a living laboratory, and he was eager to explore how to make it work.

Mr. Knott said that although they had not finalized every building detail, he was confident that they would not start a project until they had a solid plan in place. He said that earth care was a top priority for him, and he aimed to incorporate it into their design, potentially reusing reclaimed materials from the cleared road area, where they could mill and reuse the trees.

Mr. Missel asked how they were addressing the water and sewer aspects of this project.

Ms. Schlein said that currently, it seemed that there was a significant amount of suitable soil, which would likely support a conventional system. She said that they were not ruling out the possibility of an alternative solution. She said that conventional septic would undoubtedly save a substantial amount of money, and therefore, that would be their initial target. She said that the state permitted certain types of privies in primitive areas, such as composting toilets, which were also worth considering.

Mr. Knott said that he had discussed this topic with individuals in the health department, as he believed it was essential to address the importance of waste management. He said that specifically, he was concerned about the permitting process for composting and toilet systems, which seemed to be on a gray area. He said that he understood that any new construction must meet the necessary regulations, which was why he was hoping to create an educational initiative around waste management with the system they would choose.

Mr. Bivins asked if the permanent residence would have its own well and septic system.

Mr. Knott said that yes, there was already a well tap there.

Mr. Bivins asked if the staff residences would be on well and septic.

Ms. Schlein said that it would likely be an individual well and septic system for the house.

Ms. Schlein said that they could connect up to two houses to each water and sewer system.

Mr. Bivins asked if there would be a separate septic system for the area with the library and welcome area.

Ms. Schlein said yes.

Mr. Bivins asked what would be located in the primitive areas.

Ms. Schlein said that the scope of their request included the submission of a Central Water and Sewer Request, which was specific to the main camp area. She said that this was because they were requesting more than two connections to a single well or septic system in that area, with four connections in the main camp.

Ms. Schlein said that in the other areas, they were limiting connections to two or less per well or septic system. She said that unless required by any state code or County code, the primitive areas would not have well or septic systems.

Mr. Bivins asked if anything would be installed for the pavilion area.

Ms. Schlein said that they would only install something if required by the building code.

Mr. Bivins asked how they would serve children with disabilities who may not be able to quickly return to the main camp area.

Mr. Knott said that from the pavilion area, they utilized a hay wagon, which was sometimes accompanied by a truck or tractor to transport people. He said that this was one way to cover the distance. He said that he understood what Mr. Bivins meant, as it could be a considerable distance. He said that when they were out in such locations, they often brought large Gatorade containers filled with water. He said that they had considered using all-terrain vehicles to move people around.

Mr. Missel asked if any members of the public wished to speak on this item.

Mark Jackson, Samuel Miller District, said that he lived on Red Hill Road with his wife, Ellen. He said that they owned TMP-101-58, which bordered the east side of TMP-101-20, one of the parcels in the application. He said that they had owned their property since 2020 and had been living on it since 2012. He said that the property was heavily forested, except for the acreage immediately surrounding their home, which was approximately 200 feet from the property line and about 1,000 feet from the proposed primitive camp areas 2 and 3. He said that they strived to be good stewards of their property and recognized that what happened on it did not necessarily stop at the property line.

Mr. Jackson said that they became aware of the Living Earth School Plan through a letter last month from the Planning Division. He said that initially, his reaction was not positive. He said that many of them disliked change, especially when it was located next door. He said that however, over the past month, they had learned more about the school's mission and approaches and had developed a cautious acceptance of their plans. He said that as owners of adjoining property, they did have concerns regarding specifics. He said that his primary concern was camp and cooking fires.

Mr. Jackson said that in the plans for fire prevention and suppression to mitigate wildfires, they were particularly concerned about fires in the primitive camp areas 2 and 3, identified as zone three on sheet six of the February 27 concept plan revision. He said that fires in the primitive camp areas posed a higher risk than the main camp area due to the thickly wooded nature of the area and its proximity to densely vegetated zones identified as Zone 4 in the concept plan. He said that these zones were a natural tinderbox, which would impede access to the fire department, in contrast to the main camp area, which was more accessible to fire trucks.

Mr. Jackson said that additionally, prevalent winds came from the west and would fan flames in their direction in the case of a wildfire. He said that given the recent fire weather statements in 2025, with warnings almost weekly in their area, the risk of potential devastation was very concerning. He said that they hoped that fires would not be built in the primitive camp areas, given their proximity to the site.

Mr. Jackson said that his second concern was the use of White Oak Creek. He said that project narratives from August 24 and February 25 referred to the creek as a designated water supply source in a fire emergency. He said that the February 25 narrative further clarified that if additional

water supply was deemed necessary during the site plan process, the applicant would provide on-site water storage tanks.

Mr. Jackson said that this statement left open the possibility of utilizing the creek as an initial water source, supplemented by auxiliary storage. He said that White Oak Creek flowed through their property, and he was aware that it was not a reliable source for firefighting. He said that he had observed it to be dramatically reduced on many occasions.

Mr. Jackson said that the creek supported a diverse range of flora and fauna, and its current state served as an excellent educational resource for teaching camp attendees about various elements of nature. He said that any use of White Oak Creek for firefighting or other purposes that would negatively impact the habitat, stream flow, and ecosystem would be unacceptable. He said that they strongly opposed any use of White Oak Creek for firefighting or any other purposes that would impact the stream flow and believed it should be specifically ruled out at the outset.

Scott Cunningham said that as a former employee of Living Earth School, he was proud to have played a role in helping the organization reach this milestone. He said that over the past 23 years, this organization had demonstrated a remarkable commitment to teaching and educating families about the environment, conservation, and responsible stewardship of nature.

Mr. Cunningham said that the organization's mission to empower young people and their parents to become part of a sustainable future was truly commendable. He said that he believed it was a great organization, and he was heartened by the prospect of it continuing as a nonprofit for many years to come. He said that as it could be seen, it had garnered significant support, with tens of thousands of people having benefited from the program.

Mr. Cunningham said that this was a regional gem, with a strong presence on the east coast, where families brought their children to experience the program during the summer. He said that he believed it had the potential to become a larger regional tourist and education center for nature, rivaling anything else on the east coast. He said that it had already gained significant mind share and traction across every state on their coast.

Mr. Cunningham said that at its core, the organization was teaching stewardship, equipping people with the knowledge to understand and care for the land, nature, and their place within it. He said that he truly believed this was a great opportunity, and he hoped the Commission would consider supporting it. He said that the organization had been searching for years for a suitable piece of land, and he was pleased to note that this beautiful property was not only ideal but also conveniently located next to Walnut Creek Park, making it an especially attractive option.

Joe Murray said that he was from Baltimore County, Maryland. He said that he had a house in Nelson County and had been working with Mr. Knott for about 25 years. He said that The Nature Connection Movement had been around for quite some time, and he had seen hundreds of schools implement its principles. He said that in his experience, Living Earth did it better than most.

Mr. Murray said that he was involved in founding the ancestral knowledge aspect of this movement. He said that one of the notable aspects of these schools was the rapid return of plant species that were previously absent from the area for centuries. He said that animal populations also tended to flourish under the methods of land tending that they had been taught. He said that he had also observed the impact on teenagers who participated in these programs.

Mr. Murray said that he had never seen programs as powerful as these ones. He said that his friends who worked with Living Earth shared his enthusiasm. He said that he had worked with organizations like Outward Bound and Knowles, but Living Earth stood out for its exceptional results. He said that it was truly life-changing, and he had seen very few places achieve this level of success.

Mr. Murray said that he wished more young people could experience the energy and vitality of these students. He said that this school had been searching for a stable home for a long time. He said that fortunately, they had found it here, and he believed that organizations like UVA and other nature conservancies would be equally impressed by their efforts and the impact on the land.

Valerie Goodman said that she had lived in Charlottesville for 37 years. She said that she had been a nurse at UVA for 30 years. She said that at retirement, she sought to find something outside of herself that had meaning and served the community. She said that she was now the Board president of the Living Earth School, a position that has given her a sense of purpose.

Ms. Goodman said that her children had attended the Living Earth School as young students, and she had a personal connection to the school through her son. She said that when her son was a teenager, she had wanted to give him the freedom to explore, so she had entrusted him to Mr. Knott's care. She said that he had taken him under his wing and provided a nurturing environment, and he had been an important part of her life ever since.

Ms. Goodman said that having seen Living Earth from both as a parent and as a board member, she could assure the Commission that this land would be lovingly cared for. She said that she was sure that they had all had a connection to the land in their lives. She said that she had had the opportunity to spend time on this land at least a dozen times. She said that they often shared their experiences with each other, whether it was discovering a beautiful spot with pinecones or marveling at a unique rock formation.

Ms. Goodman said that she envisioned children playing on the land, hopping from one feature to the next. She said that she wanted to assure the Commission that this land was an integral part of the Living Earth School family, even if they were not yet ready to reach the green light. She said that she promised that they would be good neighbors. She said that she invited anyone in the community to contact her directly at her personal phone number to reach out and stay informed. She said that if they supported the project, it would be a lasting legacy.

Katherine Abbott said that her family and she had moved to Charlottesville in 2019 after her husband retired from the United States Navy. She said that her children had grown up in places like San Diego and New Orleans. She said that as a farm girl from the eastern shore of Maryland, she wanted them to experience Nature Connection. She said that she had enrolled them in Living Earth School, and she believed that protecting what they loved was closely tied to loving what they knew.

Ms. Abbott said that through Living Earth School, her children had had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the natural world and develop a deep connection to it, just as she had when she was growing up in a rural area. She said that this experience had allowed them to form meaningful connections with their peers and the natural world. She said that it would have a lasting impact on their lives. She said that as a board member and now an employee of Living Earth School, she was committed to working with them on this project. She said that she appreciated that the Commission valued environmental stewardship and education for their community, which was particularly crucial in 2025.

Lisa Gorsch said that she lived on a property that abuts the Living Earth School property, and they share about half of the eastern property line, which includes the North Fork of the Hardware River. She said that change can be challenging, especially when a development is proposed; however, she wanted to express her strong support for the Living Earth School. She said that one reason was that she had a personal connection to the area; as a former teacher in Albemarle County, she had taught biology to both middle school and high school students.

Ms. Gorsch said that she had found that taking her students outside, regardless of the distance, had a profound impact on their attitudes and interests in the natural world. She said that it truly brought them to life. She said that she was delighted that this organization was dedicated to doing the same at a larger scale. She said that on a personal level, her husband and she had raised two children on this property, and they had had many magical times with their children along the Hardware River.

Ms. Gorsch said that it was a truly special place, and she thought it was wonderful that others would have the opportunity to experience it. She said that she had also noticed a significant improvement in the river's ecosystem; as of a few years ago, there were still freshwater mussels in the river, and now she had seen an increase in fish populations.

Ms. Gorsch said that perhaps most remarkable, however, was the experience her daughter had when she was around 11. She said that she had gone into nature and found an orphaned baby beaver, which they had cared for over the course of three days. She said that it was an incredible experience, and she thought it was a testament to the beauty and wonder of the area.

John Outland said that he was a board member and also had the opportunity to send his daughter to the Living Earth School for summer camp. He said that as an outdoor educator for 25 years and a special needs educator for over 30 years, he had seen firsthand the importance of nature in their children's lives. He said that he was convinced that there was a nature deficit disorder affecting their youth, and it was a significant problem they were facing.

Mr. Outland said that as a parent of three teenagers, he had often wondered how to keep them engaged, educated, and healthy during the summer months. He said that both his wife and he worked full-time, making it challenging to provide them with the outdoor experiences they needed. He said that knowing that places like the Living Earth School existed, which not only entertained but also educated children, filled him with joy.

Mr. Outland said that when he returned home, he was often greeted by the sight of a toad in their driveway, which his daughter excitedly photographed and shared with her friends from camp. He said that they spent 15 minutes discussing the toad's characteristics, breaking down the information in a way that was both fun and educational.

Mr. Outland said that this was a dying aspect of their society. He said that if they could establish a place like the Living Earth School, where children could get outside and learn, he believed it was essential. He said that he did not want to get too philosophical, but he thought there was something in their DNA that was released when they were outside.

Mr. Outland said that Mr. Knott had found a way to create an environment that maximized joy, inspired awe, and fostered a sense of community, where children could educate each other about the beauty of nature. He said that finding 287 acres of land that was not covered in loblolly pines was extremely challenging, especially in Albemarle County. He said that securing affordable land with water frontage was nearly impossible.

Mr. Outland said that this was a rare find. He said that he believed this was a green light moment for the Living Earth School, and he looked forward to collaborating with them and the County to find ways to maximize the land's potential while doing so in a responsible manner.

Jack Ontis said that he grew up in Charlottesville and first attended programs at the Living Earth School approximately 15 years ago. He said that he currently worked there and had held various positions, including summer camp instructor and year-round staff, for the past seven years. He said that he could speak firsthand to the impact that the Living Earth School's programming had on his life and the lives of his peers who attended the programs alongside him.

Mr. Ontis said that the programming had not only deepened his knowledge and care for nature but also instilled in him a sense of responsibility to protect and preserve specific places over time. He said that he had seen this transformation in the children he taught now, who not only developed a strong connection to the natural world but also gained the vision and clarity to pursue their goals and make a positive impact on others.

Mr. Ontis said that the Living Earth School taught these valuable lessons, often without even realizing it, and it was truly beautiful. He said that having access to this land, where they could connect with others and work together to care for it, was essential in the long run. He said that he believed that this experience would not only benefit this piece of land, but also the students who would touch the land in the future.

Mr. Missel asked if the applicant would like to respond to the public comments.

Ms. Schlein said that she would like to respond to some of the comments made, particularly Mr. Jackson's concerns regarding fire safety. She said that she and Mr. Knott had discussed the programming, and one of the first topics he addressed with his students was the importance of being in nature and the potential hazards that came with it, including the need to be responsible with campfires. She said that this was a crucial aspect of educational programming.

Ms. Schlein said that, according to the County's supplemental regulations for boarding camps, provisions for outdoor cooking and campfires were subject to approval by the Albemarle County Fire Marshal. She said that this regulation applied to this property as well. She said that regarding designating White Oak Creek as a water source for firefighting, this was a topic of discussion with the County and the Fire Marshal during initial conversations about finding suitable water supply systems.

Ms. Schlein said that they would work through these details during the site plan phase and ensure compliance with building codes. She said that the issue may be dependent on how big the buildings were. She said that in many cases, a water tank would be required. She said that if sufficient water was available in White Oak Creek, the Fire Department was unlikely to overlook it as a resource to help fight a fire.

Ms. Schlein said that these were the key points they were addressing during the special use permit phase, and she believed they had a clear path forward. She said that ultimately, the outcome would depend on the size of the buildings on the site.

Mr. Knott said that during his walk with the Virginia Department of Forestry, he brought up White Oak Creek. He said that he specifically asked if the creek would be used for fire prevention. He said that the response was that they would not use White Oak Creek; they would proceed directly to Walnut Creek, utilizing the reservoir. He said that this approach has been taken in the area before, as it is the largest water source.

Mr. Knott said that they had already established a plan of action for this scenario, and it had been thoroughly thought out. He said that White Oak Creek was often proposed by various individuals in the County, but the Department of Forestry's approach was to head to the larger lake in the event of a forest fire. He said that this thought process may not fully address the issue, but it was one consideration.

Mr. Bivins said that he was supportive of this project. He said that he hoped that the website would showcase a bit more diversity in its content on the next visit. He said that currently, it appeared to be lacking in this regard, and it did not accurately reflect that Albemarle was a community that lived there. He said that this was something that bothered him in a very specific way, and it needed to change. He said that he would simply state this.

Mr. Bivins said that as someone who was not the chair, he did not feel obligated to be diplomatic if he did not want to be. He said that he agreed with the proposal, and he particularly appreciated that it was located next to Walnut, which aligned with their previous discussions about increasing the presence of these types of spaces.

Mr. Bivins said that he was interested in seeing how it would transition from an undeveloped site to a more developed area with six sewage systems and six wells. He said that this certainly would be less impactful than 23 homes, which he was glad to see. He said that he hoped that the curve on Red Hill Road received some attention, as it could improve traffic flow both for those entering the property and those traveling down the road.

Mr. Missel said that if they had any questions or concerns regarding the edits made to the conditions, they should address them now.

Mr. Bivins said that having been a part of numerous boards in this community, where they often went to outdoor spaces for their children, he was pleased that they would have the opportunity to enjoy these areas. He said that if he were to suggest one area for improvement, it would be the external events. He said that to him, it still felt a bit loose, but he would not propose any changes here at this time. He said that he hoped that before this proposal reached the Board of Supervisors, there would be a bit more tightening up on the language related to condition five. He said that initially, he was under the impression that this space was only for the applicants, but he understood now that it was intended for the community as a whole. He said that he would like to see a bit more narrative from the applicants, so that Supervisors could better understand what they were saying yes or no to.

Mr. Missel said that there was also a request by the applicant to edit condition five, a request to add language regarding events with more than 200 attendees. He said that specifically, it was to require shuttle services for such events.

Mr. Carrazana said that he was in support of this proposal, as he believed the function aligned well with the comprehensive plan for rural areas. He said that one of his concerns, which he believed would be handled at the site plan stage, was parking for events. He said that there were some unclear aspects regarding how events would be handled, especially with regards to parking, as there were no existing parking lots on site.

Mr. Carrazana said that he thought this could be a potential issue that may conflict with the mission's core objective of not paving or creating numerous gravel lots. He said that if up to 500 people were expected to attend, they would need to find a way to get there, and he was unclear about the clarity on this matter. He said that he was not sure if they should address this in a letter

the Board or if it should be handled during the site plan review. He said that however, he was in support of this proposal.

Mr. Clayborne said that he was certainly in support; he believed it was a perfect way to utilize the land. He said that his colleagues had also brought to their attention some valuable points that he thought should be documented.

Mr. Murray said that he was generally in support of this application. He said that Living Earth School were previously utilizing the Sugar Hollow camp for a period of time, and he only had positive things to say about them. He said that they were excellent neighbors to him in Sugar Hollow, and he never had any complaints. He said that one thing to note was that Red Hill Road was a popular route for cyclists as an alternative to entering Charlottesville. He said that therefore, he would caution that everyone should be mindful of cyclists in the area.

Mr. Murray said that he hoped that if the paved margin on the side of the road could be increased in the future, that would be beneficial to everyone. He said that however, he had some concerns regarding the events, particularly the logistics of accommodating additional attendees, parking, and other aspects. He said that he believed that clarity on this matter was necessary.

Mr. Moore said that he was also in support of this initiative. He said that their County had programs in place to reduce property taxes, which could be achieved through conservation easements or use value. He said that he often struggled to understand the public benefit of these programs, as the land was typically private and inaccessible to the public.

Mr. Moore said that in many cases, they were giving up millions of dollars in tax revenue on these large tracts of land. He said that he was not always clear on how conservation served the people living in the County. He said that this project, on the other hand, directly benefited the County's residents, providing them with an opportunity to experience and participate in educational programs. He said that he was happy to support this project.

Ms. Firehock said that she believed this was a very appropriate use of the site. She said that one thing that encouraged her was that she thought the Living Earth School would leave it in better condition than they found it. She said that the site was lovely, but it had been impacted, just like any land that had been used for farming and other activities in the past.

Ms. Firehock said that she thought it would ultimately end up in better shape. She said that she was also concerned about the vagueness of the events. She said that she understood that they were for fundraising purposes, but they might want to consider alternative designs. She said that for example, when Buchanan hosted a fair event down by the river, they designed a parking lot with trees planted in between the spaces, allowing for parking without pavement. She said that the roots of the trees helped hold the soil in place, providing habitat throughout the year. She said that this approach could be applied to areas designated for parking, offering a more environmentally friendly solution.

Ms. Firehock said that she knew they would need to obtain a zoning clearance from the County, but she thought it was a great idea to incorporate environmental education into their community. She said that as an environmental educator with 30 years of experience, she had also led summer camps and was excited to contribute to creating the next generation of environmental stewards, who may one day sit on this dais and consider projects like this.

Mr. Missel said that he would like to echo some of the points made here and express his strong support for this proposal. He said that as they had discussed at length and continued to discuss

rural preservation, he believed that respecting, engaging, and activating, preserving, and protecting were the key elements of how they worked with their rural areas, which they were blessed to have. He said that under the heading of respect, he appreciated the time and effort the applicant had invested in examining the species on the land, and he anticipated a light touch in the development process.

Mr. Missel said that engaging and activating, in his view, was a fundamental aspect of this process, and he believed it was the purpose of being part of this initiative. He said that preserving, he thought, was crucial through their vegetation management, and he appreciated the stewardship plan and the ways to actively continue preserving the land while utilizing and engaging with it. He said that he believed they had checked all the boxes there.

Mr. Missel said that he wanted to echo the concern about extracurricular events and the care and management of those. He said that as someone who lived near Plank Road and frequently biked in the area, he was familiar with its beauty and the need for caution when driving on Red Hill Road. He said that he thought this was something to consider as this proposal moved forward to the Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Barnes said that as far as special events, specifically condition number five, he believed they were discussing the parking arrangements. He asked if that was the main concern.

Mr. Missel said that he wished to share his thoughts, as he did not want to speak for everyone present. He said that the parking issue seemed to be related to the amount of activity on the site, generated by the presence of people there. He said that he believed the frequency of events was capped at 12 per year.

Mr. Barnes said that this was more of bringing awareness of the potential issue, rather than a specific concern.

Mr. Missel said that he believed it was something that was being covered by other means, such as permits and regulations.

Mr. Missel asked if the requests from the applicant for changes in the conditions should be made as part of the motion.

Mr. Herrick recommended that if the Commission wished to keep things straightforward, the motion be approved, with either the staff-recommended conditions or the applicant-requested conditions, based on the will of the Commission.

Mr. Missel asked if that would take into consideration both the applicant-recommended conditions and the staff-recommended conditions.

Mr. Herrick said that the applicant's presentation did present some differences in recommendations or requests compared to staff's suggestions.

Mr. Clark said that one thing he would like to highlight regarding the outdoor amplification was that the red distances represented the distances to nearby dwellings, as recommended by staff, where the amplified sound would be located in the yellow main camp area. He said that the blue arrows indicated the distances if the welcome area were also to have amplified sound. He said that the main difference was that the distance had changed significantly in one location. He said that specifically, between the welcome pavilion and the nearest dwelling, the distance dropped from 1,250 feet to 690 feet.

Mr. Missel asked if they would still need to comply with the County's guidelines for decibel levels.

Mr. Clark said that yes, they would still need to comply with the decibel limits, which were measured over a very short period of time, such as a minute. He said that even if something was not exceeding the 50-decibel limit, it could still be quite audible in a rural setting. He said that the applicants had offered a time limit on amplification in that area, which may help address the concern, especially during late nights. He said that it was likely that music played at the welcome pavilion would still be audible at the nearest dwelling with this change.

Mr. Missel said if they were to proceed with the applicant's request, he was wondering if the public had the opportunity to comment on that change during the period between now and the Board of Supervisors' review. He said that they could request or require a sound study, although he was unsure if that was truly necessary. He said that he did not have any concerns with this proposal, and he was aware that the timeline between now and the Board's review.

Mr. Barnes said that essentially, if he was examining this, the Commission was proposing to strike the last part of condition 8.

Mr. Herrick asked to clarify that the consensus was to recommend approval of the Special Permit with the applicant-recommended conditions, except for Condition 8, which would be removed.

Mr. Missel said that that was correct.

Ms. Firehock motioned that the Planning Commission approve SP202400022 Living Earth School with the conditions as recommended by the applicant, striking condition #8. Mr. Moore seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0).

Adjournment

At 8:00 p.m., the Commission adjourned to March 25, 2025, at 4:00 p.m., Albemarle County Planning Commission meeting, Lane Auditorium.



Michael Barnes, Director of Planning

(Recorded by Carolyn S. Shaffer, Clerk to Planning Commission & Planning Boards; transcribed by Golden Transcription Services)

Approved by Planning Commission
Date: 03/25/2025
Initials: CSS