

**Albemarle County Planning Commission
Work Session and Regular Meeting
Draft Minutes May 27, 2025**

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public meeting on Tuesday, May 27, 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.

Members absent none

Other officials present were Michael Barnes, Director of Planning; Ben Holt, Senior Planner II; Margaret Maliszewski, Planning Manager; Rebecca Ragsdale, Planning Manager; 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.

SP202500001 Field School

Rebecca Ragsdale, Planning Manager, said that this special use permit request was a focused amendment to one condition associated with the already-approved Field School on Barracks Road. She said that the proposal was to extend the deadline for Condition 9 from August 28, 2025, to August 28, 2026. She said that this change did not affect the remaining eight conditions that were included in the original Special Use Permit.

Ms. Ragsdale said that the Field School, which was approved for a site located west of town on Barracks Road, near the development area, was situated in a rural area designated as such in the comprehensive plan. She said that this area had a mix of agricultural open properties, residential areas, and wooded areas. She said that the history of this special use permit was relevant, as it had been originally approved in 2017 for a private school with a maximum enrollment of 150 students.

Ms. Ragsdale said that the original deadline for construction had been February 2022, and the deadline had been extended twice since then, most recently to August 28, 2025. She said that the enrollment remained at 150 students, and this proposed amendment would extend the deadline to August 28, 2026. She said that the applicant had submitted a site plan in April 2024, which had been approved in February 2025, they had completed their two-step site plan process, and the applicant had submitted their initial, which was approved, and had been actively working to obtain approval for their final site plan, which had also been submitted.

Ms. Ragsdale said that this particular special use permit was limited to an amendment to Condition 9, extending it for only one year. She said that staff had not identified any changes in character, circumstance, or traffic on Barracks Road that would warrant concern about the one-year extension. She said that all conditions would remain in place, as outlined in the concept plan,

and the site plan had demonstrated consistency with the approved conditions, particularly the need for turn lanes on Barracks Road.

Ms. Ragsdale said that the conditions addressed public health, safety, and welfare, including enrollment, buffers, hours of operation, lighting, and other factors. She said that given the limited request and the lack of changes since the last review, staff had recommended approval.

Mr. Missel said that he would like clarification on the definition of the start of construction, as he may have missed it in the documentation.

Ms. Ragsdale said that they did not include the detailed definition from the ordinance, which was a multi-part definition. She said that it was essentially tied to obtaining a building permit and then initiating those improvements.

Mr. Bivins asked how far they were from receiving a building permit. He asked if it was possible they could get a permit by the end of August.

Ms. Ragsdale said that it was a possibility, but it could not be guaranteed.

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

Bo Perriello said that he was approaching the end of his second year as the head of Field School. He said that they were here this evening seeking a brief extension of their existing special use permit as they worked to start the building process while ensuring compliance with all necessary regulations. He said that they had had a busy year, despite some setbacks, but remained committed to opening the campus for the 2027-28 school year while doing things the right way, as outlined in their SUP.

Mr. Perriello said that for those unfamiliar, Field was not a typical school. He said that they were an all-boys middle school, serving grades five through eight, and one of only three in the country. He said that they had always focused on boys' middle school and would continue to do so moving forward. He said that they were a small school, with only four grades and currently 86 boys. He said that natural outdoor spaces were an integral part of their school ethos and student experience.

Mr. Perriello said that their goal was to maintain as much of the natural beauty and topography of the site as possible, with long-term plans for biking and hiking trails for the boys and community. He said that they planned to build in phases, with the first phase including one building, designed to accommodate up to 95 boys with limited potential for growth. He said that they remained committed to being good partners.

Mr. Perriello said that just last week, they brought their design team to the Colthurst Homeowners Association meeting to provide an update and hear concerns. He said that the meeting was very positive, with the neighbors seeming pleased with the project, including the road widening, left-hand turn lane improvements, and safety concerns. He said that they agreed to prioritize the safest possible travel for their families and the community.

Mr. Perriello said that they were working closely with VDOT and would follow any and all recommendations for traffic safety and flow. He said that they had recently completed a traffic

study and were happy to provide copies to VDOT and the Colthurst homeowners. He said that finally, they said that they were not seeking any new changes in this special use permit; they were simply asking for a brief extension. He said that he was aware that this project had a long history, but he could only speak to his time in this position.

Mr. Perriello said that during the past 12 to 18 months, their team had made significant progress and continued to move forward with speed and purpose. He said that as an educator, they preached the importance of lifelong learning, and this project had highlighted the extent of his own knowledge gaps. He said that he was fortunate to have a great team of professionals working with them, including Daniel Hyer and Kendra Moon from Line & Grade, their civil engineers, Kevin Schaefer from Design & Develop, their architects, along with Pete Morris from Faulkner Construction.

Mr. Perriello said that they also had a dedicated group of committed volunteers running their building committee, consisting of Wick Knox, a current parent and principal at VMDO downtown, Jay McNeely from Eagle Corps, Matt Wilkinson from Beck Cohen, and their board chair, Will Sowers. He said that this committee met every two weeks to ensure they were consistently making progress and had been doing so for over a year now. He said that he wanted to extend his gratitude to the County staff for their assistance in expediting the process. He said that they currently had their final site plan and Virginia stormwater management plan in for review, with the initial building plan to follow in the coming weeks.

Mr. Perriello said that they had a potential path to completion by their sunset clause, but he was aware that things did not always go as planned, and this extension request was to ensure they could stay on track. He said that their ultimate goal was to build a single building school that could house up to 95 students on this beautiful piece of land. He said that currently, they were housed in a 100-year-old building that they rented from Albemarle County and shared with Crozet Arts.

Mr. Perriello said that every time they experienced heavy rains, they lost a third of their classroom space, displacing faculty and students. He said that the technology was subpar, and large parts of the building were inaccessible due to asbestos. He said that given that the majority of their families resided in town, this move to Barracks Road was crucial for their school community. He said that they were eager to provide these boys with a permanent space to learn and grow. He said that there was no shortage of news highlighting that boys were falling behind educationally, making the need for a place like Field School more pressing than ever. He said that this move would enable them to have an even greater impact on the local area.

Mr. Missel asked if the Commission had any questions for the applicant.

Mr. Bivins said that it sounded like they were making significant progress, and that was good. He said that he offered congratulations on their tenure and the success they had achieved during that time. He said that he believed that they should be able to complete the project by September, if not by December, January 1. He said that he was struggling to understand why they needed a year extension.

Mr. Bivins said that personally, he was less concerned with the end of the year and more concerned with the fact that they seemed ready to move forward and pull a permit. He said that they should keep the pressure on him and his donors to ensure they could facilitate the permitting process. He said that he needed to hear more about the specific challenges he was facing and

why he required additional time. He said that if he would like to defer to one of his previous comments.

Mr. Perriello said that he would defer to the professionals if he misspoke, but he would summarize that most of this had been a result of conversations with the County. He said that they had an initial meeting where they collectively discussed the project, and the County was trying to be creative to help them meet the deadline. He said that they left that meeting with a sense of uncertainty, feeling that they needed to request an extension to protect themselves. He said that since then, they had another meeting, and the County had allowed them to expedite the review process, which was helpful. He said that they would now be meeting with the County every couple of weeks.

Mr. Perriello said that as someone relatively new to this process, he had learned that timelines could be unpredictable. He said that nevertheless, he believed they had a path forward, and this was primarily done to ensure the project's success and timely completion. He said that they had their permits in place, and their architects were close to submitting the foundation and footing plan, which should be ready within the next week to two weeks. He said that they were moving forward with the project.

Mr. Murray said that the National Bike Route 76 went right in front of this property. He said that they did not typically receive special use permits along that route. He said that it was currently used by cyclists, so he was wondering if the applicant had considered the safety of that bike route's traffic.

Mr. Perriello said that he was aware that they would be widening the road and adding turn lanes for safety. He said that biking was an incredibly important activity in their school programming, so they could certainly in tune with the biking community, but he was unsure of any specifics about that route.

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

Robert Humphreys, Jr., Jack Jouett District, said that his property was adjacent to the school. He said that he was here tonight to respectfully yet firmly urge them to deny the Field School's request for an extension on their mandatory construction start deadline for the property on Barracks Road. He said that the project had had more than enough time and opportunities. He said that since purchasing the land in 2019, the school had experienced multiple changes in plans, at least three hits of school, and had already missed two previous deadlines to begin construction. He said that in six years; the project had yielded little more than turnover and delay.

Mr. Humphreys said that when they last requested an extension, they cited COVID-19 as the reason, but no visible fundraising effort was made, and they had no website page dedicated to the cause. He said that in contrast; local organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club successfully raised millions and completed a 52,000 square foot facility during the same period. He said that the difference was in the follow-through and commitment, which the Field School had not demonstrated.

Mr. Humphreys said that the latest site plan moved the entrance halfway up the eastbound hill on Barracks Road, away from its original location across from Magnolia Ridge. He said that this change required a commercial entrance, necessitating both a right turn and a left turn lane, and

expanding Barracks Road to four lanes at that spot. He said that this new layout introduced a hazardous traffic situation, particularly for drivers on the westbound side of the road, which picked up speed after clearing city congestion.

Mr. Humphreys said that predictably, this would lead to a future request for a school zone and a 25 mile-an-hour speed limit, which would significantly impact thousands of daily drivers. He implored the Commission not to reward inaction with yet another extension. He said that this project had stalled for years, and it was time to bring it to a close. He asked that they deny this request and please consider his concerns.

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

Mr. Perriello said that he wanted to be respectful of Mr. Humphrey's comments and concerns while also highlighting that they had recently completed a traffic study, which they were happy to share. He said that if the Commission had not seen a copy, he knew that the staff had access to it. He said that additionally, he would like to reference the significant amount of work they had done in the past year to demonstrate that they were working diligently to move the project forward as quickly as possible, as evident by their site plan and stormwater management plan. He said that he would further note the wonderful meeting they had with the Colthurst community and HOA, during which they received very supportive reactions to this project.

Mr. Missel closed the public hearing, and the matter rested with the Commission.

Mr. Bivins asked if it was possible to amend staff's proposal to change the extended date to January 1, 2026.

Mr. Missel said that having been through this process many times as an applicant, he believed the intent was most important. He said that it should be clear that the intent was to get this project done sooner rather than later; however, the reality was unclear, and it could take much longer than expected to get things done. He said that another issue to consider from the applicant's perspective was the budget. He said that the faster the process went, the easier it was to get real numbers, but it also could result in unexpected costs that the budget could not cover, and value-engineering would take additional time.

Mr. Bivins said that in his experience, value-engineering should occur after permits were approved. He said that the condition mentioned that they just needed to start building, which meant they just needed the permit.

Mr. Missel said that building permits were taking significantly longer than they used to, and they were paying for third-party reviewers to supplement the process. He said that these reviewers reviewed their documents, stamped them, and then came to the County, where the County then turned them around. He said that there were challenges with the timeline, which could take multiple months.

Mr. Bivins said that even if it took multiple months, it seemed reasonable that they should have it by the end of the year.

Ms. Ragsdale said that in terms of the overall process and the various individuals involved, she wanted to clarify that expedited did not guarantee a specific timeframe. She said that they had to

consider the reviews from VDOT and the Health Department, which could take as long as those agencies needed. She said that this process was not just limited to the site plan; it also included the building permit process.

Ms. Ragsdale said that given this, she felt it was reasonable to expect a one-year extension of the special use permit. She said that she did not foresee any circumstances that would change staff's perspective on granting a year-long extension. She said that she would not want to extend it for too short of a time period, because then they may end up in the same position if there were any unforeseen circumstances. She said that staff was comfortable with a one-year extension.

Mr. Clayborne said that he was supportive of the request. He said that upon reviewing the application, he did not see anything that would suggest the applicant would be dragging their feet with this project.

Ms. Firehock said that she felt much more comfortable having heard from the applicant, as she was concerned about their ability to fulfill the requirements. She said that upon reviewing the applications, she noticed that they were submitted year after year, which led her to wonder if they truly had the necessary funds for this project. She said that it seemed that the applicant was creating a safety net, in case VDOT or the Health Department took a long time to complete their respective tasks, rather than simply not having the capability to execute the project. She said that therefore, she was less worried now that she had heard from the applicant.

Mr. Bivins said that hearing staff's presentation and seeing the new information in this application, it seemed likely that this would be completed by the end of the year. He said that he was concerned that this extension was excessive, considering that the planning and zoning processes itself already was seen generally as lengthy and slow by the community. He said that he did not believe that getting these applications processed should not be a liability on their staff.

Mr. Bivins motioned that the Planning Commission recommend approval of SP202500001 Field School for the reasons presented in the staff report. Mr. Carrazana seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (7-0).

Adjournment

At 7:20 p.m., the Commission adjourned to June 10, 2025, Albemarle County Planning Commission meeting, 6:00 p.m.

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:
Initials: