Albemarle County Planning Commission
Regular Meeting and Presentation
Final Minutes November 18, 2025

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public meeting on Tuesday, November 18, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.

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

Members absent: Karen Firehock.

Other officials present were Michael Barnes, Director of Planning; Kevin McDermott; Syd Shoaf; Lea Brumfield; Rebecca Ragsdale; Francis MacCall; Jodie Filardo; Bart Svoboda; Andrea Ruege, County Attorney; and Carolyn Shaffer, Clerk to the Planning Commissions.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Ms. Shaffer called the roll.

Mr. Missel established a quorum.

Public Comment on matters pending before the Commission, but not listed on this agenda

There were none.

Consent Agenda

Mr. Clayborne motioned that the Planning Commission approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Mr. Murray seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0). (Ms. Firehock was absent.)

Public Hearing

SP-2025-00004 Northridge Preschool

Syd Shoaf, Senior Planner II, said that he would be giving staff's presentation for the Special Use Permit SP-2025-00004 Northridge Preschool. He said that this request sought to amend an existing special use permit to increase the total enrollment and hours of operation for a preschool. He said that the subject property, located at 5100 Dickerson Road, spanned approximately 9.92 acres and was situated approximately 1.5 miles south of the County line with Greene County, just north of the Route 29 Development Area.

Mr. Shoaf said that the property was zoned Rural Areas and was designated as such in the Comprehensive Plan. He said that the surrounding properties were also zoned for Rural Areas and included other religious assembly uses and single-family residences. He said that the subject property was home to the Northridge Community Church of Nazarene, which had been first approved by a special use permit in 2000, and the preschool had been established in 2003. He said that an active special use permit, approved in 2006, allowed for a maximum enrollment of 80 students.

Mr. Shoaf said that the applicants requested to increase the student enrollment to 100 students and extend the hours of operation from 7:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. He said that the special use permit application had been reviewed under the factors for consideration outlined in the Zoning Ordinance. He said that staff believed that the proposed special use permit would not negatively impact adjacent parcels, alter the character of the nearby area, or conflict with the Rural Area Zoning District, and concluded that the proposed permit was consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Shoaf said that three conditions were recommended for the application, two related to the applicant's proposal and the third being a carryover from the previously approved special use permit. He said that the intent of the latter condition was to preserve the existing woodland on the property. He said that in sum, there were three positive aspects to the proposal: it aligned with the review criteria for special use permits in the Zoning Ordinance, provided a preschool and daycare option for community members, and did not anticipate detrimental impacts to adjoining properties. He said that staff found no concerns and recommended approval of the special use permit with the conditions as outlined in the staff report.

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

Debbie Swanson, Director of the Northridge Preschool, said that she would like to take a moment to provide an overview of their preschool and the purpose of their request. She said that their preschool was a religious-exempt child day center serving children from three to six years of age. She said that they strived to create a safe and nurturing environment that supported children's social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and kindergarten readiness needs.

Ms. Swanson said that they were requesting approval for an addendum to their current special use permit, which would allow them to increase their student enrollment from 80 to 100 students and extend their hours from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. She said that this extension was essential for them to meet the growing demand from local families, ensuring compliance with County planning and safety standards, and ensuring their long-term operations aligned with the County's developmental goals.

Ms. Swanson said that just this past week, Dr. Jason Grant from Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) had announced that they had recently added classrooms, and she was pleased to see the growing recognition of the need for high-quality early education in their area. She said that parents often reported challenges in finding accessible quality childcare, with long wait lists for local programs. She said that they aimed to address this need by providing a reliable and quality program that supported school readiness with strong early literacy and pre-math foundations.

Ms. Swanson said that ACPS had also noted that research had shown that 90% of brain development occurred before age five, making early education crucial for a child's life foundation. She said that they wanted to partner with the County to ensure that as many children as possible had access to a quality program. She said that community stability was vital, and they had carefully designed their operations to minimize the impact on the neighborhood. She said that they had staggered their drop-off and pickup times and scheduled outdoor play times so they would not disturb neighbors.

Ms. Swanson said that safety was their top priority, with fenced outdoor playgrounds and strict supervision. She said that approving this request would bring several community benefits, including increased access to early education, support for local employers and the workforce, and a positive economic impact through their employment of staff and welcoming new members. She

said that they believed that their preschool was an essential part of the County's family-friendly infrastructure, and they were committed to serving the community.

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

Mr. Bivins said that he did not think the preschool would be disturbing any of their neighbors, considering there were only three churches in the area. He said that he also noticed on the church's website that they already offered a full-day program from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. He asked if the request before the Commission this evening was meant to bring that program into compliance.

Ms. Swanson said that that was correct.

Mr. Bivins said that that made sense. He said that he further was trying to understand the classroom setup. He said that based on the information provided, the census never exceeded 10 children per day in each classroom, so they would always be at 80 students. He said that he did not understand the request to increase enrollment to 100 students unless some of the existing classrooms would accommodate more than 10 students.

Ms. Swanson said that if they increased enrollment, they hoped to utilize more of the building.

Mr. Bivins said that he would recommend to the applicant that they clearly state that to the Board of Supervisors when this item was presented to them. He said that it was not immediately evident to him in the materials provided this evening, which made him question why this request was being made at all. He said that Ms. Swanson's answer was helpful and important to note.

Ms. Swanson said that that was good to know, and she thanked Mr. Bivins for the suggestion.

Mr. Bivins said that an additional concern he wanted to bring up was the fact that the applicant asserted that they served a diverse population of County children but had not presented any evidence to confirm it. He asked that they consider that as part of their presentation of this request, especially since their main goal was to help the entire community.

Mr. Clayborne said that as a father with two young kids and two working parents, he appreciated the importance of these types of proposals, especially offering a program extending from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. He said that he was curious to know what drove the 100-student cap for this program. He asked if it was related to the capacity of the facility itself or if it was more about their growth projections.

Ms. Swanson said that it was a limitation of the current facility itself. She said that in order to accommodate more students than what they were requesting here, it would require extensive renovations. She said that the actual space itself could allow them to add 10 children per available classroom, for a total of 20 additional children.

Mr. Bivins said that he had one final suggestion related to the space constraints for this program. He said that there was another church across the street that could potentially be used for additional classroom capacity, so he would ask the applicant to consider collaborating with that church in order to fully meet the community's needs.

Ms. Swanson said that it was a great idea.

Mr. Missel asked if any members of the public wished to speak on this item. Seeing none, he closed the public hearing and the matter rested with the Commission.

Mr. Moore said that this proposal was fine and very straightforward. He said that he would like to bring to the attention of the Board of Supervisors for future consideration the extent to which they had privatized preschools, which should be a public good. He said that while he acknowledged that private preschools like this one were excellent institutions, research had consistently shown that early childhood education was crucial for brain development, social readiness, and learning outcomes.

Mr. Moore said that the County had not invested their tax resources into providing early childhood education programs. He said that they had Bright Stars, but that was a very limited program. He said that there were extensive waiting lists for preschool programs everywhere, and he would like to see their community move in a more progressive direction, treating their children as a public investment and a public good, and allocating sufficient resources to support this critical need.

Mr. Bivins said that there was also an economic benefit to what Mr. Moore had suggested. He said that there were economic advantages to offering a full suite of opportunities to people coming to the community. He said that this was not a partisan issue, but rather a matter of doing what was good for the community, particularly for the children and families who would benefit from these opportunities.

Mr. Murray motioned that the Planning Commission recommend approval of SP-2025-00004 Northridge Preschool, with the conditions stated in the staff report. Mr. Carrazana seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0).

Adjournment

At 7:40 p.m., the Commission adjourned to November 25, 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: 12/09/2025
Initials: CSS