

**Albemarle County Planning Commission
Work Session and Regular Meeting
Final Minutes July 28, 2026**

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public meeting on Tuesday, July 28, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.

Members attending were Luis Carrazana Chair; Corey Clayborne; Nathan Moore; Mary Katherine King; Catherine Brown.

Members absent: Karen Firehock, Vice-Chair; Lonnie Murray.

Other officials present were Bill Fritz, Development Process Manager; Cameron Langille, Principal Planner; Lea Brumfield, Senior Planner II; Trevor Henry, Deputy County Executive; Bart Svoboda, Director of Community Development; Francis MacCall, Deputy Zoning Administrator; Michael Barnes, Director of Planning; Jenny Tevendale, Deputy County Attorney; and Carolyn Shaffer, Clerk to the Planning Commissions.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Ms. Shaffer called the roll.

Mr. Carrazana established a quorum.

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

There were none.

Consent Agenda (on the next sheet)

Mr. Clayborne motioned that the Planning Commission adopt the consent agenda as presented. Mr. Moore seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (5-0). (Ms. Firehock and Mr. Murray were absent)

Public Hearing

ZMA-2026-00004 Rivanna Futures

Bill Fritz, Development Process Manager, said that this was ZMA-2026-00004 Rivanna Futures, which was an application for consideration of steep slopes. He said that for context, he provided an image taken from the rezoning application for this property. He said that the image showed in red the boundaries of the property recently purchased by the County, and the portion that was rezoned to industrial was in blue. He said that he had highlighted the approximate area of the slopes under consideration tonight. He said that they could see its relationship to the surrounding area and the zoning boundary.

Mr. Fritz said that the area highlighted was a little more extensive than the area proposed to be rezoned; this was done to make the general location easier to see. He said that the zoning boundary represented the extent of the development area in both the existing and prior ordinance.

He said that the blue area also showed where the boundary was between the Rural and Development Areas of the County. He said that this application was a proposal to change the designation of Preserved Steep Slopes to Managed Steep Slopes Overlay District.

Mr. Fritz said that the district divided slopes into two categories: preserved and managed. He said that preserved slopes were shown in green on the map and managed slopes were shown in yellow. He said that they might notice that there were some areas to the north and east of this, and east and far west, which were shown in orange. He said that those were critical slopes that were located outside of the Development Area, so there were three designations that protected slopes. He said that disturbance of preserved slopes was severely restricted.

Mr. Fritz said that to oversimplify the regulations, the permitted uses of preserved slopes were those necessary to allow some use of the property in order to prevent a taking and facilities that could not avoid the slopes, such as utilities and roads and uses identified in the Comprehensive Plan; managed slopes may be disturbed. He said that any permitted disturbance of either type of slope was subject to review to ensure that the activity met all the requirements of the zoning and water protection ordinances. He said that the area being proposed for rezoning that night was approximately a half-acre.

Mr. Fritz said that they could see the area they were talking about highlighted on the provided map, which was the northern area. He said that their geographic information system (GIS) did not allow the aerial photo to be shown with the zoning information, but he wanted to show an image that showed the extent of the industrial zoning of the area in blue. He said that designated stream buffers were shown in purple, managed slopes were shown in yellow and preserved slopes were shown in green. He said that the white areas of the map were zoned Rural Area.

Mr. Fritz said that the areas under consideration were the circled slopes, and the areas to the north and to the east were zoned Rural and owned by the County, so there were no adjacent properties up against the area they were considering. He said that another image provided was from the applicant's narrative, and there was a much more detailed plan in their packet. He said that it was one of the applicant's appendices and it showed the slopes, topography, and water courses. He said that he just wanted to make sure they were aware of this in case they wanted to look at it in a little more detail at their desk.

Mr. Fritz said that the Zoning Ordinance included very detailed characteristics for both managed and preserved slopes. He said that the exact language of the Ordinance was included in the staff report, and there was an analysis of each characteristic. He said that staff's finding was that these slopes displayed characteristics of both managed and preserved slopes; that was not unusual or uncommon. He said that however, staff's opinion was that generally these slopes appeared to have more characteristics of preserved slopes than of managed slopes. He said that one of the mixed findings staff made that led to that conclusion was the relationship of the slopes to water features.

Mr. Fritz said that this image from the staff report showed the stream buffers in purple from their GIS system, and that the slope designations were also shown. He said that during a field visit to the site, they investigated the water courses adjacent to these slopes. He said that they were very aware that they did this in a drought, and that was taken into consideration when they were looking at those streams. He said that portions of the water courses were clearly intermittent and were

not subject to a stream buffer setback. He said that water was observed at the location shown above.

Mr. Fritz said that preliminarily, it was believed that the stream may be perennial at this point from the solid blue line. He said that additional verification would be made during the site plan review process. He said that if the stream was determined to be perennial beyond the limits shown in purple above the stream, the buffer would be applied. He said that to be clear, there was no floodplain. He said that this determination would be made during the site development review process; that was normal procedure. He said that if this rezoning was approved and a determination was made that the stream was perennial, the stream protection requirements of the ordinance would be applied.

Mr. Fritz said that this rezoning did not supersede any of those protections. He said that staff's analysis of the characteristics of these slopes, based on the language included in the steep overlay district, resulted in mixed findings. He said that what was very important to note was that the content of the Steep Slopes Overlay District was not the only factor that must be considered during the review process. He said that the State Code and the County Zoning Ordinance set out specific criteria that must be considered. He said that this analysis was included in the staff report the Commission had in their packet.

Mr. Fritz said that he would not review every detail of the staff report, but he did want to highlight just a few things. He said that the County had on multiple occasions stated that the County's investment in Rivanna Futures created a generational opportunity. He said that the importance of this property to the County and its economic development strategy was contained in the Comprehensive Plan and in the County's Economic Development strategy. He said that they were very specific about this property and the opportunities of this property. He said that these were significant factors in support of a rezoning that would facilitate development of the property.

Mr. Fritz said that industrial development, particularly large-scale industrial development of the type envisioned for Rivanna Futures, required large building footprints with a single floor elevation. He said that to serve these buildings, travelways, storage areas, and loading zones were necessary. He said that these areas required limited slope and often needed large, unbroken areas to accommodate large truck traffic, large truck turning radius, and the safe operation of the loading and storage areas. He said that the location of the preserved slopes in the center of the screen impacted the ability to develop areas to the east and the west, which were highlighted in red.

Mr. Fritz said that the red areas did not have limitations on development due to slope, stream buffers, or other requirements. He said that effectively, the specific location of the steep slopes was restricting potential development of the limited industrial land that the County had. He said that the Comprehensive Plan estimated that the theoretical capacity of the Development Area contained adequate capacity to accommodate projected growth. He said that the Comprehensive Plan also stated that this was only theoretical capacity, and the Plan acknowledged that constraining factors limited the actual capacity, and this undermined the Growth Management Policy.

Mr. Fritz said that to summarize, the staff analysis had resulted in mixed findings. He said that when considering the characteristics of steep slopes as contained in the overlay district provisions of the Zoning Ordinance, staff identified characteristics that supported maintaining the existing

preserved slope designation and characteristics that supported a managed slope designation. He said that when all of the factors in Section 33 outside of the steep slopes district were be considered when drawing zoning district boundaries were incorporated into the review, the staff's conclusion was that a rezoning was appropriate.

Mr. Fritz said that particularly compelling to staff were the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan and the recommendations of the Albemarle County Economic Development Strategic Plan, particularly the identified need for industrial land. He said that for the reasons included in the staff report, staff was recommending approval of this rezoning application.

Ms. Brown said that in the application, one of the reasons suggested by the site engineer was the prior use as agriculture for part of this area designated as steep slopes. She said that that was the same area that seemed a little less steep in the southern southeastern portion of the property. She said that it was also mentioned that there was a percentage of the area that might have a 25% or greater slope. She said that she wondered why the request was for this entire area rather than carving out this more restricted area that had been altered and was less deep. She said that it also seemed to be located along the intermittent stream rather than the western portion, which was steeper and had not had prior use along the perennial stream.

Mr. Fritz said that staff looked at the information that the applicant provided about the historical use of this property for agriculture and that it may have been disturbed in the past. He said that they did not find that a compelling factor for consideration. He said that they viewed the information in the Steep Slopes Overlay District content, which discussed the area which had been previously disturbed or approved for development. He said that those images were from the 1930s, so they were not particularly compelled by that issue.

Mr. Fritz said that they were not sure why the applicant made this particular request for these slopes as opposed to others. He said that their understanding was that additional information was needed to be able to utilize those red areas that they showed. He said that he would have the applicant try to answer the other parts of the question better.

Ms. King said that in the drawing where she showed the green oval, she was trying to get a general sense of how big this area was. She said that the application was for about half an acre. She asked if the green area was roughly half an acre in this drawing.

Mr. Fritz said that the slopes identified there were 0.46 acres. He said that he was guessing that it impacted or had a significant impact on anywhere around four to six acres of land when those two other bubbles were added in. He said that it was hard to give an exact acreage, but it was in that range.

Mr. Moore said that he had seen for years the layers they had in their GIS map for preserved steep slopes versus managed steep slopes. He said that he read the definitions, and there were still a few parts of the suite of six or seven things that defined a slope as one or the other that he did not totally understand in terms of where they came from. He said that one was contiguous areas of 10,000 square feet or more. He said that he was wondering why that particular cutoff point was chosen as the definition, as he did not see it as a universal definition that other Counties used.

Mr. Fritz said that the Board of Supervisors actually spent quite a bit of time discussing that when they were doing the Steep Slopes Overlay District. He said that they spent a lot of time crafting

the language for the characteristics of preserved and the characteristics of managed. He said that that came specifically from discussions with the Board of Supervisors. He said that the number came from there; it was a very specific discussion of the Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Moore said that in practice, it could look somewhat odd on maps and the difference between managed and steep slopes was not very intuitive.

Mr. Fritz said that it was difficult because there would be some places where an area was less than 10,000 square feet, but it may be part of a larger hillside system.

Mr. Moore said that he understood what "hillside" meant and what "system" meant, but he was unsure of what exactly a "hillside system" was.

Mr. Fritz said that it was the best term to describe the network of hills in an area.

Mr. Moore said that with regard to the water systems, he understood the intent of preventing erosion, siltation, and excessive stormwater runoff. He asked how much of modern landscaping methods could obviate the need for slope preservation.

Mr. Fritz said that that was a topic of conversation when the Steep Slopes Overlay District was discussed; they considered how much was necessary based on modern engineering techniques. He said that when the original Steep Slopes Overlay District was established, retaining wall height within the District was limited to six feet, and outside of the District, it was ten feet. He said that had since been modified; it was ten feet uniform across the board that could be done. He said that there were separations between retaining walls, and there were performance standards associated with all grading, not just steep slopes.

Mr. Moore said that, especially in the Development Areas, he had wondered how critical some of the critical slopes really were.

Mr. Fritz said that in the staff report, it was noted that one of the things identified in the Comprehensive Plan was a reevaluation of some of the environmental standards within the Development Areas in order to facilitate the utilization of the theoretical capacity. He said that it was an opportunity for the Commission tonight with this rezoning application, also.

Mr. Carrazana thanked Mr. Fritz for mentioning that they had previously discussed at length that some of the standards needed to be revisited. He asked if the applicant had a presentation.

Blake Abplanalp, Rivanna Futures Program Manager, said that he was involved in the development of the site itself, the County's properties, the future Boulders Road Extension grant work they were currently doing on site, and the site preparation for County and future AstraZeneca work. He said that they had been very fortunate to have Mr. Daniel Hyer there, a principal of Line + Grade Engineering Firm, who had been working with them since early 2023. He said that he had been evaluating the Rivanna Futures property and helping them through development and design related to some of the site work and utility connections that they were making.

Mr. Abplanalp said that he had worked for ten months putting together a due diligence and engineering report, which he thought would be interesting to show the thoroughness and the care that went into evaluating this site and taking a close look at every little factor that could impact the initial decision the County was going to make on purchasing the land and moving forward. He

said that Mr. Hyer was going to talk about a brief history of what transpired at the site, his due diligence efforts, some of the development that was going on, and some of the grant work that they were doing.

Mr. Abplanalp said that they had been fortunate to receive transportation partnership opportunity funding for the Boulders Road extension, Virginia Business Ready Sites funding for some of the site work and utility work that they were doing out there, and GOVirginia grants for the design work that they completed. He said that collectively, these represented about \$32 million worth of funding that they had been fortunate enough to receive from other sources. He said that they would briefly discuss the AstraZeneca development area and then talk in more detail, adding to what Mr. Fritz had already communicated as it related to the application itself.

Daniel Hyer, Principal Engineer with Line + Grade, said that they had been working on this since early 2023. He said that they had gone through a very robust due diligence about the land, and there was a 600-page document of that work. He said that that due diligence led to the Board of Supervisors purchasing these 462 acres. He said that development and programming ensued, and he thought this background would be helpful to understand the context of this application. He said that without being too verbose, anything that they would want to know about this land had likely been studied, even very minute details like plant community mapping and animal community mapping, which they were still doing to this day.

Mr. Hyer said that everything from dam inspections to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents to the fine, gritty detail, they continued to be very careful and thorough in how they thought about this land. He said that that was important to consider when they talked about changing the classification of slopes on this property; it was rooted in a thorough understanding of the landscape in general. He said that the land they were talking about was now shown in the clearer color. He said that the white overlay was beyond their property limits and within the black boundary were the 462 acres that the Board purchased in December 2023, making a \$58 million investment in this piece of land and the County more generally.

Mr. Hyer said that after the purchase, his firm was also retained to begin to understand how the land could be used. He said that after a number of iterations, they landed on a nomenclature called "land bays." He said that there were a number of land parcels present at this property in varying acreages. He said that in 2024, after the land was purchased, they also assisted the County in applying for multiple grants, including the GOVirginia grant and the Virginia Economic Development Partnership's (VEDP) Site Readiness Grant. He said that in 2024, a busy year, they rezoned 172 acres of the 462 acres into light industrial. He said that they also had a special use permit for office use within those 172 acres at the same time.

Mr. Hyer said that both of those applications were approved. He said that not long thereafter, they learned of their success with the grant applications and received a successful grant with GOVirginia, which helped to pay for a lot of the early-level design work. He said that the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) also awarded a grant of \$9.7 million, so the work in 2024 leading to the grants in 2025 was intentional and specific in how they were approaching those applications. He said that not long after they were awarded the grant money, they learned that AstraZeneca announced its intention to occupy this land. He said that at first, they thought it would be a smaller portion, and then it ended up being a larger portion.

Mr. Hyer said that their land was shown in purple, which was about 82 acres in total. He said that currently, bringing them to nearly today, there were early-level construction activities happening. He said that contractors were mobilizing to begin implementing the site readiness work. He said that there was a little shape in this application, which was the 0.46 acres of slopes that they were asking to be classified as managed instead of preserved. He said that after they looked at this in a number of different ways, these slopes contained characteristics of both preserved and managed, depending on how one looked at them.

Mr. Hyer said that he wanted to clarify one thing that Mr. Fritz had mentioned. He said that he was showing them a green shape, and they were actually only asking to reclassify about half of that shape. He said that the slopes continued along what became a defined stream further to the north and west. He said that those slopes would continue down along this corridor through there. He said that the gray hatch on the map was their actual proposed slope reclassification. He said that within that shape, they would see a myriad of slope characteristics, some less than 25%, and some more than 25%. He said that it was very fluctuating within that outline.

Mr. Hyer said that this land's use and their ability to use the land as it needs to be used were supportive of broader visions and initiatives within the County, including the Comprehensive Plan and the Economic Development Strategic Plan. He said that he just wanted to add a little bit about the historic imagery briefly. He said that they had gone to relatively great lengths to accurately represent and locate the historic imagery within their digital ecosystem. He said that he reviewed it again today before he spoke tonight, and he could say with a high degree of confidence that this historic photograph was properly located within their digital ecosystem. He said they felt relatively confident that portions of this area defined as preserved slopes had been used to support agricultural activities in the past.

Mr. Hyer said that he was not here to say how heavily that weighed in. He said that he did know that they felt confident that in the past, this landscape had been materially altered by man to support man's activities. He said that to summarize, their impacts were relatively de minimis in some ways. He said that they were not impacting any floodplains, wetlands, or existing structures. He said that there were no impacts to housing, schools, playgrounds. He said that it was relatively isolated and very specific in terms of what they had identified to be reclassified.

Ms. Brown asked if that gray area was the 0.46-acre portion, not the entire area they saw previously.

Mr. Hyer said that was correct; Mr. Fritz was showing the slope system, and they were asking to reclassify a portion of the system rather than the entire area.

Mr. Fritz said that that was shown in the packet in more detail.

Ms. King asked for clarification that the area in question was on the parcel to be potentially used by AstraZeneca.

Mr. Hyer confirmed that was correct.

Ms. King asked if there was already a concept plan for that area.

Mr. Hyer said that there had been multiple concept plans. He said that AstraZeneca was working with Jacobs Engineering to do their formal concept work. He said that previously, they conducted

what they called a front-end study, which evaluated their leading edge of exploring how to use the land, and now AstraZeneca was currently in the concept phase.

Ms. King asked if there was any confirmation that this particular request either supported or did not directly support their future concept plan that they had not yet developed.

Mr. Abplanalp said that one of the things that had to be worked out from an engineering standpoint initially was the internal road system for AstraZeneca. He said that to support the large truck deliveries, there was a real challenge from a slope standpoint. He said that from a topographical standpoint, the people who were working dialed in what would be their future road system. He said that the grades were very difficult to make that work. He said that that was probably the only thing that, unless there was some major significant change, was pretty much set in stone now.

Mr. Abplanalp said that he was coordinating with them, for example, on the Boulders Road extension. He said that initially, where the truck entrance into AstraZeneca would go was identified as a potential queuing issue. He said that some changes were made at the intersection with Route 29. He said that as the new Boulders came down, that widened the intersection and added turn lanes in each direction. He said that this approach removed the queuing problem because it would have been a complex problem if they had to move that truck entrance due to the topographical challenges present in that hilly area.

Mr. Abplanalp said that this was the one thing that was etched in. He said that AstraZeneca had changed their footprints a number of times or even their concepts of how they were doing things. He said that they previously changed the footprint of some of their outbuildings. He said that they basically had wastewater, utilities, building, and other things. He said that they moved it while they were doing the tree clearing so that they could reduce the number of trees taken down by 22 acres. He said that they decided to move their buildings around to accommodate that. He said that they had been a responsible and thoughtful partner as they went through this planning process.

Ms. King said that her biggest question was what the need was for this request. She said that half an acre out of 172 acres was insignificant, so she was wondering if they could just put things in another area, considering the available acreage. She said that however, she understood there was a concept for roadways that was the driver of this request.

Mr. Carrazana asked if the significant engineering report that he presented to them was available to the public on the County website.

Mr. Abplanalp said that it was not part of the published documentation, but yes, it could be made available to the public.

Mr. Carrazana opened the public hearing. Seeing no speakers, he closed the public hearing and the matter rested with the Commission.

Ms. King said that she thought it was important to say that if a decision was to be made by the Commission, she would first direct people to the fifth and sixth pages of the staff report. She said that there was a section that specifically discussed the availability of land for development as discussed in the Comprehensive Plan. She said that it was important to understand the limitations of the analysis; the figures were estimates, and the theoretical capacity measured the maximum development potential of the Development Areas.

Ms. King said that the analysis also found that development projects often could not realize their maximum development potential due to a variety of constraining factors. She said that these factors limited the actual build-out of the Development Areas, which undermined the Growth Management Policy as well as other goals, such as the goals related to housing and economic development. She said that the report went on to say that however, the demand for the forecasts or projections based on historical trends of development indicated that constraining factors, including the availability of land and the cost of development, as well as environmental constraints, would limit the build-out potential.

Ms. King said that she expected that as a Commissioner, if this type of adjustment for the County was approved, they would continue to give this type of exception to the public as well as to private developers when they were bringing things like housing and wanted to make similar changes in order to maximize the land for housing. She said that she thought that if this precedent was set by approving it for the County, then they needed to be ready to continue doing that in the future with other types of applications. She said that she thought that was her biggest issue with the applicant. She said that with the request, she did not feel good about giving favoritism to themselves for economic development when they were not giving the same considerations to housing developments.

Mr. Carrazana said that changes to the types of slopes had been approved in other applications to enable more development. He said that to clarify, they were not setting precedents. He said that they always had to look at the merits of every single application, so regardless of what was done for one application, that did not mean that was a precedent that they had now set for another because they had to look at the merits of each one and they were each independent of each other.

Mr. Carrazana said that the other point he would make was that in AC44, there were a number of factors that they had addressed to try to maximize the development. He said that one thing was looking at gross instead of the net area of a development. He said that the other point that Mr. Fritz alluded to was that they were evaluating the critical slopes to see if there was one where they may have gone too far in their evaluation. He said that they could map better because they had better technology for mapping. He said that that was also part of what they were doing. He said that he thought they were trying to address a couple of areas where they believed would lead to more dense development and encourage that.

Mr. Clayborne said that he fully agreed with Mr. Carrazana; this was case-by-case, and his voting one way on this was not a blanket agreement across the board. He said that when he looked at what was before him today, it appeared to be a step in trying to align zoning with the Comprehensive Plan. He said that right now was a misalignment. He said that with the image that Mr. Fritz had shown of the two adjacent parcels or areas where they were colored in red and theirs was in green, it clearly limited the potential for the build-out. He said that for him, it was a no-brainer. He said that to reiterate, his voting yes on one application was not voting yes across the board and every case was on its own.

Mr. Carrazana said that in this particular application, they were still evaluating the stream. He said that if that stream was viewed to be a perennial, then they would require the buffer and the protections of that stream. He said that given the information they had, he was fine moving forward with this, but he assumed that if there was a change during the site plan review, then that would be required to buffer.

Ms. King said that she not stating that she thought their approval of this was a blanket. She said that she wanted to point out that staff had included, in her opinion, the information here about the challenges they faced with the current Growth Management plan related to environmental factors and maximum build-out. She said that she hoped that as they moved forward, this same statement would be used to support other types of applications that might do the same thing, not just those that the County was presenting.

Mr. Clayborne motioned that the Planning Commission recommend approval of ZMA-2026-00004 Rivanna Futures for the reasons stated in the staff report. Mr. Moore seconded the motion, which carried (4-1). (Mr. Carrazana, Mr. Clayborne, Ms. King, Mr. Moore voted aye; Ms. Brown voted nay; Ms. Firehock and Mr. Murray was absent)

Adjournment

At 7:50 p.m., the Commission adjourned to August 11, 2026, 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: 08/11/2026
Initials: CSS