ALBEMARLE COUNTY PLANNING
STAFF REPORT SUMMARY

Project Name: SP-2026-00001 Alberene Yoga Retreat	**Staff:** Ben Loppacker, Planner
Planning Commission Hearing: August 25, 2026	**Board of Supervisors Public Hearing:** To be scheduled
Owners: Christopher Lee Gates & Jamie Porter Gates	**Applicant**: Polina Andreeva, Shimp Engineering
Acreage: 29.71 acres	**Special Use Permit:** Section 18-10.2.2 (20) Day camp, boarding camp.
TMP: 11900-00-00-052C2 **Location:** On the west side of Secretarys Sand Road, approximately 1 mile south of the intersection of Secretarys Sand Road and Green Creek Road.	**Zoning/By-right use**: Rural Areas (RA)-Allows agricultural, forestal, and fishery uses as well as residential uses (maximum density of 0.5 unit/acre in development lots).
Magisterial District: Scottsville	**Conditions:** Yes **EC:** No
Proposal: Boarding camp, with recreational facilities such as yoga and hiking trails.	**Comp. Plan Designation:** Rural Area – preserve and protect agricultural, forestal, open space, and natural, historic and scenic resources; residential (0.5 unit/acre in development lots)
Character of Property: The property is comprised of evergreen and deciduous forest with a gravel driveway to Secretarys Sand Road. A stream is along the western portion of the property.	**Use of Surrounding Properties:** Single-family residences and other Rural Areas uses, including forestry.
Positive Aspects: 1. The use is consistent with the review criteria for special use permits contained in the Zoning Ordinance. 2. Majority of the property would remain forested. 3. No detrimental impacts to adjoining properties are anticipated.	**Concerns:** 1. No concerns have been identified at this time.
Recommendation: Staff recommends approval of SP-2026-00001 Alberene Yoga Retreat with the conditions stated in the staff report.	

STAFF PERSON: Ben Loppacker, Planner
PLANNING COMMISSION: August 25, 2026
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS: To be scheduled

CHARACTER OF THE AREA

The subject parcel totals 29.71-acres (the property) and is located on the western side of Secretarys Sand Road approximately 1 mile south of the intersection of Secretarys Sand Rd and Green Creek Rd. The parcel is zoned Rural Areas, and is currently undeveloped, however, was previously used for timbering.

Adjacent properties on all sides of the parcels are zoned Rural Areas (RA) with a mix RA uses. All surrounding properties are occupied by either rural, single family residential uses or parcels that were formerly timbered. The adjoining property to the south, TMP 119-52C1, is owned by the same property owner as this parcel and will be occupied by their house.

PLANNING AND ZONING HISTORY

Based on County records, there have been no previous legislative proposals for the property. The parcel retains two development rights and could be developed with up to three single family dwellings.

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL

The Alberene Yoga Retreat proposes a camp (boarding camp) to be established in two phases. The first phase would include primitive campsites, a 4,000 square foot indoor yoga studio, a picnic area, and hiking trails. The second phase that would add permanent cabins to 9 campsites shown on Sheet 5 of the Concept Plan (Attachment 3), with an associated bathhouse for campers. The proposal includes using the site for small events, not to exceed 50 people per day. The applicant has provided a detailed narrative and a concept plan (Attachment 2 and Attachment 3).

The concept plan illustrates the proposed layout, including both phases, showing the location of building envelopes, location for permanent parking and overflow parking, recreation and other facilities, and phases of development of the site.

COMMUNITY MEETING/PUBLIC INPUT

On Tuesday, June 16, 2026, the required community meeting was held at Walton Middle School. However, there were no attendees from the public, so no comments were received at that time. Comment received by staff after the community meeting can be found in Attachment 4.

ANALYSIS OF THE SPECIAL USE PERMIT REQUEST:

Special Use Permits are evaluated under reasonable standards, based on zoning principles which include the proposal's compliance with the Comprehensive Plan. Any impacts caused by the proposal may be addressed through conditions which must be reasonably related and roughly proportional to the impacts.

Section 33.8(A) states that the Commission, in making its recommendation, shall consider the following factors:

1. ***No substantial detriment. Whether the proposed special use will be a substantial detriment to adjacent parcels.***

   The use is not expected to cause substantial detriment to adjacent properties. The proposal minimizes tree clearing and slopes away from Secretarys Sand Road, which will reduce visibility

from the right of way. The parcel is also over 1,000 feet away from the nearest residential and the concept plan includes vegetative buffers. To further mitigate the use on adjacent properties, staff recommends a condition that requires the establishment of quiet hours from 10 pm to 7 am, and the amplification of music during those hours is prohibited.

2. ***Character of the nearby area is unchanged. Whether the character of the adjacent parcels and the nearby area will be changed by the proposed special use.***

   The nearby area predominately contains forestry activity and residences. The concept plan proposes improvements concentrated in the center of the site, away from property lines, with much of the property remaining forested. The addition of a yoga retreat boarding camp on this parcel would not prohibit the parcel from being used for agricultural or forestal uses in the future.

   Staff believes the proposed special use permit amendment supports retention of the existing character of the area. The recommended special use permit conditions would mitigate impacts that may negatively impact the character of the area.

3. ***Harmony. Whether the proposed special use will be harmony with the purpose and intent of this chapter,***

   Section 10 of the Zoning Ordinance outlines the purpose and intent of Rural Areas (RA) zoning:

   - *Preservation of agricultural and forestal lands and activities;*
   - *Water supply protection;*
   - *Limited service delivery to the rural areas; and*
   - *Conservation of natural, scenic, and historic resources.*

   In regard to agricultural preservation, this district is intended to preserve the county's active farms and best agricultural and forestal lands by providing lot areas designed to insure the continued availability of such lands for preferential land use tax assessment in order to enhance the economy, and maintain employment and lifestyle opportunities.

   The special use permit process evaluates impacts and whether a use is appropriate at a specific location in the Rural Area and whether it is in harmony with the RA district.

   In this case, the proposed special use permit is in harmony with the purpose and intent of the chapter because the outcome would preserve forestal land and activities on large portions of the site, which can be sustained with limited services from the County, and no significant impacts are expected to natural, scenic, and historic resources.

   with the uses permitted by right in the district,

   The uses permitted by right in the Rural Areas zoning district support agriculture, forestry, and land conservation, as well as permit residential uses. The proposed boarding camp is not expected to negatively impact adjacent uses. Overall, the proposal is in harmony with by-right uses permitted in the district.

   with the regulations provided in Section 5 as applicable,

   Section 5.1.05 provides supplemental regulations that are applicable to all day camps and boarding camps. These regulations are in addition to all other requirements of County Code and

all other applicable laws. The proposed expansion will be subject to the regulations in Section 5.1.05 listed below.

a. Provisions for outdoor cooking, campfires, cooking pits, etc., shall be subject to Albemarle County fire official approval whether or not a site development plan is required;

b. All such uses shall conform to the requirements of the Virginia Department of Health Bureau of Tourist Establishment Sanitation and other applicable requirements.

The applicant is required to ensure compliance with these supplemental regulations during the review of the site plan. The Fire Marshall's Office will review any outdoor firepits, and the Health Department will review permits for well and septic facilities on site.

and with the public health, safety, and general welfare.

The public health, safety, and general welfare of the community are protected throughout the special use permit process, which assures that the proposed expansion is appropriate in the location requested.

Staff from Zoning, Engineering, Inspections, Conservation, Historic Preservation, Fire Rescue, Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), and Transportation have all reviewed this application and provided input into the special use permit process. VDOT has not identified any concerns with the proposed entrance location on Secretary's Sand Road and the road is adequate to accommodate additional trips from the camp.

If the special use permit amendment is approved, the use cannot commence without the appropriate approvals from Planning, the Fire Marshal, Inspections, and Zoning. These approvals include the site plan, building and zoning permits. These processes will ensure that all State and County regulations, special use permit conditions, and all necessary improvements have been constructed, inspected, and approved.

4. Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. Whether the proposed special use will be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan (AC44) land use designation for the property is Rural Area. The property and all of the abutting properties along Secretarys Sand Road are also designated as Rural Area within Comprehensive Plan. Staff found consistency with the Comprehensive Plan throughout the RA land use (RALU) objectives.

Supportive statements from the Rural Areas chapter of AC44 include:

- RALU, Obj. 2: Protect natural systems, water supplies, and historic and cultural resources through the implementation of natural area preservation, adaptive reuse, historic preservation, and education policies and practices.

This proposal seeks to retain approximately 14.5 acres as conservation area, including all portions of this parcel located within the stream buffer. There would be no clearing conducted on this portion of the parcel within approximately 300 feet of the stream, thus protecting existing water protection ordinance buffers that exist on this parcel.

- RALU, Obj. 3: Increase the use of land conservation programs to implement the Objectives of AC44's Rural Area Chapter and Environmental Stewardship Chapter.

The proposal seeks to designate approximately 14.5 acres as open space conservation area, leaving the entire western portion of the parcel in an undisturbed state.

- RALU, Obj. 6.1: Add small-scale, outdoor recreation uses (not to include indoor lodging) that have minimal impact on natural resources, infrastructure, and adjacent properties to the list of uses permitted in the Rural Area Zoning District, especially where these uses can co-exist with rather than replace existing agricultural and silvicultural uses.

This proposal is for a small-scale, largely outdoor recreational use that has minimal impact to natural features, on a site that is currently unused. Some of the proposed recreational activities include hiking, camping, and yoga retreats.

- RALU, Obj. 7: Plan for and manage non-residential land uses and existing development in the Rural Area.
    - Prioritize land use and zoning opportunities to support agricultural, recreational, silvicultural, and related/supporting industries in these locations.

This proposal for camping, hiking, and a yoga retreat are consistent with recreational activities supported in the rural area.

SUMMARY

Staff have identified the following positive aspects with this request:

1. The use is consistent with the review criteria for special use permits contained in the Zoning Ordinance.
2. The majority of the property would remain forested.
3. No detrimental impacts to adjoining properties are anticipated.

Staff have identified the following concerns with this request:

1. No concerns have been identified at this time.

RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the findings contained in this staff report, staff recommends approval of SP-2026-00001 Alberene Yoga Retreat Special Use Permit with conditions.

Staff is providing the following draft conditions for consideration:

1. The development of the use must be in general accord (as determined by the Director of Planning and the Zoning Administrator) with the sheet titled, “Alberene Wellness Retreat Concept Plan” prepared by Shimp Engineering, and dated January 19, 2026, last revised April 16, 2026. To be in general accord with the Concept Plan, development and use must reflect the following major elements as shown on the Plan:
    a. Location of proposed building envelopes and site features;
    b. Location of site entrance;
    c. Location of proposed permanent and overflow parking envelopes; and
    d. Location of proposed disturbance.

    Minor modifications to the Plan that do not conflict with the elements above may be made to ensure compliance with the Zoning Ordinance.

2. Events. The site may hold up to 24 events per calendar year with a maximum of 50 attendees per day.

3. Quiet Hours. The owner must establish and enforce Campground Quiet Hours, which must be from 10pm to 7am and must include a prohibition on outdoor amplified music during those hours.

4. Buffers. All parking areas shall be located at least 125 feet from all parcel boundaries, and all parking must be adequately screened per Section 32.7.9.7 of the Albemarle County Code

5. Lighting. Any lighting associated with the retreat must comply with County Code § 18-4.17.

6. Outdoor Amplified Music. Sound from outdoor amplified music is regulated as follows:
    a) Maximum Sound Levels: Outdoor amplified music must comply with the applicable maximum sound levels established in County Code § 18-4.18.04.
    b) Prohibited Hours: Outdoor amplified music is prohibited between 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. the following morning.

POSSIBLE PLANNING COMMISSION MOTIONS:

A. Should the Planning Commission **choose to recommend approval** of this special use permit:

I move to recommend approval of SP-2026-00001 Alberene Yoga Retreat Special Use Permit with the conditions provided by staff for the reasons stated in the staff report.

B. Should the Planning Commission **choose to recommend denial** of this special use permit:

I move to recommend denial of SP-2026-00001 Alberene Yoga Retreat Special Use Permit for the reasons stated in the staff report. *Should a commissioner motion to recommend denial, he or she should state the reason(s) for recommending denial*.

SE-2026-00004 and SE-2026-00005 SPECIAL EXCEPTION APPLICATIONs

The applicant has requested waiver of the following two requirements of the Zoning Ordinance related to access aisles and parking. Both requests are subject to County Engineer review and approval.

1. **4.12.17(a)] Grade for vehicle access aisles not adjacent to parking spaces.** Vehicle access aisles that are not adjacent to parking spaces, shall not exceed a grade of ten percent. The Board of Supervisors may increase the maximum grade, upon a finding that no reasonable design alternative would reduce or alleviate the need and that the increase in grade would be in the best interest of public health, safety and welfare. The developer must request the waiver in writing and provide all information necessary to justify that no reasonable design alternative exists. In no case shall the grade exceed private road standards set forth in section 14-514 of the Code.

    The concept plan proposes to use the existing entrance and entrance road already established on the property. Due to topography, the access aisle is proposed to be at a maximum grade of 14%. Any realignment of the driveway from the current alignment would result in disturbance of existing forested area, with more extensive earthwork, and

would still may exceed a maximum grade of ten percent. Therefore, staff conclude no reasonable design alternative exists that would allow the travelway to be constructed at less than a ten percent grade. Given the limited number of trips, limited increase in grade, and length of the travel aisle associated with the increase, staff does not concerns with public health, safety, and welfare. Minimum standards for emergency vehicle access will still be met.

2. **[4.12.15 (g)]** ***Curb and gutter in parking areas along travelways.*** Curbs shall be established at the edges of parking areas or access aisles in the following circumstances: (1) in all commercial or institutional developments requiring eight or more parking spaces; (2) in all multi-family dwelling and townhouse developments requiring eight or more parking spaces; (3) where necessary to control or direct stormwater runoff; (4) where a sidewalk is located closer than four feet from the edge of an access aisle; and (5) where necessary to contain vehicular traffic to protect pedestrians and/or property. Gutters shall be required where necessary to control or direct stormwater runoff. The Board of Supervisors may waive or modify this requirement if deemed necessary to accommodate stormwater management/BMP facility design or existing uses located in the Rural Areas (RA) zoning district.

   Staff expects the site plan will utilize a variety of stormwater strategies to effectively capture and provide the necessary treatment for runoff from impervious surfaces. There is no storm sewer for this property to tie into and no anticipated impacts to neighboring properties that could be mitigated by implementing curb and gutter. Any stormwater impacts will largely be mitigated by retaining existing forested areas, which the applicant intends to preserve as much as possible. Stormwater and safe pedestrian ways will be verified at the time of site plan.

   Staff has no objection to the waiver of curb and gutter requirements along travelways.

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Commission is not required to make a recommendation on this Special Exception. However, if the Planning Commission chooses to provide comments on the special exception, staff will include those in the Transmittal Summary to the Board of Supervisors.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attach 1 – SP-2026-00001 Alberene Yoga Retreat – Location Map
Attach 2 – SP-2026-00001 Alberene Yoga Retreat – Applicant Narrative
Attach 3 – SP-2026-00001 Alberene Yoga Retreat – Conceptual Plan
Attach 4 – SP-2006-00001 Alberene Yoga Retreat – Public Comment
Attach 5 – SE-2026-00004 Alberene Yoga Retreat – Narrative – Grade
Attach 6 – SE-2026-00005 Alberene Yoga Retreat – Narrative – Requirements for Curb and Gutter