Albemarle County Planning Commission
Work Session and Regular Meeting
Draft 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.

Recess

The Commission recessed at 4:04 p.m. and reconvened at 4:10 p.m.

CPA202100002 AC44 Thriving Economy

Ben Holt, Senior Planner II, said that he would like to provide a high-level overview of the AC44 project and how it would tie into their future implementation efforts. He said that as they were aware, the comprehensive plan outlined numerous actions across the 10 AC44 topic chapters. He said that these actions would be considered as a whole and evaluated to identify the key actions that would inform the six objectives within the Board strategic plan.

Mr. Holt said that the budget process would then be used to determine how key initiatives would be funded, ultimately informing the department and the work program for allocating County

resources and staff efforts. He said that this process would be further discussed as they continued to refine the implementation pathway throughout the remainder of the AC44 project.

Mr. Missel said that he had a quick question regarding the timeline. He said that he was unsure if this was a fair question, but he asked if staff could provide them with a general sense of the timeframe for the milestones of the comprehensive plan.

Mr. Holt said that they were aiming to have the final draft of the last topic chapter published in June. He said that as they transitioned into the late summer and fall months, they anticipated adoption. He said that their goal was to have AC44 adopted later this calendar year. He said that he did not have the details on the strategic plan or its timeline, which was to be determined.

Mr. Missel said that this would not be related to the budget process for this year; it would be a future budget year.

Mr. Holt said that that was correct. He said that the refined strategic plan would help them determine the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that would be used to implement AC44. He said that AC44 would continue to inform the CIP effort moving forward, as they were discussing a 20-year horizon plan.

Emily Kilroy, Director of Economic Development, said that they were approximately halfway through the current Board's strategic plan, which encompassed all County and local government functions. She said that they were three quarters of the way through Fiscal Year (FY) 25, and their plan goes through FY28.

Mr. Holt said that for today's work session, he would provide a brief presentation on the Thriving Economy chapter. He said that he would keep the presentation concise to allow for ample time for discussion. He said that as previously mentioned by the Chair, Ms. Kilroy would also present the strategic plan from the Economic Development team. He said that their focus for today would be centered on the chapter objectives and actions for Thriving Economy, with particular emphasis on Objective 2 and the associated actions within it, as these focused on land use and were of particular importance.

Mr. Holt said that, building on previous feedback from both the Commission and the Board, prominent themes on this topic of the economy included providing land for target industries, along with the necessary zoning designations for economic uses, and the need for development-ready sites with supporting infrastructure in place. He said that their build-out analysis had identified the lack of these types of properties as a significant issue.

Mr. Holt said that other key themes included the need for affordable housing near employment areas, support for small businesses, workforce development, and economic uses in rural areas such as tourism and the outdoor recreation industry. He said that community input had highlighted the need for jobs that provided career growth opportunities within key industries, as well as the importance of attracting new jobs to the area. He said that there was also a desire to support businesses and entrepreneurs, including the provision of workspace availability, growing artisan and craft industries, and reducing restrictions for home-based businesses.

Mr. Holt said that community members had echoed the need for land and infrastructure that supported economic uses and the importance of utilizing infill and adaptive reuse within their development areas, reducing barriers for site development. He said that workforce development was another priority, including career and vocational training through partnerships with local colleges and technical schools, as well as providing support services for local employees such as childcare, housing, and transportation options.

Mr. Holt said that a thriving economy was also supported by other chapter topics and County initiatives. He said that economic development was guided and supported by their growth management policy and the associated land use strategies within both development areas and rural areas. He said that AC44 recognized the Economic Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) as the primary document guiding the County's economic development and growth. He said that both the AC44 and the Economic Development Strategic Plan reinforced connections to the Board's initiatives on equity and climate action.

Mr. Holt said that in terms of overall scope, the Thriving Economy objectives and actions provided high-level support for economic development, while the ongoing or pending Economic Strategic Plan would provide more detailed implementation strategies for the local economy. He said that the AC44 chapter would be refined by direction from the Strategic Plan, and future revisions of the chapter would be informed by the Strategic Plan. He said that their current draft chapter actions were more focused on land use and regulatory efforts, which were less likely to change with future Strategic Plan input.

Mr. Holt said that the Thriving Economy chapter overlapped with other topics, including the Development Areas chapter, which emphasized the quality of life, dense development within development areas, and a mix of uses. He said that in contrast, the Rural Areas chapter included guidance on tourism, agriculture, and forestry-related uses, as well as historic, cultural, and outdoor activities. He said that the Transportation and Community Facilities chapters emphasized the multimodal transportation planning efforts, and the community infrastructure needs critical to supporting a thriving economy.

Mr. Holt said that some of the challenges addressed by the chapter included the need for industrial or light industrial zoned land, site-ready land in various sizes, and supporting different scales of buildings to support employment-related uses. He said that the chapter also supported identified target industries, such as the local defense industry and others. He said that there was a need to address barriers for work and employee support services, including childcare, multimodal transportation, and workforce housing.

Mr. Holt said that the chapter had five objectives, which were to implement the strategic plan as the primary document for economic development and to ensure the availability of land and infrastructure for employment-related uses, strengthen business retention and expansion, particularly for target industries, and support access to jobs training and career advancement to reduce barriers to workforce participation.

Mr. Holt said that overlapping and related actions within the Rural Areas Land Use chapter called for updating the zoning ordinance to allow uses that support processing and sales for agriculture and silviculture-related uses, as well as allowing small-scale businesses for services and daily needs through adaptive reuse of buildings and allowing low-impact outdoor recreation uses that complement and did not conflict with other existing rural land uses, such as agriculture and forestry-related uses. He said that related actions within the Development Areas chapter included updating the Zoning Ordinance to support infill, adaptive reuse, and redevelopment, especially within their activity centers.

Mr. Holt said that other actions included utilizing public-private partnerships to support redevelopment in underutilized areas, identifying and funding CIP projects that supported activity center development, utilizing tools and funding sources, such as capital funding grants and community development block grants (CDBG), to support employment uses. He said that an action recommended that the zoning ordinance update include a provision to allow for data centers within the Development Areas, but only on industrial-zoned land, and it would be accompanied by performance improvements and performance standards that addressed and mitigated the associated impacts.

Mr. Holt said that reviewing the AC44 schedule, they would have a continued work session with the Board on April 2 to finalize their discussion on revisions to the Development Areas Land Use Chapter and Community Design Guidelines. He said that for Thriving Economy, they had their work session today, and their session with the Board would be held on April 16. He said that they also recently held a virtual Lunch and Learn event for community members on February 27. He said that the Community Facilities and Infrastructure Chapter would be covered at the Commission's work session on March 25, followed by the Board's work session on April 16.

Mr. Moore said that he was not reviewing the bullet-pointed sections, but he did take a look at the land use build out analysis page in the packet. He said that according to the information, there were approximately 39 development area parcels that may qualify. He said that he would like to learn more about these parcels, including their locations and any maps or visual aids that may be available.

Mr. Holt said that he did not have a map available at the moment. He said that Ms. Kanellopoulos was more involved with the build-out analysis, so she may recall whether a map was ever produced as part of that process to identify those locations.

Tori Kanellopoulos, Principal Planner on the Long-Range Planning Team, said that they did not create a map of those parcels, but rather conducted an internal review, examining criteria such as which properties would be suitable for a business generating economic development uses, considering existing zoning, like light industrial zoning, and assessing accessibility of infrastructure. She said that their goal was to evaluate these criteria at a high level, informally, and then consider the available space in their development areas. She said that unfortunately, there were limited sites that were ready for economic development from the outset.

Mr. Moore said that this was related to another question he had, which dated back to when the Economic Development Office team visited them a year ago. He said that they had since learned that there was one tier four site, North Fork, and currently, none were tier five. He said that he was curious about the remaining 38 parcels and how they generally fell into tier one, two, or three categories.

Ms. Kanellopoulos said that she would need to review the results in more detail, but she believed many of them were at the two or three tier level.

Emily Kilroy, Director of Economic Development, said that the state had adopted a tier system in coordination with engineering firms, which helped establish a common language for assessing the readiness of a site. She said that the tiers were essentially a measure of the time it took to reach a point where a ribbon-cutting ceremony could be held.

Ms. Kilroy said that there were five tiers in the system. She said that Tier 5 was not typically the end goal for economic developers, as it involved building or designing a structure for a future prospect. She said that in reality, Tier 4 was more commonly targeted, as it represented a site that had been cleared, graded, and had a preliminary site plan, allowing for quick vertical construction that was informed by the end user's needs.

Ms. Kilroy said that it was worth noting that not everyone was aware that Tier 5 was not the primary target. She said that the study had identified most of the County's sites as falling into Tier 2 and Tier 3 categories. She said that Tier 1 consisted of privately owned raw land, Tier 2 involved public land or sites controlled by developers seeking to develop them for economic purposes, and Tier 3 featured established zoning and due diligence.

Ms. Kilroy said that for the Rivanna Futures Project, which had begun as a Tier 1 designation in 2023 and was now classified as a Tier 3, as of September 2024. She said that they were actively working to achieve Tier 4 status, which involved having all necessary infrastructure in place, resolving outstanding issues, and completing entitlement work with the County. She said that this process was ongoing, and they were hopeful of advancing to Tier 4.

Ms. Kilroy said that their plan was to develop a second Tier 4 site with increased capacity, at which point they would focus on identifying and supporting Tier 2 and Tier 2 sites that were likely to achieve Tier 4 status soon and explore ways for the County to partner in that process.

Mr. Clayborne said that he had a question, and if it was not suitable for this discussion, he may revisit it later. He said that it involved the macro environment, particularly at the federal level, and balancing that with a longer-term vision typically included in a comprehensive plan. He said that he was wondering about conversations in the Economic Development Department that he could share with them regarding target industries, considering the cuts that were expected to occur over the next four years, as well as the reliance on federal funds, such as the Block Grant program. He asked if this information may influence how they approached the conversation around land use.

Ms. Kilroy said that during the current budget season, the County Executive's Recommended Budget was released about two weeks ago, and the Board was just starting to work sessions on it this week. She said that they were discussing the County's exposure to federal funding, including opportunities and potential risks to grants that may be at risk.

Ms. Kilroy said that the staff was thoroughly studying this. She said that the landscape evolved fairly rapidly, which was not something the government was typically accused of. She said that however, the County's budget, particularly when focusing on local government and excluding the public school system, had a distinct makeup.

Ms. Kilroy said that federal revenues accounted for a relatively small portion of the County's budget. She said that the federal funds available were closely tied to specific programs, and the County had reserve funds to help absorb any potential shock from a rapid shift in funding availability. She said that these conversations were currently taking place with the Board.

Ms. Kilroy said that from an economic development perspective, they were closely monitoring announcements and their subsequent shifts in scale, impact, or magnitude. She said that they were focusing on permanent and ongoing initiatives and looking for ways to be responsive to these changes. She said that the Rivanna Futures project, located adjacent to a federal installation, had significant implications.

Ms. Kilroy said that they were working closely with state and federal partners to understand potential on-the-ground impacts. She said that as things became more concrete, they felt well-positioned to respond. She said that the good news was that economic development often took a longer-term view. She said that while the next 12 months may not be the primary focus, they were more interested in what the next three to five years held and how they could establish themselves as a stable and reliable partner during that time. She said that she had high hopes that they would be able to successfully navigate the challenges that lay ahead in the next couple of years.

Mr. Clayborne said that he thanked her for the information. He said that in the context of their discussion, it was reasonable to assume that defense would continue to be a primary target area as they considered land use and other factors.

Ms. Kilroy said that was the assumption they were working with.

Mr. Carrazana said that he thanked them for the clarification on the tiers, as that was where his questions were heading. He said that he appreciated the clarification, as Tier 5 initially seemed like a building that was already designed and ready to occupy. He said that however, it appeared that someone would still need to develop it. He asked if, when considering the opportunities, university properties within the County had been considered at all.

Ms. Kanellopoulos said that the evaluation focused on the overall build-out, specifically the property owned by the UVA Foundation, but not by UVA itself. She said that when considering the build-out, they generally excluded areas that already had approved development and were in the process of being built out. She said that therefore, they did not assume a major redevelopment would occur, and instead, they considered it would develop at its current capacity. She said that Fontaine Avenue was recognized as having a relatively stable capacity, and that was a key factor in their evaluation.

Mr. Carrazana asked if the opportunities within the County that were already part of a planned development were not included in the count.

Ms. Kanellopoulos said that they counted them separately from a new, unbuilt-out project that had not yet been submitted.

Mr. Carrazana said that he believed there was an important piece that should be included, as it highlighted opportunities within the County that may not be fully accounted for. He said that currently, it seemed like these types of developments were facing diminished opportunities, but he thought there was a lot more potential out there.

Mr. Carrazana said that his other question pertained to redevelopment sites, particularly those along Route 29. He said that there were currently empty spaces, including box stores, and he was wondering how these were being considered in terms of development opportunities. He said that he wanted to know where these sites fell in the rankings, and what were the potential for redevelopment.

Ms. Kanellopoulos said that for the buildout, they examined areas where land value exceeded structure value for redevelopment. She said that one notable example was the acquisition of a property that had recently been rezoned for residential and office use, transforming an old office building into approximately 15 residential units and an office building below.

Ms. Kanellopoulos said that this analysis did identify such opportunities, but she believed that a more in-depth study of other areas was necessary, as these areas could potentially redevelop in ways that wouldn't be apparent through the analysis alone. She said that they were indeed planning to conduct this in-depth study this year as an update to their initial build-out analysis, taking these considerations into account.

Mr. Carrazana said that he appreciated that clarification. He said that it would be helpful to avoid creating the impression that they had a limited supply to accommodate functions like this, when in fact, he believed that there were many more opportunities within the County.

Mr. Bivins said that he was seeking a definitional clarification regarding the development district or development area. He said that in his understanding, this area was intended to house people. He said that when discussing light industrial and commercial areas, he would like to know if this land mass was an addition to the development area or if it was already included within it.

Mr. Bivins said that if it was included, he reiterated that they lacked sufficient land to achieve their goals. He said that he knew this may be a contentious point, but considering 20 years of growth,

they were already operating in a constrained area and increasing density in commercial and light industrial areas appeared to be limited by available land.

Mr. Carrazana said that to follow up on his previous point, he believed that this analysis was incomplete, as it only examined the areas, they had available. He said that upon further consideration, he realized that there was more capacity for building, particularly if they densely developed the land. He said that in fact, with a total of 1.9 million square feet, it was feasible to reach that capacity in areas zoned for this type of development.

Mr. Bivins said that he was unsure how they could accommodate the conservative population growth that had been projected by the Weldon Cooper Center, which was not a large influx of individuals. He said that he believed they needed to consider growing the local economy to provide an alternative to real estate taxes.

Mr. Bivins said that in essence, they should use this as a means to balance real estate taxes. He said that he was concerned that they did not have enough land to do this in an effective manner. He said that when they discussed economic development with Ms. Kilroy, he planned to elaborate on why he thought this idea was flawed and unlikely to occur in a meaningful way.

Mr. Missel said that regarding Slide 13, he did not fully understand it, and he would appreciate a brief explanation. He said that specifically, regarding section 4.2, he would like to know if the zoning ordinance regulations would be updated to allow for rural, light, industrial, and commercial uses that support retail sales with agricultural and civil, as well as silviculture uses, such as those found in agricultural, forestry and rural communities.

Mr. Holt said that an example of industry-supporting uses within the rural area could be a canning operation used for food processing. He said that he believed that there were limited uses specifically allowed by right within their current zoning, so they were trying to target some of those opportunities that were suitable for the rural area.

Mr. Missel said that he wanted to bring up one additional point to highlight what he believed was an obvious connection. He said that the Economic Development Strategic Plan was currently underway, and it would inform the AC44 document. He said that this would allow for some of the information from the Economic Development Strategic Plan to be integrated into the AC44 document, working ahead of other plans such as the Rural Area Plan, which would trail behind the AC44 Plan and therefore may not be as informative to the AC44 Plan.

David Benish, Development Process Manager, said that the development and completion of the strategic plan may provide them with more information that could lead to further updates of this section. He said that the intent here was to provide a higher level of guidance in the comprehensive plan, offering broader direction that supports long-term viability. He said that the strategic plan was the substance of the actions, and some of the actions listed in this section were relatively light, with the expectation that they belonged in the strategic plan. He said that similarly, this section, like others, contained numerous economic development-related actions that they had already highlighted, and there were many more to consider.

Ms. Firehock said that she would like to make two quick points. She said that as they considered the land available for economic development, she would like to highlight the underdeveloped parcels they had. She said that for example, Avon Street Extended featured a number of single-story businesses, including Leap and other low-density developments.

Ms. Firehock said that given this, she wondered what the incentive was to redevelop these parcels. She said that perhaps the County could consider strategic approaches, such as offering

tax breaks, to encourage higher-density development. She said that for instance, providing a tax break for a few years on real estate taxes could incentivize redevelopment.

Ms. Firehock said that additionally, she would like to note that there were issues with their zoning, which had been touched upon today. She said that for instance, a recent development required a special use permit for a business that also wanted to live in the space. She said that this could make similar uses easier to accommodate.

Ms. Firehock said that furthermore, many of their older spaces required extensive rewiring, which could be costly. She said that some spaces lacked elevators to the second floor, making them inaccessible to people with disabilities. She said that this could also impact their ability to rent these spaces, as many federal grants required disability access. She said that improving the infrastructure of existing businesses to make them more attractive could be a priority. She said that additionally, creative zoning and incentives to densify their available space could also be explored.

Ms. Kilroy said that she and Mr. Benish discussed how to approach the Thriving Economy chapter with the Planning Commission, given the reliance on a strategic plan that did not exist. She said that they also talked about whether to discuss the strategic plan that they had and then come back to it later. She said that they felt that it might be more efficient to focus on the things they knew from the plan that they were currently working through, given the close timelines.

Ms. Kilroy said that they did not have a final adoption date nailed down yet, but they were looking at an August adoption by the Board of Supervisors. She said that they believed that the strategic plan would be final ahead of the AC44 comprehensive plan, so any adjustments that needed to be made could be worked through.

Ms. Kilroy said that to provide some context on why economic development was an important topic, they were focusing on it because it was currently the County's budget season, so they were looking at where their revenues were coming from. She said that federal revenues, residential and commercial real estate tax revenues, and property tax. She said that property tax was the largest provider of revenue for Albemarle County, as it was for most local governments.

Ms. Kilroy said that having a good mix was important because commercial properties would generate more tax revenue than the cost of providing services to that property, especially versus a residential property. She said that this was a big-picture consideration and was one of the reasons why economic development was an area in which most local governments invested in.

Ms. Kilroy said that the role of economic development was to identify how government could effectively partner with businesses to create a thriving business environment, and this was determined by their strategic plan. She said that the focus of economic development strategies varied by locality, with some focusing on main street retail opportunities and others prioritizing tourism.

Ms. Kilroy said that they were fortunate to have several areas with promising business opportunities for their local communities. She said that the strategic plan would help them determine the best areas to focus on, given the limited land available in each area. She said that their goal was to ensure that they were making the right decisions for the community, taking into account the unique needs and opportunities of each location.

Ms. Kilroy said that the mission of economic development is to attract financial resources into the community through responsible activities that enhance the County's competitive position, focusing on quality job creation and career employment opportunities. She said that this, in turn, helps

increase the tax base. She said that in Albemarle, they prioritize enhancing natural resources and community character, while improving the quality of life for all residents.

Ms. Kilroy said that she would share how this looked in practice. She said that one area they had been focusing on was job creation. She said that provided was a photo from the Governor's announcement at Afton Scientific, located on Avon Street Extended. She said that Tom Thorpe and his company, Afton Scientific, had a significant presence here. She said that they started here, grew here, and were now poised for further growth.

Ms. Kilroy said that this was particularly exciting, as their work involved developing a delivery injectable mechanism for the pharmaceutical industry, ensuring that medications reach consumers. She said that they had announced plans to create 200 jobs and invest $200 million in building a new facility, adjacent to their existing one. She said that they continued to explore additional investments.

Ms. Kilroy said that what was notable about Afton Scientific was that the jobs they were creating are not limited to PhD-level positions. She said that while some staff members hold advanced degrees, the majority of the jobs were in advanced manufacturing, making them accessible to a broad range of community members.

Ms. Kilroy said that the County is partnering with Cville Biohub and other local economic development partners to better align training and educational opportunities at high schools, community colleges, and universities, ensuring that community members are well-prepared to work with companies like Afton Scientific and take advantage of those job opportunities.

Ms. Kilroy said that next was redevelopment. She said that as Ms. Kanellopoulos had mentioned in her comments, they highlighted the potential for redevelopment at properties where the improvement in value is below the land value. She said that they partnered with the Home Depot over the summer to create a public-private partnership for their store at the Fashion Square Mall.

Ms. Kilroy said that one of the reasons this was crucial was that Home Depot could develop on greenfields, which is their typical model. She said that they were interested in expanding to Albemarle County, and redevelopment sites were what they were finding, often with additional expenses. She said that these included considering upgrades, remediation issues related to the Sears Auto site, which had operated for many years, and the cost to develop that property was higher than expected. She said that as a result, they were looking at what they normally would expect from a site of that size.

Ms. Kilroy said that the County partnered with them on this project. She said that typically, the County had not focused heavily on retail strategies, but in this case, they evaluated the redevelopment opportunity. She said that by examining cities and counties across the Commonwealth, they saw that significant funding was being invested in public-private partnership agreements to encourage developers to redevelop aging malls.

Ms. Kilroy said that they felt that a modest investment could help trigger redevelopment, which they expected would be a first step for that property. She said that as they looked to its future, they were excited about this opportunity. She said that the other step was focused on planning for the future, specifically Rivanna Futures. She said that the defense sector in their community and regional economy generated $1.2 billion annually, second only to the University of Virginia.

Ms. Kilroy said that the Rivanna Futures initiative was a significant investment in creating an additional Tier 4 site, a site of considerable scale. She said that they had approximately 172 acres zoned for light industrial and commercial use, which had been achieved through the collaborative

efforts of the past 18 months. She said that this project aimed to stay ahead of the curve, build opportunities, and bring partners to the table to drive meaningful outcomes.

Ms. Kilroy said that the first economic development strategic plan, Project ENABLE, was a groundbreaking effort for the County. She said that the metrics presented on this slide demonstrated the success of that initiative. She said that they often partnered with the Economic Development Authority (EDA) to secure grant funding matches for state opportunities, supporting business retention and expansion programs, job creation, and agricultural infrastructure grants.

Ms. Kilroy said that their data-driven approach was a key aspect of their current strategy. She said that they were working with Resonance, a firm that combined data-driven and engagement approaches, to shape conversations and understand stakeholder priorities. She said that the process outlined on this slide involved four main elements: data collection, stakeholder engagement, data analysis, and plan development.

Ms. Kilroy said that this process was iterative, with ongoing data analysis, stakeholder engagement, and plan refinement. She said that she would like to share a couple of data points from their initial data work with Resonance that may be of interest to the Planning Commission, particularly in the context of a thriving economy. She said that one takeaway from the data was that Albemarle County had strong economic growth, but workforce participation was lagging behind its peers.

Ms. Kilroy said that according to the data, their unemployment rate was very low, considered full employment by economists. She said that however, when examining the rate of job growth, they had seen 11% growth over a five-year period from 2018 to 2023. She said that this high job growth, combined with full employment, may lead to labor shortage crunches. She said that the data had identified this as a potential issue.

Ms. Kilroy said that the next point was related in some ways. She said that Albemarle County had a highly educated workforce, with some of the highest bachelor's, master's, and above credentials in the country. She said that, however, their prime working-age population, specifically those aged 25 to 44, was underrepresented. She said that a review of their population showed that they were behind the Commonwealth, the United States, and their peers in this age group. She said that their median age was also high, indicating a large retirement-age population.

Ms. Kilroy said that this is not unique to Albemarle, as the City of Charlottesville also faced a similar challenge. She said that the County has strong innovation assets and a fast-growing STEM job market among its peers. She said that a significant portion of this is due to the University of Virginia and the extensive research being conducted there, as well as their strong focus on commercialization and translating university research into entrepreneurial endeavors.

Ms. Kilroy said that the next slide illustrated the growth rate of STEM jobs. She said that when examining their ranking among peers, they fall into the high-middle category. She said that the growth rate of STEM jobs over the past several years had been substantial.

Mr. Bivins said that on Slide 6, he suggested removing Charlottesville-Albemarle Technical Education Center (CATEC) and instead considered Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC). He said that given staff's recent sharing with them, he believed PVCC may offer an alternative approach to filling that space, one that differed from the CATEC arrangement. He said that he believed the County had been more receptive to PVCC, adopting a different approach than they had with KTECATECC. He said that he would like to know if staff had any information regarding how their experience with opportunity zones might be relevant to this decision.

Mr. Bivins said that the County was not experienced with opportunity zones, and unfortunately, they did not do well with this. He said that one piece that did take advantage of the opportunity zone was the property across from the Fifth Street Office Building, where a unique set of buildings were planned to house high-tech, biotech companies, similar to those Ms. Kilroy had spoken about. He said that instead, they now have a self-storage facility.

Mr. Bivins said that he had strong feelings about the self-storage facility, and he believed this experience might be helpful as they considered how to attract businesses to this area. He said that he could provide some information on target industries on their page, which he had broken down into three categories. He said that they had provided the name for the third category.

Mr. Bivins said that when he looked at their historic industries, he saw that they had evolved into new sectors, largely due to the reshaping of Albemarle County into a retirement community. He said that historically, their industries were largely agricultural businesses, with many located in the Crozet area. He said that however, they were scattered throughout the County. He said that this raised questions about what constituted historic industries. He said that on page four, they listed the current state of their industries.

Mr. Bivins said that he believed the County received only a very small amount of federal funding. He said that if any of these industries were to fail tomorrow based on a Washington D.C. policy or folly, rather than any inherent weakness. He said that Northrop Grumman's future was uncertain, depending on their plans for the defense industry.

Mr. Bivins said that he would not speculate on what could happen, but he was concerned about the potential impact on the University of Virginia and Sentara if they made significant changes to Medicaid. He said that this could have severe consequences for these organizations. Crutchfield Corporation, a private entity, may also face financial difficulties if its leadership decided to close it.

Mr. Bivins said that similarly, private entities like the Atlantic Coast and Farmington may choose to stop paying dues, leading to a steady state. He said that his point was that many of these organizations relied on federal funding and decisions that could affect employment. He said that if federal funding was reduced or eliminated, it could lead to job losses, housing instability, and a decrease in their defense space.

Mr. Bivins said that this was a concern for him, particularly when considering the impact on target industries like defense and aerospace. He said that in contrast, Afton Scientific, a business similar to Micro Air, produces products that benefit healthcare. He said that this was the kind of business that had a diverse workforce, comprising individuals with various educational backgrounds, including PhDs, MBAs, and lawyers.

Mr. Bivins said that he believed this eclectic mix of people helped the community prepare a workforce for emerging industries. He said that he would encourage staff to consider aspirational industries when shaping the conversation about how the County invested in attracting people and collaborating with educational institutions. He said that this approach was somewhat unnerving to some, as it implied that they were thinking about the future, but they had access to the necessary smart people in this community.

Mr. Bivins said that his concern was that when one examined the data on low unemployment rate and high job growth, it was clear that many of these jobs were being filled by people coming from outside the area. He said that in Albemarle County, most new job growth was due to importing people, rather than growing their own workforce. He said that he was concerned that when one looked at low unemployment and high growth rates, it was not just about providing jobs, but also about creating opportunities for people to live and thrive there.

Mr. Bivins said that even if they offered housing options, many people were deterred from moving to this area due to the lower quality of life compared to other cities, such as Richmond. He said that Richmond offered a better quality of life for a single person, and even Lynchburg had a more diverse and attractive set of opportunities. He said that when considering what they were doing, it was not just about providing a job, but also about what people could do outside of work, such as pursuing hobbies or community activities on weekends.

Mr. Bivins said that what was the purpose of this space, and this was where his colleague, Mr. Moore, and he had discussed the importance of community spaces that brought people together, making it a place where people wanted to live. He said that they had heard many of them express frustration with the presence of tot lots, as they were often underutilized by individuals who would never use them. He said that this was a fact, as evidenced by the declining birth rate in Albemarle County.

Mr. Bivins said that the increasing number of hotlines suggested a need for community engagement, but the declining live birth rate indicated a disconnect between their goals and the reality of attracting young families. He said that it was counterintuitive to aim to attract people in their 30s, 20s, and 40s, as they often did not have the same needs as those in their 30s. He said that without a variety of activities, it was challenging for individuals to establish roots in the community.

Mr. Bivins said that one way to address this was to acknowledge the data and the work that had gone into creating this space, rather than relying solely on intuition or assumptions. He said that by validating the data, they could increase the adoption and appreciation of the efforts made to create this community space.

Mr. Bivins said that their County-wide service, the survey, inquired about various aspects of individuals' lives, including their educational background, income, and overall well-being. He said that the survey was conducted annually. He said that examining the demographics of the survey revealed that it appeared to be geared towards older, more affluent individuals with higher levels of education and access to resources.

Mr. Bivins said that while they could analyze this data in various ways, it was essential to acknowledge that it was self-reported and may not accurately represent the broader community. He said that they did not ask about heritage, age, or other demographic factors. He said that this meant that not everyone may respond to the survey, and their data gathering methods may not be as comprehensive as they could be. He said that his colleague, Mr. Clayborne, could provide more information on their data collection process.

Mr. Carrazana said that he appreciated the presentation and found it to be very informative. He said that he also appreciated them highlighting the Home Depot example, which he believed was a great success story and embodied many of the principles they were discussing in AC44. He said that this concept of taking advantage of infill sites, redevelopment sites, and partnering with private industry to accomplish that was a perfect example.

Mr. Carrazana said that one thing he would add to this was densification. He said that as they looked at the mall area, he thought they should encourage higher density development, rather than just one-story buildings. He said that while the Home Depot was a great example of a successful use of land, it was still a one-story building.

Mr. Carrazana said that he did not want to see them replicate Fifth Street Station, which would require enormous retaining walls and civil engineering feats to create development land, only to build one-story buildings. He said that this could be three to four times denser than what they had

now. He said that he thought these were lessons they needed to learn from and consider when evaluating these opportunities.

Mr. Carrazana said that he believed they were underestimating the capacity they had in the County, particularly when they married it back to the chart showing a potential 3.4 million square feet of need over the next 20 years, if they added up office, retail, and industrial space. He said that he was confident they had more than that capacity, so it would not be a challenge to achieve.

Mr. Carrazana said that he had a question regarding the logic related to the tax base, with the taxes coming from the Foundation but not from the university. He said that however, if the focus was on job growth and career enhancements, and that was part of the economic conversation, the university should be considered. He said that although the university may not provide direct tax revenue, it did generate indirect tax revenue from the people employed. He said that it was worth considering. He said that one takeaway from Mr. Bivin's comments was that there should be a greater emphasis on pickleball facilities rather than tot lots.

Mr. Missel said that he would like to add a thought to their discussion about UVA lands and Foundation lands. He said that as they had been exploring these topics, he would like to provide some context that Ms. Kilroy was well aware of, and he would like to thank Ms. Kilroy for her partnership with them on many initiatives. He said that he had also been mindful of his role as a private citizen versus the Foundation, and he would like to share an example that might be helpful to share.

Mr. Missel said that at North Fork, it was public knowledge that there was 3.7 million square feet of allowable industrial mixed-use and research space, among other uses. He said that this designation had been in place since 2010, and it was initially 3 million square feet of allowed density, dating back to the late 1990s. He said that they had built 650,000 square feet of that, and it had taken this long for them to start feeling like a wave was cresting.

Mr. Missel said that this was largely due to the importance of partnerships in this process. He said that he would not elaborate further now, but he would like to highlight this point and provide some context to support their discussion about capacity. He said that specifically, there were 3.7 million square feet available at North Fork, and they had discussed the challenges of fitting development into Albemarle, which was not flat land. He said that even with 565 acres proffered, including 200 acres of permanent open space, they still had to build upwards to make it work.

Ms. Firehock said that she wanted to build on Mr. Bivins' earlier point and add to what Mr. Missel had just said. She said that the affordable housing component was indeed crucial. She said that as an employer, she had hired five new employees in the past year, and she had had to bring in a couple of tech professionals from outside the area due to the lack of skilled workers in the community.

Ms. Firehock said that one of the bigger challenges was convincing people that they could afford to buy a home in the community. She said that she would like to offer an example of a creative use of funding. She said that a community had partnered with John Deere Tractor to address the affordable housing needs of their workers.

Ms. Firehock said that they had used Community Development Block Grant funds to reduce mortgage costs, down payment costs, and other expenses, allowing them to attract and retain employees, and ultimately, become permanent residents of the community. She said that this highlighted the importance of affordable housing for regular, average-paid individuals, not just essential workers like teachers and first responders. She said that it was difficult to make the case for housing affordability, given the current unaffordability of housing.

Ms. Firehock said that thinking about innovative partnerships and subsidies to support housing initiatives, and considering the need for flexible office space, she would like to consider that as part of the economic development strategic plan. She said that to support businesses of varying sizes, they needed to explore ways to create incubator spaces and flexible office areas that could accommodate growth over time. She said that this may involve rethinking design for new office spaces. She said that she understood there was a lot of space at the North Fork site, but small businesses may not need that much space.

Ms. Firehock said that she understood that she may be just one small business person, but she believed that the County was not necessarily meeting the needs of mid-level startups. She said that she thought it would be beneficial to consider offering more diverse types of space. She said that she was curious about how the County could provide incentives to facilitate this.

Ms. Firehock said that she had previously mentioned that many of their spaces required modernization to be suitable for today's market. She said that as a result, some spaces remained unrented due to their outdated condition. She said that perhaps the County could explore providing micro loans or other opportunities to help make these spaces more ready for the current market.

Mr. missel said that he appreciated her comments. He said that one additional point he would like to make was that she mentioned the importance of incubator space, startups, and finding ways to offset or incentivize these costs. He said that she also noted that the point of an incubator space was to provide low-cost space. He said that however, the developer often struggled to make the pro forma work because they still needed to build out the space. He said that he believed these points were crucial. He said that he thought it would be beneficial for the County to focus on supporting startups and incubators, potentially partnering with developers in this area to provide more resources and opportunities.

Mr. Bivins said that in many grand research university communities, the university typically owned the space. He said that for example, the University of Virginia's vision was similar to that of Stanford University and Palo Alto, where the space was often owned by the university, allowing companies like Google and Apple to flourish. He said that Stanford received a share of the profits once the project was completed, but the ownership remained with Stanford.

Mr. Bivins said that this was a different approach than what they had typically seen. He said that it was essential to revisit what had been mentioned earlier regarding page four of the document, which stated that firms with four or fewer employees were what made up the firms here.

Mr. Clayborne said that it was exciting to hear the direction of the strategic plan. He said that he had flagged three points as he listened to the presentation and heard his colleagues' comments. He said that the first point he had flagged was that transportation and infrastructure were not given enough emphasis.

Mr. Clayborne said that when considering individuals who were underemployed or young professionals seeking to live in a vibrant area, reliable public transit infrastructure was crucial. He said that it could get people where they needed to go without excessive waiting times. He said that he thought this aspect should be explored further.

Mr. Clayborne said that the second point he had flagged was the importance of being a trusted partner, particularly with underinvested and underrepresented communities in their town. He said that many significant events had occurred in their lifetimes that should not be forgotten. He said that to bring in new workers and invest in these relationships, he believed the Economic Development team should prioritize building these connections.

Mr. Clayborne said that the third point he had flagged was the concept of regionalism, as seen in northern Virginia's success in attracting major companies like Boeing and Amazon. He said that this strength in numbers could be a signal in a strategic plan. He said that he was sure their region would continue to work together to bring economic vitality.

Mr. Clayborne said that he was struck by how often the Planning Commission failed to collaborate with the Charlottesville Planning Commission and surrounding counties when considering future land use. He said that this lack of coordination was evident both internally and from an economic development perspective. He said that he believed they would be having these conversations 20 years down the road as a region, but he felt they were not currently doing it.

Mr. Murray said that he recalled a class he had taken at UVA, where they discussed brownfield redevelopment, and one of the topics they covered was the kind of place that would attract Google employees and tech companies in general. He said that he learned that it was not always about what people think; it was about access to nature and recreation, walkability, cultural attractions, a good transportation network, and diversity and inclusion. He said that those were the qualities that tech workers, including himself, look for in a community.

Mr. Murray said that when considering the challenge of housing, he believed it was essential to think of workforce housing as a distinct issue. He said that their County had two economies: those who made their primary income from investments versus those who were wage earners, who were not the same people. He said that they competed for the same housing, creating a problem. He said that they could try to offer affordable housing, but as long as someone from northern Virginia could move in and take it, wage earners could not compete.

Mr. Murray said that he had long wished for Albemarle County to partner with the university and other organizations to build dedicated workforce housing for people who worked there. He envisioned a scenario where local employers, such as Ms. Firehock mentioned, contributed to the project, and a local developer was willing to build it. He said that the County could also offer up land to make it happen. He said that it was possible that a partnership could form. He was aware of the various grant opportunities available, which may be applicable specifically to workforce housing.

Mr. Moore said that he appreciated the conversation so far and thanked staff for the presentation, which was informative and thoughtful. He said that it served as a good recap of where they had been. He said that he did know that the Home Depot project had some advantages, such as the store being closer to fruition and offering a tax incentive for the road behind it.

Mr. Moore said that he did not want to second-guess the County's decisions over the past decade; nevertheless, he believed they should think more critically as they moved forward with projects like this. He said that they had spent a significant amount of time on the Rio 29 study and small area plan, but ultimately, it was put on the shelf for years until Home Depot came in and acquired that land.

Mr. Moore said that now, Home Depot would be building a store, which was not part of the original plan. He said that while this could potentially lead to a thriving store and, in the distant future, they could sell land and something similar to the Rio small area plan if future owners chose not to develop the land by right.

Mr. Moore said that he would like to see a more proactive approach to planning. He said that given the 20-year plan, this was an ideal time to think about proactive planning. He said that the Rivanna Station area was a prime example, where significant investment and energy were being directed towards it. He said that the past two months had brought a sense that they were hoping

it would still work, but it may or may not be where future investment actually happened for the federal government.

Mr. Moore said that additionally, this approach could lead to jobs that attracted people from outside the region, rather than growing their own workforce. He said that those who grew up here often ended up pursuing higher education at UVA or entering the service sector. He said that however, many of them struggled to afford to stay. He said that this nuanced critique was essential as they considered how to invest in future development.

Mr. Moore said that to him, economic development was about providing the resources, tools, and land people needed to meet their basic needs and lead flourishing lives. He said that in this context, affordable housing, free and subsidized childcare, high union membership rates, and other initiatives that boosted people's ability to thrive were all forms of economic development. He said that for example, training and financing for cooperative development and small backyard developers to redevelop underutilized land to increase housing stock could have a significant impact.

Mr. Moore said that he believed investing in education and training programs that paid workers a living wage could be a powerful way to build wealth. He said that as someone who recognized the importance of labor in economic development, he believed it was essential to prioritize these initiatives. He said that while Virginia may not have a strong tradition of labor unions, he believed it was crucial to consider the role of labor in driving economic growth.

Mr. Moore said that overall, he thought there were many positive aspects to this plan, and he agreed that investing in adequate land supply, Tier 4 sites, but investing in people's needs was essential for long-term growth and development.

Mr. Missel said that he would like to roll through a few thoughts. He said that specifically, he would like to discuss the chapter's page four. He said that the second bullet point on the right-hand side mentions continuing to strengthen existing business retention and expansion. He said that as of June 24, the County had leveraged $877,000 to secure $1.8 million in state grants. He said that he would appreciate it if staff could briefly discuss the proactive approach the County was taking to incentivize strengthening existing business retention, which he believed was critically important.

Mr. Missel said that the paragraph did not seem to have an aspirational goal, so he would like to explore what that might look like. He said that moving on to page five, he would like them to continue highlighting ways to support and expand tourism, which he believed was a significant factor in the area's growth. He said that as they reviewed page five, he would like staff to continue highlighting ways to support and expand tourism opportunities to drive growth.

Mr. Missel said that on page seven, he would like to reiterate the efficient use of existing space. He said that they had acknowledged the 20-year demand for 3.4 million square feet. He said that he would like them to provide more information on the capacity and build-out goal for Rivanna Futures, including a specific square footage goal.

Ms. Kilroy said that there was approximately one million square feet available there.

Mr. Missel said that tying that together with North Fork, there was approximately 4.3 million square feet of total available land, which was critically important. He said that on page 10, the Commission had been asked to focus on the objectives, particularly action items, such as the land use-related aspects. He said that Section 2.1 specifically addressed maintaining an adequate inventory of land use plan-designated and zoned lands for light industrial purposes, among others.

Mr. Missel said that it prioritized maintaining existing designated and zoned lands over converting them to other uses. He said that he thought this was an important point and wanted to underscore it. He said that moving on to Action 2.4, it mentioned initiating County-led rezonings. He said that he was curious to know how many of these rezonings actually occurred.

Mr. Benish said that in the past, they had not typically taken the initiative to dictate the level of development or density in these areas. He said that instead, they had generally allowed the private sector or market forces to drive those decisions. He said that as they moved forward with efforts to encourage and incentivize infill development, it may be necessary to provide additional support. He said that one of the key factors in the tier category was the lack of zoning and the associated cost of rezoning. He said that this was a significant land use tool that could help incentivize and make that space available to meet density needs.

Mr. Carrazana said that Action 2.7 stated to provide a full range of potential sites and structures. He said that he believed that a graphic, such as a map, would be helpful in illustrating the locations of these sites. He said that it would be helpful in illustrating that point.

Mr. Benish said that in a very basic, high-level sense, he believed that this was an attempt to convey one of Ms. Firehock's points and others, that they required a full range of options from startup to corporate.

Mr. Bivins said that he would also like to see the link between the industries. He said that for example, on the same page that the Chair discussed on page five, where they had talked about the wineries and agribusiness in the area. He said that if he wanted to visit a winery and stay there, he would have to go to Waynesboro.

Mr. Bivins said that unless he chose to stay at the Boar's Head Inn, which was one of the few options available. He said that however, if he did not want to stay at the Boar's Head Inn, he had no other places to stay in that area, except for a few homestays. He said that this was not supporting the 45 wineries, which were primarily located west of town.

Mr. Missel said that regarding Objective 5.1, update the zoning ordinance to reduce barriers to land uses. He said that this aligned with what had been mentioned earlier. He said that he recalled that they had also discussed revisiting Objective 2.7, at least in part. He said that it stated that the County was considering incentives to promote and incentivize a wide range of businesses. He said that the idea was to explore how the County could offer incentives to encourage these types of businesses, as taxes alone may not be effective.

Mr. Bivins said that tax abatements did not effectively address the issue, as the amount abated was insufficient to trigger the pro forma. He said that the pro forma was not about tax or real estate abatement; it was about something else entirely.

Mr. Missel said that he would like to add a few comments to their discussion. He said that these comments were primarily to provide new insights, consider existing points, and underscore some of the key takeaways they had already mentioned. He said that when examining the identification of sites and tying them directly to user groups, it was essential to consider what needs were present and how they could proactively think about site locations and uses.

Mr. Missel said that leveraging relationships with adjacent counties and organizations, such as the green and innovation corridor initiative, was also beneficial. He said that he thought it was crucial to consider partnerships and whether they should be mentioned in this context. He said that infrastructure alignment with uses had been discussed previously.

Mr. Missel said that he would like to highlight the importance of educating developers about available resources, such as state grants for Tier 4-ready sites. He said that he recently learned about these grants and believed an education program could be a valuable addition to this initiative. He said that such a program could provide developers with information on financial support and incentives, including time-saving measures for the zoning process.

Mr. Missel said that given the critical need for market-driven and adaptable solutions, particularly in regards to housing and housing availability, he believed an equitable approach to expedite the zoning process was necessary.

Mr. Murray said that he had a few additional points to discuss. He said that one of the things he wanted to mention was that it would be beneficial if they could highlight the importance of the recreation economy, but unfortunately, there were no action items associated with it. He said that he understood that some of these items would be addressed in other chapters, but they should be tied together, nonetheless.

Mr. Murray said that the recreation economy was a significant contributor to their local economy, with people spending an average of $1,500 each on their respective sports. He was aware that Albemarle County had a substantial number of runners, and bird watchers spent even more. He said that he believed quantifying these numbers would be valuable, particularly when conducting the park needs assessment.

Mr. Murray said that it would be essential to have these numbers to inform their decisions. He said that additionally, he thought it would be helpful to include maps in this report. He said that also, he wanted to bring up the issue of former industrial sites in Crozet, which were often contaminated.

Mr. Murray said that although federal grant opportunities may be limited in the short term, this was a 20-year plan, and he believed they should explore redevelopment opportunities for these sites. In Crozet, people had expressed concerns about the transportation network, stating that it was insufficient to accommodate all the commuters and the growing population. He said that his initial thought was that they should focus on attracting employment opportunities to Crozet, rather than simply expanding the roads to accommodate commuters to and from Charlottesville.

Mr. Murray said that in their analysis of where they wanted to attract jobs, they also needed to consider where people were commuting from significant distances. He said that they should think about infilling jobs in those areas because, as they had previously mentioned, it could help reduce sprawl and its associated costs. He said that for example, residential sprawl costs millions of dollars, whereas commercial land could had a surplus of $70 million to their economy.

Mr. Murray said that to attract businesses back, they should focus on areas like Crozet, which used to be an industrial community with businesses like Morton Foods. He said that they had lost a lot by losing those businesses. He said that additionally, he suggested that they should explore opportunities with the agriculture community to understand the barriers the agricultural community had in getting their products to market.

Mr. Murray said that Highland County's experience, where a small-scale processing facility was established, could be a model for Albemarle County. He said that they should ask what barriers they could solve to support this community. He said that environmental services were a significant expense, with the Soil and Water Conservation District spending money on fencing cattle out of streams, installing wildlife habitats, and converting lawns to native plants.

Mr. Murray said that many jobs were associated with these programs, and it was essential to coordinate training programs so that students, such as those at Western Albemarle's

Environmental Studies Academy, could learn skills like biofilter construction, rain garden design, and how to convert lawns to native plant gardens. He said that it seemed that they should consider exploring the possibility of collaborating with PVCC to provide some of those jobs.

Recess

The Commission recessed at 5:40 p.m. and reconvened at 6:00 p.m.

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

There were none.

Consent Agenda

Mr. Bivins motioned that the Planning Commission approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Mr. Carrazana seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0).

Public Hearings

SP202400001 Crozet Independence Day Celebration

Rebecca Ragsdale, Planning Manager, said that she would be providing staff's presentation and covering the details of this request. She said that this was a request for a temporary event in the County's Rural Areas zoning district, specifically a category event that requires extra planning and attention, and they wanted to ensure that the site could accommodate it.

Ms. Ragsdale said that this was the traditional Crozet Community Fourth of July celebration, organized by the Crozet Community Association and other nonprofits. She said that the request was for the event to be held at King Family Vineyard, as the site had outgrown its capacity at Crozet Park and could no longer accommodate the fireworks display. She said that the planned event would take place in the evening after the parade, featuring a community celebration, music, food, beverages, and culminating in the fireworks.

Ms. Ragsdale said that the property, which they may be familiar with, was adjacent to the Crozet development area, located at King Family Vineyard, which was also home to the polo activities off Half Mile Branch Road. She said that the site had a history of agricultural uses, with the vineyard being the primary use, and had had multiple special use permits. She said that the property owners, the King family, were experienced in the special use permit process and had hosted larger nonprofit events, including the Pink Ribbon Polo Match, which was a one-time event approved as a temporary nonprofit event.

Ms. Ragsdale said that more recently, they had held weekend polo activities, which had accommodated up to 1,000 people. She said that additionally, the property had been under conservation easement with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation since 2000. She said that she had previously mentioned that the community's previous location at Crozet Park would no longer be suitable for fireworks. She said that as a result, the Celebration had been moved to the King family property in 2004, which had been held but with fewer attendees. She said that for the event to continue and grow, a special use permit was necessary.

Ms. Ragsdale said that provided was an aerial overview of the site, where the red rectangle indicates the primary event setup area. She said that the food trucks, music, and parking areas would be located in these areas, and some of the existing parking spaces were in the surrounding area. She said that she had also shown locations where traffic control would be set up. She said

that this event had been extensively coordinated with public safety agencies for both on-site events and traffic management to and from the site. She said that this was one of the primary factors in this review.

Ms. Ragsdale said that the event was taking place in a rural area, where it may not be suitable for continued use due to easement conflicts with the comprehensive plan. She said that the substantial detriment category was primarily addressed through the supplemental regulations, which had undergone an extensive review by public safety agencies. She said that as a one-time event, staff did not have concerns about the character and harmony of the area changing.

Ms. Ragsdale said that staff had included this information in the packet and wanted to note that they wanted to ensure that the roads could handle the traffic. She said that they wanted to ensure they had the opportunity to review the parameters of the hours and frequency of the event through the special use permit process and also had a preliminary plan in place with the public safety agencies, which had met several times. She said that a condition of the special use permit approval was that the final plan be approved and then annually reviewed and approved prior to the 4th of July event, involving VDOT, the Police, Fire Rescue, the Fire Marshal's office, and local non-local volunteer organizations such as Western Albemarle Rescue Squad and the Crozet Volunteer Fire Department.

Ms. Ragsdale said that staff had ensured that adequate arrangements were made through this process, covering on-site activities, parking, access for emergency vehicles, maneuverability, and access on site, as well as establishing command and control, having crowd managers, and implementing and inspecting for the fireworks permit by the fire marshal. She said that these measures were similar to those seen at larger events, where certified crowd manager staff and a fire marshal were present. She said that staff had recommended approval with these conditions.

Ms. Ragsdale said that she would review the staff report to note the staff's demonstrated ability to meet the criteria outlined in the ordinance and their development of a preliminary event plan. She said that although the event was expected to generate more traffic than usual, it would be managed and was limited to a one-day event. She said that staff had recommended approval with conditions that specified this was for the 4th of July ceremony, allowing for flexibility in case of weather events to be held on or around the 4th of July, no later than 10:30 p.m.

Ms. Ragsdale said that this included provisions for activities and shutdowns, which may result in people leaving and cars departing after 10:30 p.m. She said that they would conduct a yearly review prior to each year to ensure the submission of zoning clearance and the annual review of the safety plan.

Mr. Clayborne said that he had a clarifying question regarding the condition ending at 10:30 p.m. He said that in other words, the program was scheduled to end at 10:30 p.m. He said that it was likely that another hour would pass before the site was clear, so he estimated it to be around 11:30 or 12:00 a.m.

Ms. Ragsdale said that that was correct.

Ms. Firehock said that this was a question for staff, and it was acceptable if they did not have the answer. She said that she knew that King Family Vineyards had done a great job with traffic management at their polo events, as they had demonstrated a strong ability to handle large crowds. She said that given this, she was not overly concerned about the potential impact of this application on event logistics.

Ms. Firehock said that her question was regarding fire safety, particularly in situations where high winds and dry conditions were present. She said that currently, Virginia was under fire watches,

and she was curious to know how this might affect the fireworks event. She asked if the Fire Department would communicate with the event holders regarding this risk. She said that considering this was in a rural area with surrounding dry forest land, she was particularly interested in how they mitigated this fire risk and handled such conditions.

Ms. Ragsdale said that a fireworks permit was required through the Fire Marshal's Office. She said that one of the intended purposes of this permit was to ensure that the fireworks could be launched safely, and the Fire Marshal was on site to inspect the conditions and determine whether it posed a fire hazard. She said that it was not just a permit; it was a process that involves monitoring and authorization through the fire code regulations.

Ms. Firehock asked if, in a high fire risk scenario, they might delay the event for a few days. She said that she was wondering how much the event cost, as she typically thought of Fire Departments being on the ground, surrounding the immediate event. She said that given the increased concern of extended dry periods due to climate change, she was concerned about this aspect.

Mr. Bivins said that he had a couple of clarifying points to address. He said that when they referred to this as an annual event, it was essential to note that the special permit would allow them to hold this annual event. He said that this meant that the event was not limited to 2025; rather, it was intended to be a recurring event for perpetuity, giving them the ability to grant a permit for this piece of property to host a fireworks event within a 10-day window of the 4th of July.

Ms. Ragsdale said that to address the first part of the question, this annual event was intended to be a recurring occurrence, and they had not recommended any conditions that would require the permit to expire or have a renewal period. She said that this permit specifically covered the event itself, so they were not regulating the vineyard's use of fireworks as a separate activity, but rather as part of the overall event. She said that, however, the permit did address the large number of attendees, and the activities associated with the event.

Mr. Bivins said that the gathering was a key point of the evaluation. He said that moving forward, he had another clarifying question regarding the upward limit of 2,000 vehicles. He asked if they were envisioning individual vehicles making their way to the vineyard, or were they planning for staging and shuttle services to transport a segment of those visitors to the vineyard or the polo grounds?

Ms. Ragsdale said that the facility had been reviewed without the use of a shuttle and managing it without a shuttle was something that had been mentioned earlier as a potential implementation. She said that, however, it had been reviewed with the capacity to handle the cars, which suggested that planning was in place to accommodate this need.

Mr. Bivins said that on page five, the property owner boasted of having 148 different species of birds. He said that when discussing biodiversity, he wondered whether the presence of fireworks would be incompatible with such a high number of species. He said that there were also cows and sheep, and the horses pastured on the property. He said that it seemed odd that the individual would highlight the number of bird species without considering the potential negative impact of fireworks on that wildlife.

Ms. Ragsdale said that she believed that in their narrative, they had aimed to emphasize their stewardship and highlight their contributions to the property's history, particularly in terms of projects, easements, and initiatives that had positively impacted the rural areas and biodiversity. She said that she was not the expert to provide a detailed assessment of the potential disruption to local wildlife, such as the species of birds that may be present on the Fourth of July weekend or the surrounding days. She said that that aspect of their narrative had been mentioned by them.

Mr. Missel said that he had a clarifying question to follow up on Mr. Bivins' mention. He said that they had mentioned that the special use permit would be in perpetuity, but he wanted to confirm that they would need to apply for a zoning clearance every year prior to the event.

Ms. Ragsdale said that that yes, it was a staff-level review. She said that it was a very common practice for events that did not require special use permits, as it ensured that all necessary approvals were in place for each event. She said that this had been a standard condition for zoning clearances, particularly for larger, temporary events.

Mr. Clayborne said that he had some questions regarding the duration of the fireworks portion of the program. He said that he was wondering if the duration was governed by the fireworks permit that was applied for, or if it was specific to this particular special use permit.

Ms. Ragsdale said that they were not intending to govern the duration of the fireworks. She said that they had an end time, but he believed that was adequately covered by other code.

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

James King said that he was a co-owner of King Vineyards in Crozet. said that he was grateful for the opportunity to be there tonight, and thanked Ms. Ragsdale for all her hard work in helping them with the application process. He said that his family and he were seeking this special use permit, not by choice, but out of service to their community. He said that Mr. Tolson, behind him to the left, had run this event for the past 10 years at the park, and it had been ongoing since 1947.

Mr. King said that Mr. Marshall, behind him to his right, had written in the Crozet Gazette that due to housing encroachment, the event would no longer be able to take place at the park. He said that having the land and acreage they did, he read that and thought he might be of service. He said that it was indeed a large undertaking, and they were taking on a significant amount of liability and handled it with horses, wine, and other activities.

Mr. King said that having watched his father go through this process for the Pink Ribbon Polo Tournament, which was a community event benefiting breast cancer research, he knew that the money stayed in the area. He said that like his father, he wanted to help the community with what he had. He said that when he saw Mr. Tolson trying to help people, he wanted to help people too. He said that this was simply an ask that they host the event Mr. Tolson had run so well for many years. He said that he was happy to answer any questions.

Mr. King said that when he applied for this process, the mention of the 100 bird species was because he wanted to highlight how they were stewards of the environment and how they were helping it. He said that they had worked with Ducks Unlimited and the Army Corps of Engineers to build a waterfowl impoundment, which transformed a dry stream bed into a birdwatching hotspot.

Mr. King said that it was previously just a dry pasture. He said that birders from across the state and country visited their location to observe the migratory bird species that passed through during the day. He said that he hoped this answered their question. He said that their goal was to support the community and host this event annually, and he would be happy to reapply through the zoning process every year, ensuring checks and balances.

Mr. King said that they believed that their collaboration with local organizations, such as EMS, Fire Rescue, and Planning, had helped them understand what worked well last year and what they needed to improve. He said that as a result, they expected the event to continue improving

each year. He said that he hoped that they would be allowed to continue this tradition, which was unique to Crozet.

Mr. King said that the event brought the community together, and they called it "Old Crozet and New Crozet." He said that it was a time for people to come together, regardless of how long they had lived in the area, to share a meal, socialize, and enjoy each other's company. He said that the event was family-friendly and community-oriented, and he would love to keep it going.

Mr. Murray said that the question was asked about the potential for public transportation to carry some people.

Mr. King said that they initially reached out to a gentleman who runs the Crozet Trolley, Mr. Byrd, who had three or four trolleys parked in downtown Crozet. He said that they asked him, due to his logistical capabilities, if he could shuttle people in. He said that initially, he gave a thumbs up, but when it came down to business, he kind of backed out.

Mr. King said that they would greatly appreciate the opportunity to do it, but they required the asset to achieve it. He said that the farm had the capability to handle the number of cars they were discussing, but if people faced transportation issues or preferred public transportation or shuttle services, they would love to help make that happen. He said that they were simply trying to utilize a local asset that was available, and he had backed out last year. He said that perhaps they would re-approach this year and ask again, and he may be more willing to collaborate.

Mr. Clayborne said that he appreciated the insights that Mr. King had provided. He said that to confirm, the Vineyard building was open throughout its entire operating hours and allowed access to the restroom facilities, specifically for those with disabilities.

Mr. King said that the winery facility, tasting room, and carriage house, as well as the event space next door, would remain open throughout the entire operation. He said that the plan included an emergency shelter for guests in the event of severe weather or other emergencies. He said that although they were not legally required to be ADA compliant as a farm winery, they had chosen to make their facility accessible for this reason, as a family and business commitment. He said that as a result, their facility would remain open to accommodate guests with disabilities.

Mr. Clayborne said that he wanted to respectfully mention that not everyone enjoyed fireworks. He said that he thought of veterans who had served in combat, and he believed that the 10:30 p.m. time frame should be respected for that reason, possibly even earlier. He said that he was not sure, but he thought it was worth considering.

Mr. King said that to respond to his earlier comment about the fireworks, he believed the duration was primarily driven by budgetary restrictions. He said that typically, fireworks cost around $1,000 per minute, so the budget they brought to the table each year was equivalent to approximately 15 minutes of fireworks. He said that given the nautical sunset time, he estimated that fireworks would likely start around 9:30 and run for 15 minutes.

Mr. King said that the last hour of the event would be used for cars to exit. He said that he was aware that not everyone appreciated fireworks, and he had no problem with that. He said that they would focus on educating and communicating with the community about the fireworks schedule, so that they could take necessary precautions such as wearing ear protection, shutting and locking their doors, and keeping their dogs indoors.

Mr. Carrazana asked, during the summer months when the polo tournament was taking place, how many cars they typically saw on a typical Sunday.

Mr. King said that he was unsure of the typical count for numbers, but he could ask their parking manager, Brandon Black. He said that the parking lot around the tasting room could become full, and there was also tailgating taking place in the field. He said that they had an overflow lot adjacent to the property, which was essentially in his front yard. He said that they had never reached capacity for pull-up events, in terms of the limit being around 1,000 vehicles. He said that the two busiest days of the year were Memorial Day and Labor Day, when people were traveling. He said that he could provide a more accurate answer if he spoke with Mr. Black. He said that to throw a number out, he would estimate 400 cars total.

Mr. Bivins said that he appreciated the clarification regarding their work with Ducks Unlimited, which was a reputable organization. He said that to clarify, they had an exercise rink located below the polo rink, which was an outdoor polo arena. He said that there was also a large arena behind the gray fencing.

Mr. Ling said that the gray fencing was actually the outdoor polo arena. He said that the upper field was simply a grass field, albeit a smaller one. He said that the reason for the construction was to address a specific issue. He said that if the grass field was wet, it posed a safety risk for both the ponies and the players, as it could be slippery. He said that if the field was not saturated, the ponies and players could safely play in the arena, which featured a unique footing made of a rock-dust-sand mixture, providing a safer surface. He said that they also offered lessons for children and adults in the arena, as it was specifically designed for that purpose.

Mr. Bivins said that to clarify, there was no parking in the arena.

Mr. King said that was correct.

Mr. Missel said that he wanted to thank the applicants for everything they did for the community. He said that he would now like to briefly address the event management aspect of this event. He said that specifically, regarding Half Mile Branch Road, it was mentioned as sufficient to handle the cars. He said that in terms of the vision for event management, he would like the applicant to discuss how they can effectively manage the flow of traffic and ensure a smooth experience for attendees.

Mr. King said that last year, the exit plan was initially to have cars exit two different exits. He said that one would turn right and go south down Half Mile Branch Road towards Route 250 and Interstate 64. He said that the other would exit left out of the main entrance and go towards Jarman's Gap, Crozet proper. He said that at the last minute, the decision was made to keep cars away from 250, resulting in all cars exiting to the left, which was not conducive to efficiency. He said that after discussing the plan with all parties involved, including Mr. Black and Officer Rhodes, they had devised a new plan for the coming year.

Mr. King said that two officers would be stationed at the intersection of Jarmans Gap and Half Mile Branch Road and Lanetown Road, illuminated as required. He said that two officers would be stationed at 250 where Hillsboro exits onto 250, also illuminated. He said that three officers would be positioned on Greenwood Road and Jarmans Gap Road to limit traffic heading towards the intersection of Jarmans Gap and Lanetown Road, ensuring the safety of the officers and reducing congestion.

He said that based on last years' experience and recommendations from Officer Rhodes, Mr. Black, and VDOT, they believed this plan would be more efficient, safer, and faster for everyone. He said that they were hopeful that this plan would improve with each passing year, as is often the case.

Mike Marshall said that he was the publisher and editor of the Crozet Gazette. He said that he was representing the Crozet Board of Trade, the nonprofit organization responsible for fundraising for the event. He said that they were all volunteers, and they did not charge for this event. He said that this year, the estimated cost to host the event was approximately $50,000. He said that he was a bit concerned that the increased requirements may also lead to higher costs.

Mr. Marshall said that he and Tim had been organizing this event for 15 years, and it had been a volunteer-driven effort from the start. He said that their goal was to create an attraction that would draw newcomers to the town, encourage them to become invested in the community, and make the town their home. He said that he wanted to emphasize that this event had been free to attend for many years, with no admission fee. He said that they wanted everyone to feel welcome and included.

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. Bivins said that he was glad that the King family had been able to secure a location for this community building project, as it aligned with their discussions on the importance of community spaces. He said that however, the County had a responsibility to ensure the community's safety, particularly during large events like this one.

Mr. Bivins said that the King family had shouldered a significant expense, and he appreciated their willingness to do so. He said that he wanted to acknowledge the volunteers who had contributed to this effort. He said that it was essential to recognize that regulations were in place not to burden volunteers financially, but to guarantee the community's safety during these events.

Mr. Bivins said that with 2,000 people attending, the lawn would easily fill, and he was confident that the King family and their organization had a proven track record of hosting successful events. He said that his intention was to clarify that this project was not about placing an undue burden on volunteers, but rather about ensuring the long-term success of these community events.

Andy Herrick, County Attorney said that before making a motion, he would like to suggest a phrase to be added to the motion. He said that if recommending approval, he suggested: "move to recommend approval with the conditions and for the reasons stated in the staff report." He said that if the Commission was inclined to recommend approval, he would like to add the recommended conditions to the motion.

Mr. Murray said that he would like to commend the King family for offering this service to the community.

Mr. Murray motioned that the Planning Commission recommend approval of SP20240001 Crozet Independence Day Celebration with the conditions and for the reasons stated in the staff report. Mr. Clayborne seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0).

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 said that if the Commission wished to keep things straightforward, he recommended that 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 said that to clarify, 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).

Committee Reports

Mr. Bivins said that the Places 29 Hydraulic Community Advisory Committee recently met, and they received a presentation on the Lambs Lane Loop Road, which was a proposed solution to alleviate traffic congestion at the Lambs Lane Campus. He said that currently, there was only one way in and one way out, which could be a challenge. He said that the presentation also took into consideration the ongoing work at the former Center 2, now known as the Albemarle Career Exploration Academy on Lambs Lane.

Mr. Bivins said that he would not speculate on what it should be, but he acknowledged its current state. He said that this new information was noteworthy, particularly the fact that the intersection of Lambs Lane and Lambs Road, and Hydraulic Road, was the highest pedestrian crossing intersection in Albemarle County, with over 3,000 pedestrians crossing there daily during the week.

Mr. Moore said that they had a Rio 29 Community Advisory Committee meeting, and although there were no proposals for new construction, they did have a presentation in the Economic Development Office, which served as a good warm-up for today's discussion.

Review of Board of Supervisors Meeting: February 16, 2025; March 5, 2025; March 10, 2025

Mr. Barnes said that one meeting was on the February 26, when the recommended budget was presented to the Board of Supervisors. He said that the March 5 meeting was a regular business meeting, during which public comment was taken on the budget, and an extensive discussion was held on the Chestnut Grove rezoning proposal, which included a special use permit for mobile homes in the southern part of the County, off Chestnut Grove Road. He said that the proposal failed on a 3-3 vote. He said that they had a meeting last night, a work session for the budget, and tomorrow night, they would have another meeting on the budget as well.

AC44 Update

Mr. Barnes said that he did not have any additional comments to share. He said that in fact, he thought he should remove that item from the agenda since they were working on AC44 quite frequently.

New Business

There was none.

Old Business

There was none.

Items for follow-up

Mr. Clayborne said that he had a question. He said that as they had heard tonight, the goal was to adopt the comprehensive plan by the end of this calendar year. He asked if he, the Vice Chair, and staff were considering bringing in other groups to provide an update, perhaps on transportation or other related topics. He said that as they worked to complete this process, he would like to know if there were any additional stakeholders that would be involved in providing updates.

Mr. Clayborne said that he was wondering if there were any additional groups that they were considering bringing in to provide an update on their planning, which could inform their conversations. He said that this might include transportation, microCAT, or other initiatives, similar to the housing update they had previously had. He asked if there were any other stakeholder groups that they were looking at involving to help shape the final leg of the comprehensive plan.

Mr. Barnes said that the remaining chapters were Community Facilities, Transportation, Resiliency, and Housing. He said that he did not intend to bring someone to speak to them all, but staff would be happy to discuss a few topics. He said that Mr. McDermott had been deeply

involved with the MicroCAT program, and they could be sure to discuss some of that when they covered the transit aspect of the comprehensive plan. He said that in fact, that part of the meeting was expected to be longer, so he would make sure to provide a more detailed explanation as needed.

Mr. Missel said that he would appreciate hearing from Dr. Pethia about housing as they worked through the subsequent chapters of the comprehensive plan.

Mr. Carrazana said that it would be very helpful to have another housing update, specifically whether their current policy had been effective, or it had not been working. He said that they should consider whether or not they should include a specific housing component in the comprehensive plan for the next 20 years if it was proven to not have been successful. He said that they continued to lose traction here, so he believed an update was necessary.

Mr. Bivins said that it would be helpful to receive the update on a separate day from their work session.

Mr. Missel said that he and Mr. Barnes should discuss their next steps and strategize on where they were headed.

Mr. Barnes said that he wanted to clarify that when they adopted the calendar at the beginning of the year, a date inadvertently ended up scheduled for next week. He said that it was not their intention to hold a meeting next week, so he apologized for any confusion that may have been caused with the original calendar. He said that their next meeting was scheduled for March 25.

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.

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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: