Albemarle County Planning Commission
Regular Meeting
Draft Minutes April 14, 2026

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public meeting on Tuesday, April 14, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.

Members attending were Luis Carrazana, Chair; Karen Firehock, Vice-Chair; Corey Clayborne; Lonnie Murray; Mary Katherine King; Catherine Brown.

Members absent: Nathan Moore. Michael Barnes, Director of Planning

Other officials present were Kevin McDermott, Deputy Director of Planning; J.T. Newberry, Senior Planner; Jenny Tevendale, Assistant County Attorney; and Carolyn Shaffer, Clerk to the Planning Commission.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Carolyn Shaffer called the roll.

Mr. Carrazana established a quorum.

Public Comment

There was no one who signed up to speak.

Consent Agenda

Mr. Clayborne motioned that the Planning Commission adopt the Consent Agenda. Mr. Murray seconded the motion, which carried (5-0-1). (Mr. Carrazana, Ms. Firehock, Mr. Clayborne, Ms. King, and Mr. Murray voted aye; Ms. Brown abstained; Mr. Moore was absent)

Item Requesting Indefinite Deferral

TA-2026-00001 Fill Regulations

Staff requested an indefinite deferral.

Mr. Clayborne motioned that the Planning Commission accept the deferral. Mr. Murray seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0). (Mr. Moore was absent)

Public Hearing

SP-2025-00005 Crozet Fellowship Church

J.T. Newberry, Senior Planner, said that he was joined by the applicant and their representative, Charles Rapp from Collins Engineering. He said the proposal was located west of the I-64/Route 250 interchange in Crozet. He said the proposal consisted of three

separate parcels totaling approximately 16 and two-thirds acres, located in the rural areas zoning district and the rural areas section of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Newberry said that the property had some non-residential use since the 1970s. He said that in 1973, the site obtained a special use permit for a country store and later converted to a religious assembly use in 2003. He said the County amended its zoning ordinance in 2019 to align with federal law, allowing religious assembly uses of up to 200 persons as a by-right use in the rural area zoning district. He said Crozet Fellowship Church purchased the property in 2024 and had grown its congregation since then, approaching the 200-person limit.

Mr. Newberry said the applicant was seeking a special use permit to allow a religious assembly use of up to 400 persons, construct a new sanctuary building, expand the existing parking area, and provide new stormwater management facilities. He said the applicant's conceptual plan included the proposed parking envelope, building envelope for the new sanctuary, and conceptual stormwater management. He said that it showed the typical 100-foot water protection ordinance buffer applied to the stream at the rear of the property and added a 50-foot buffer for the stream and forest.

Mr. Newberry said that the plan also showed the 125-foot parking setback required by the supplemental regulations in the zoning ordinance for parking related to religious assembly uses. He said that a proposed 20-foot buffer around the edge of the property mitigated impacts to adjoining properties, with additional screening such as a fence or landscaping permitted within that 20 feet. He said that all special use permits were evaluated under the four factors shown on the screen, and pages four through eight of the staff report contained staff's analysis on each of these individual factors.

Mr. Newberry said that staff had determined that with a few recommended conditions, a positive finding could be made for each of the factors listed on the slide. He said they had three conditions that were recommended. He said the first was general accord with the conceptual plan, particularly with regard to the parking and building envelopes and the buffers.

Mr. Newberry said the second condition was the buffer that surrounded the entire property, and the final recommended condition was a maximum religious assembly size of up to 400 persons. He said that with these conditions, staff had identified two positive aspects to the proposal. He said it met all the criteria required for special use permits in the zoning ordinance, and it focused development on already disturbed areas of the site, minimizing the need for new disturbance with the proposed improvements. He said no concerns were identified. He said that staff recommended approval of the request.

Mr. Murray said that according to the guidance provided by DCR and DEQ, the buffer should be allowed to return to a wooded state or a natural state. He said that he was curious about what "maintenance of the wooded areas within the Water Protection Ordinance (WPO) buffer" meant.

Mr. Newberry said that the entirety of the buffer was in the wooded area. He said the condition was meant to reinforce the WPO as a protected area that they would like to see remain in its current state.

Mr. Murray suggested that the condition be changed to state, "maintain native vegetation within the WPO buffer". He said it was not prohibited to remove invasive species, which was good for the buffer.

Mr. Clayborne said that if the church were to establish a school in the future and needed to revise the SUP, it would require approval from the County.

Mr. Newberry said that was correct.

Ms. King asked if the use of the word "maintenance" implied non-disturbance, and if that was what the County intended.

Mr. Newberry said that the Zoning Administrator, in conjunction with the County Attorney's Office, would ultimately make the decision regarding how to interpret the term "maintenance." He said that he believed that this particular condition was intended to mirror those previously used to maintain good stewardship of the buffer. He said that to ensure clarity, they should review the language to confirm that they were not inadvertently conveying a different meaning than the original intent.

Ms. Brown asked for clarification if invasive species could be removed as part of maintenance of the buffer.

Mr. Murray said that as part of the current water protection ordinance, it allowed for the maintenance and removal of invasive species.

Ms. Brown said that it may be worth clarifying the distinction between preserving native vegetation or woodlands and maintaining the existing vegetation.

Mr. Carrazana provided the applicant with ten minutes for a presentation.

Chuck Rapp, Collins Engineering and representative of the applicant, said they also had a representative from the church to help answer any questions. He said the future land use was rural areas, and the existing zoning was also rural areas. He said that as Crozet had grown and development had brought more residents to the area, the membership of the church had also grown. He said they would like to accommodate this growth by building a new sanctuary, adding parking, and making some necessary improvements to meet the community's demands.

Mr. Rapp said the site lent itself well to the proposed improvements. He said there was an established stream running through the site, which was at a lower elevation than the developed portion. He said the intention was to preserve more than just a WPO buffer, and they did not anticipate needing to encroach on the wooded area at all.

Mr. Rapp said the idea was to utilize the cleared area, expand the parking, and minimize disturbance to the existing topography. He said the existing parking lot had about 50 spaces. He said one of the concerns was traffic, but there was a right turn taper off on Route 250 that helped minimize traffic. He said that there were also full access left-hand turn movements. He said there were no major proposals, and there was no school or daycare being proposed. He said the church's current operations would remain the same, with an increase in attendees to Sunday services and off-peak hours on the weekends.

Mr. Rapp said they had a community meeting and received comments from a neighbor on the adjacent property, where they planned to preserve the wood vegetation and minimize any impacts to the farmland. He said that the concept plan showed 140 parking spaces, and they aimed to get somewhere between 120 and 150, while also providing pedestrian infrastructure and improving circulation for those parking to access the building.

Mr. Rapp said that ideally, they would implement a rain garden or a similar feature in the middle of the parking lot for stormwater management. He said that this type of feature helped to capture and filter stormwater naturally, allowing it to drain to a central point and then be released downstream in a more controlled manner.

Mr. Rapp said that they had found that the existing stormwater management system along Twinkling Spring's Road worked well, so they aimed to minimize disruptions to that system. He said that there were a few residences along that road, and they were trying to accommodate the existing infrastructure. He said that the proposed structure could be up to 10,000 square feet. He said there was an existing well, and another would be installed to serve the new building. He said the applicant had recently designed a new septic system to accommodate the future expansion.

Mr. Clayborne asked if they anticipated installing site lighting in the parking lot.

Mr. Rapp said that the site was located in the rural area adjacent to a farm, so they wanted to limit impacts to the adjacent farm. He said that if lighting were proposed, it would be dark sky compliant. He said that it was ultimately up for the applicant to decide if they needed lighting. He said they did not typically have activities in the evening.

John Healy, Pastor of Crozet Fellowship, said they had existing lighting because in the winter, they held events after 5 p.m. He said they would need some lighting for the parking lot.

Mr. Clayborne asked if they would need to add a separate condition to address lighting requirements.

Mr. Newberry said that lighting would be addressed during site plan review.

Ms. Firehock asked if the lighting would be cut off after a certain time. She said they had required similar conditions in the past.

Mr. Newberry said that no condition was necessary if the Commission was comfortable with the existing lighting regulations. He said the lighting ordinance did not require lights to be shut off at a certain time, but they were required to be full cutoff over a certain number of lumens. He said that if the Commission wanted to require the lights to shut off at a certain time or after hours of operation, one would have to be proposed.

Ms. Firehock said that light pollution could have a significant impact, and they were striving to create a dark skies county.

Mr. Murray said that it was worth noting that they were currently discussing ways to strengthen the dark sky ordinance. He said that while this proposal was not yet part of that process, it was essential to consider that the current ordinance was viewed by many as insufficient. He said that specifically, with regards to LEDs, it was crucial to be mindful of the temperature and the type of light they provided. He said that LEDs could be more damaging to wildlife than incandescent lights, even though they were more energy efficient.

Mr. Clayborne asked if the applicant anticipated needing commercial kitchen space.

Mr. Healy said they were working with a builder, and they were currently not including a commercial kitchen.

Mr. Clayborne asked how many services were held.

Mr. Healy said that currently, with their current seating capacity, they had two gatherings on Sundays. He said that the goal was to build this in enough time to allow them to meet as one.

Mr. Clayborne said he believed it was essential to consider the building requirements, particularly in terms of a sprinkler system. He said that with 400 people assembled, he was concerned about the feasibility of installing a sprinkler system that relied on well water.

Mr. Healy said that they understood the parameters around what size would indicate the need for a sprinkler system. He said that they were aware of the existing well system. He said that as a result, if they designed the building to require a sprinkler system, it would be very cost-prohibitive for them because they would need to have an onsite cistern. He said they had received recommendations from the County that were in line with other church expansion proposals.

Mr. Clayborne asked if the stormwater management pond was a dry pond.

Mr. Rapp said that it was only conceptual at this stage. He said that typically, if they implemented bioretention in the middle of the parking lot, they still needed to pipe it with an outfall and have a location for the water to be released. He said that in this case, they would typically have a dry pond. He said that during heavy rainfall events, the retention system could become overwhelmed, and the parking lot would fill up. He said that to

mitigate this, they needed to have an overflow system in place to hold the water until it could be safely released into the stream.

Mr. Clayborne suggested installing fencing around the stormwater management to prevent people from falling in.

Mr. Murray said they should consider a biofilter over a retention basin. He said he believed biofilters were more attractive, more effective, and safer because they were shallower. He said that the biofilter could also be used as an amenity for the site. He said he supported incorporating the stormwater management into the parking lot.

Mr. Carrazana opened the hearing for comments from the public.

Neil Williamson, President of the Free Enterprise Forum, said that he was concerned about comments regarding a new dark sky regulation. He said that the Commission should not be concerned with what they aspired to have as an ordinance; rather, they should focus on the current ordinance.

Mr. Carrazana closed the public hearing and brought the matter back before the Commission.

Ms. Firehock said that while it was true that they wanted to follow the ordinance as written, it was also their job as planning commissioners to add conditions that would offset the impacts of expanded uses in the rural area. She said that this included factors such as opening and closing times, lighting, noise, and amplified sound, all of which were within their purview.

Ms. Firehock said that if none of these considerations were important, there would be no purpose in having a planning commission to review these applications. She said that each application was unique, and each side had its own unique concerns. She said that in this case, the potential for additional lighting in a rural area primarily used for agriculture raised concerns about dark skies and the rural environment.

Ms. Firehock said she believed it was well within their purview to recommend that lights be turned off at a certain time of night, not only to conserve energy but also to be respectful of the area's natural beauty. She said that she had observed many rural areas, including those near Charlottesville, that were lit up at 10, 11, and 12 pm at night, yet there was no activity. She said that she simply wanted this site to be mindful of their dark skies and rural areas, and she wanted to clarify their role in this process.

Mr. Carrazana said that he believed each site was unique, and he was confident that their staff would agree that their ordinances were not perfect. He said that in fact, they regularly reviewed and amended them to address any shortcomings.

Ms. King said that the uniqueness of this site to her highlighted its heavy wooded nature and protection from neighboring eyesight. She said that its proximity to I-64, which would bring significant light exposure and noise, made her believe that this site was unlikely to cause any negative harm to neighbors, even with parking lighting.

Ms. Firehock said that there were other neighbors besides the bipedal neighbors, including moths and other creatures that relied on the diurnal rhythm. She said that this disruption affects mating behavior, reproduction, and the ability of various animals and critters to survive and thrive. She said that in essence, the issue was a cumulative effect of night lighting, which can be likened to "death by a thousand light points." She said that given the potential for applicants to change and properties to shift ownership, she believed it was prudent for them to establish conditions to mitigate this issue.

Mr. Murray said he hoped that they could consider revising the language of the condition regarding the buffer or proposing an alternative to that condition.

Kevin McDermott, Deputy Director of Planning, said that to clarify, Mr. Murray was referring to the condition that ensured the wooded buffer was maintained. He said he believed they did not need to add to the condition that invasive species control was allowed.

Mr. Murray said that he preferred language that stated maintaining native vegetation within the WPO buffer.

Ms. Firehock said she was comfortable with "maintain the wooded areas", but she had no objection to adding "native".

Mr. McDermott said that they would work with the applicant before presenting to the Board.

Ms. Firehock said that for the lighting question, it would be useful to hear from the applicant as to whether they would like to impose a condition on the timing of the lights cut-off.

Mr. McDermott said that they would work with the applicant. He said that there were various details regarding the applicant's specific lighting needs at night.

Ms. Firehock said they should include language ensuring lights were turned off after the end of any scheduled or sponsored event at the church.

Mr. McDermott said that they could work with the applicant to refine the condition language, as long as the motion included acknowledgment of these two changes.

Mr. Murray motioned that the Planning Commission recommend approval of SP-2025-00005 for the reasons in the staff report and to include conditions discussed by the Commission. Ms. Brown seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0). (Mr. Moore was absent)

Committee Reports

Mr. Murray said that he had committees meet while he was in Florida, so he had to review the meeting minutes. He said he would report at the next meeting.

Review of the Board of Supervisors Meeting: March 11, 2026; March 18 2026, and April 1, 2026

Mr. McDermott said that the March 11 meeting was a budget work session, so there were no official actions by the Board related to planning items on that agenda. He said that the March 18 agenda included a couple of items that had come through the Planning Commission. He said that one of these items was the Hollymead Town Center Area C rezoning, which aimed to remove some commercial areas and add approximately 40 residential units. He said that this rezoning was approved unanimously by the Board.

Mr. McDermott said that the Sieg property rezoning, which would bring around 600 new units and approximately 400,000 square feet of non-residential space, was also approved by the Board with a 5-1 vote. He said that Supervisor Missel was the dissenting vote. He said that the April 1 meeting featured the North Pointe Amendment rezoning, which sought to remove a significant amount of commercial areas and add around 700 additional residential units. He said that this project was also approved unanimously by the Board.

New Business

Mr. Carrazana said they would address committee assignments since they had a new member. He said there were not many vacancies. He said that Ms. Brown would be assigned to the 5th and Avon committee. He said that Mr. Moore would be assigned to Land Use and Environmental Planning Committee (LUPEC). He said that Mr. Murray would be assigned to the Crozet Community Advisory Committee (CAC), and Ms. King would be the liaison to Citizen Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC). He said that Ms. Firehock would be the liaison to the Historic Preservation Committee. He said that the Pantops CAC liaison would be Mr. Clayborne. He said that for the Places 29 committee, Mr. Clayborne, Ms. King, and Mr. Moore would be assigned. He said that the University of Virginia Master Planning Committee had not met in a number of years. He said that Mr. Murray would be assigned to the Charlottesville and Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Technical Committee.

Mr. Clayborne motioned that the Planning Commission approve the committee assignments. Ms. King seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0). (Mr. Moore was absent)

Old Business

Mr. Murray said that the Board had considered the secondary road improvement program for road paving. He said that he was aware that there had been discussion about taking into account pedestrian use during this process. He said that in the comprehensive plan, they had new language that emphasized considering transportation improvements to accommodate pedestrian traffic. He said that this was not currently a factor in the road paving policy program. He said that he was wondering if they had any updates or insights on the discussions that took place or where staff was leaning on this issue.

Mr. McDermott said they had not actually explored that topic yet. He said that it had been a discussion point during the work session for the secondary six-year plan. He said staff would examine that and they would revisit it with the Board at a later time. He said that he believed it was something that could be added to any reports they had for the recommendations on those roads. He said that when those came before them every year, they could review the data on bike and pedestrian usage on the roads and consider including that information in their reports. He said they would look into how to incorporate this into their reports and likely discuss it with the Board when they returned for the public hearing on the secondary six-year plan.

Items for follow-up

There were none.

Adjournment

At 6:53 p.m., the Commission adjourned to April 24, 2026, Albemarle County Planning Commission meeting, 6:00 p.m.

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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: