ALBEMARLE COUNTY PLANNING
STAFF REPORT SUMMARY

Project Name: SP-2026-00002 Camp Watermarks Special Use Permit Amendment	**Staff:** J.T. Newberry, Senior Planner II
Planning Commission Hearing: August 11, 2026	**Board of Supervisors Public Hearing:** To be scheduled
Owners: Travis Critzer and Angela Critzer; James River Farm, LLC; Camp Watermarks, Inc.; Scuffletown LLC	**Applicant**: Josh Critzer, Camp Director
Acreage: 190.47 acres (combined)	**Special Use Permit:** Section 18-10.2.2 (20) Day camp, boarding camp.
TMPs: 13600-00-00-006B0, 13600-00-00-009D0, 13600-00-00-009D1, 13600-00-00-009E0, 13600-00-00-009A2, 13600-00-00-009A1, 13600-00-00-009H2 **Location:** 1153 Camp Watermarks Lane, Scottsville, VA, 24590	**By-right use**: Rural Areas (RA). Allows agricultural, forestal, and fishery uses as well as residential uses (maximum density of 0.5 unit/acre in development lots).
Magisterial District: Scottsville	**Conditions:** Yes **EC:** No
Proposal: Amend special use permit (SP) to increase the frequency and duration of overnight camp sessions, increase the maximum number of people allowed per camp session, and to reduce the overall acreage used for the camp.	**Comp. Plan Designation:** Rural Area – preserve and protect agricultural, forestal, open space, and natural, historic and scenic resources; residential (0.5 unit/acre in development lots)
Character of Property: The property is comprised of evergreen and deciduous forest, agricultural fields, a railroad crossing, as well as structures for residential, agricultural, and camp purposes. Water features include a pond and a lake, and streams along the western and eastern property lines that drain into the James River at the southern end of the property.	**Use of Surrounding Properties:** Single-family residences and other Rural Areas uses, including agriculture. Many of the subject properties are part of and surrounded by other properties contributing to the Hatton Agricultural and Forestal District.
Positive Aspects: 1. Existing agricultural and timber uses could continue along with expanded camp operations. 2. Majority of the property would remain available for agricultural and forestal use. 3. Additional structures are located within area already developed for camp use.	**Concerns:** 1. The owner is still working to resolve a number of outstanding code violations related to structures added to the property without permits.
Recommendation: Staff recommends approval of SP-2026-00002 Camp Watermarks Special Use Permit Amendment with conditions.	

STAFF PERSON: J.T. Newberry, Senior Planner II
PLANNING COMMISSION: August 11, 2026
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS: To be scheduled

CHARACTER OF THE AREA

Camp Watermarks is located approximately four miles west of the Town of Scottsville on James River Road (State Route 726). The property is comprised of evergreen and deciduous forest, agricultural fields, a railroad crossing, as well as structures for residential, agricultural, and camp purposes. Water features include a pond and a lake, and streams along the western and eastern property lines. The CSX railroad tracks and the banks of the James River form the boundary to the south. Its frontage along the James River is nearly equidistant between the Warren and Hatton communities. Across the James River is Buckingham County (see Attachment 1 - Location Map).

The surrounding landscape is predominately agricultural uses and residential buildings amongst large patches of mixed evergreen and deciduous forest. Many of the subject properties and surrounding properties are located within the Southern Albemarle Rural Historic District and the Hatton Agricultural and Forestal District.

Adjacent properties are designated both in the Comprehensive Plan and zoned as Rural Areas.

PLANNING AND ZONING HISTORY

There are multiple special use permits associated with Camp Watermarks:

SP200500034	A special use permit was approved May 3, 2006, to allow a nature / agricultural camp for children for four weeks per year.
SP200600037	A special use permit was approved March 14, 2007 to increase the number of camp sessions from 4 weeks per year to 16 weeks per year.
SP200700064	A special use permit was approved May 7, 2008, to increase the square footage of an activity building. This special use permit remains valid and is applicable to the site. The current concept plan and conditions of approval are included as Attachment 2.

There are other application types currently under review, as well as a zoning complaint:

ZCPLT-2025-00240	Concerns were received by the County that the property was not in compliance, which resulted in the discovery that multiple structures on the property had building code and zoning issues, including no permits for camp uses. The applicant was made aware of all outstanding issues on the property and has worked with Zoning, Building, Fire Rescue, and the Health Department to resolve them. The applicant has been responsive in addressing compliance issues and has applied for all the necessary permits identified to date, some of which cannot be approved until action on the requested special use permit amendment.
SUB-2026-00072	A subdivision application is under review for a boundary line adjustment, which will resolve setback compliance issues with existing structures on the property.

CSW-2026-00001 A central sewer request has been submitted and is under review. The existing sewage treatment system has been approved by the Virginia Department of Health and installed. It includes more than three connections, which requires central system approval by the Board of Supervisors. The system is designed with a capacity to serve up to 250 people.

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL

Camp Watermarks operates as a private boarding camp. The applicant is proposing several changes to the existing special use permit, including an increase in camp sessions, increase in the maximum number of people allowed per camp session, adjustments to the concept plan, and an adjustment to the tax map parcels subject to the special use permit. The parcel adjustment results in an overall reduction of approximately 10 acres for camp use. The applicant has provided a narrative of their proposal in Attachment 3 and their proposed concept plan is provided in Attachment 4.

The proposed changes in parcels and acreage for camp use are highlighted in this graphic to the right.

Three parcels (Parcels 9G, 9F, and 9H1) totaling 21.95 acres would be removed from the special use permit (see parcels hatched in blue), and one parcel (Parcel 9A1) totaling 10.16 acres would be added (see parcel hatched in yellow).

Parcels 9G, 9F, and 9H1 are owned by the applicants, but will no longer be used for camp purposes.

Parcel 9A1 (adjacent to the James River) would allow expansion of an activity area that currently exists on Parcel 9A2.

Each of the parcels outlined in red on the image are proposed to continue being used for camp purposes.

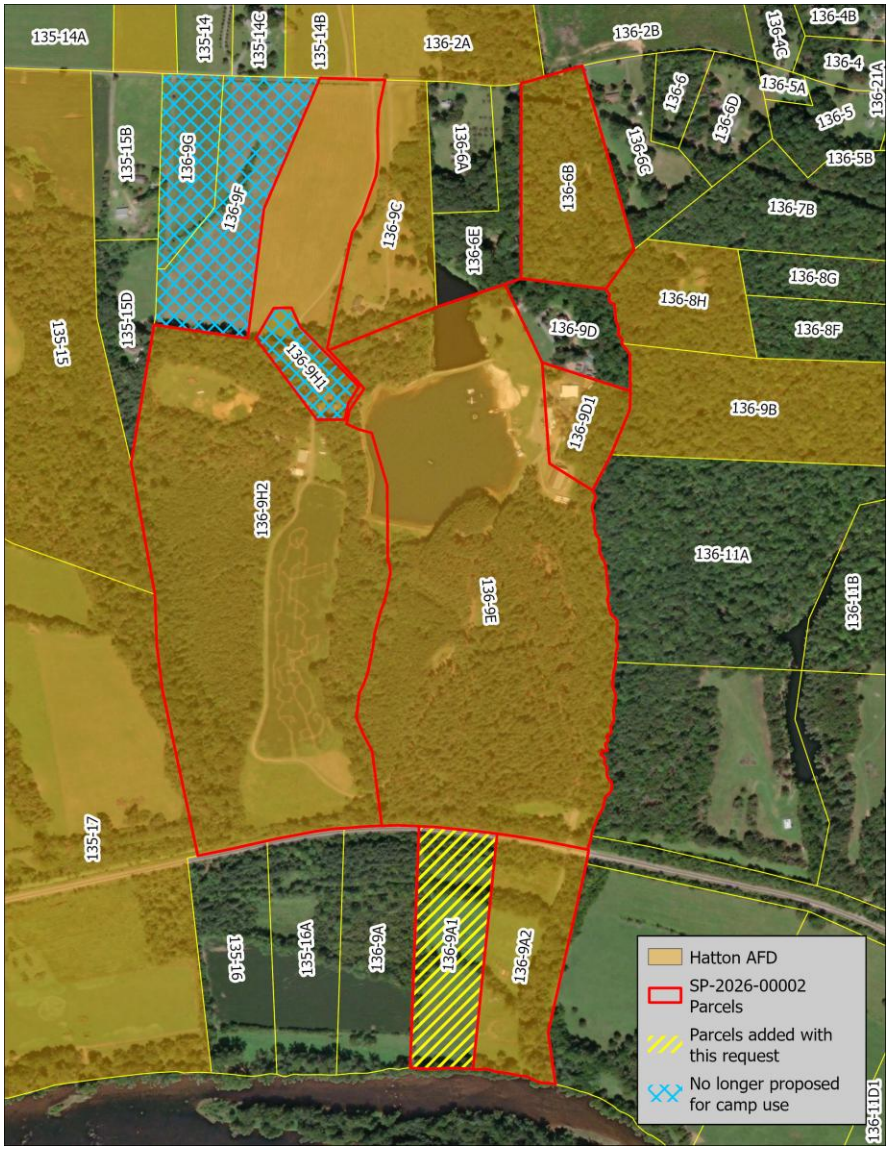


Figure 1: Map showing proposed changes to the tax map and parcels included in the special use permit and highlights the parcels contributing to the Hatton Agricultural-Forestal District.

A summary of the existing special use permit and proposed changes is included below:

	SP200700064 (Approved)	SP-2026-00002 (Under Review)
Capacity	Maximum of 75 campers; maximum of 20 staff (in addition to the applicant or family)	Maximum of 250 people (camp owners, staff, and campers)
Frequency	16 sessions (up to 1 week per session)	16 sessions (up to 1 week per session); 35 weekend sessions from October through May
Transportation	6 round-trip bus/van trips per weeklong session; 5 food deliveries by truck	15 round-trip bus/van/food delivery trips per camp session
Staff	Maximum of 20 staff members on-site at any one time	Maximum of 20 staff members on-site at any one time
Camp Facilities and Parking Area	Primarily on parcels 9D and 9D1 (approximately 3.75 acres)	Primarily parcel 9D1 (approximately 4.2 acres)

The applicant's conceptual plan in Attachment 4 highlights different features of the camp. The exhibit below highlights the main camp area (identified in the inset as the "cabin facilities and parking area") where the structures for eating, sleeping, and sanitation are located. The structures approved under SP200700064 are highlighted in green and the facilities that are proposed to be added for camp use under SP-2026-00002 are highlighted in blue.

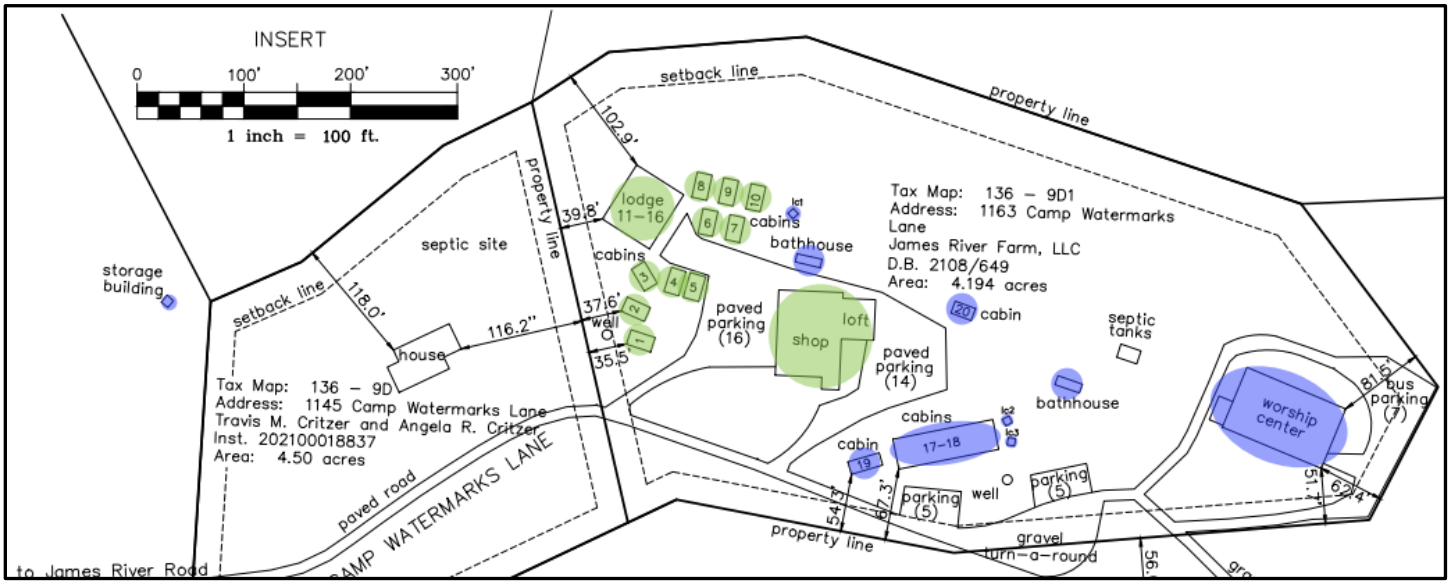


Figure 2: Portion of exhibit in Attachment 3 showing approved structures (in green) and proposed structures (in blue)

Another exhibit in Attachment 3 shows the remainder of the site highlighted in yellow as "wooded areas to remain" (or to be replanted if used for tree farming).

COMMUNITY MEETING/PUBLIC INPUT

On Thursday, April 30, 2026, the required community meeting was held at the Camp Watermarks site. The applicant provided details regarding the proposal and County staff presented an overview of the special use permit application process. Attendees provided comments and discussed several different topic areas; some topics related to the existing camp and its proposed expansion, and others related to increased activity in the broader area, especially on the James River.

The discussion and comments regarding the camp and its proposed expansion were generally positive, and concerns focused primarily on noise and hours of operation. Additional public comment received by staff after the community meeting can be found in Attachment 5.

Concerns related to broader activity in the area focused on noise, traffic, alcohol consumption, and littering, especially by recreational users of the James River. Following the community meeting, staff shared these concerns with the County departments focused on public safety and law enforcement.

AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTAL DISTRICTS (AFD) ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Section 3-202(A)(3)(k) of County Code states that a special use permit may be approved in an AFD, "provided that the Board of Supervisors determines that the use or structure allowed by the special use permit is consistent with the purposes of this chapter."

Parcels within the Hatton Agricultural and Forestal District are shown in Figure 1 on page 3, including those associated with the Camp Watermarks and those not in the district. The AFD advisory committee assists the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors by advising on the consistency of the proposed amendment with the purposes of AFDs. On April 21, 2026, the committee received a presentation from County staff about the proposal's impact on the district.

The committee found the proposed special use permit amendment would not significantly reduce land available for agriculture and forestry on the property and recommended it as consistent with Chapter 3 of the County Code.

ANALYSIS OF THE SPECIAL USE PERMIT REQUEST:

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

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

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

   The proposed amendment to the existing special use permit increases the intensity of the boarding camp use and transitions it from a seasonal to a year-round operation, which raises the potential impacts. However, staff believes these impacts can be mitigated through a combination of the unique characteristics of this site, the limits imposed by the applicant's conceptual plan, and the recommended special use permit conditions.

   As noted in previous special use permit amendments, the camp environment remains well integrated into the surrounding landscape. The proposed expansion of the cabin facilities and parking area is over 1,500 feet from James River Road, and none of the structures proposed for camp use are located closer to adjacent properties than existing, approved cabin facilities. The western and eastern boundaries of the special use permit area include mature wooded areas

located within stream buffers, where disturbance is not permitted. The southern sections of the site contain the CSX railroad and the James River. Together, these features buffer and limit impacts to adjacent parcels.

In addition, the recommended special use permit conditions limit potential impacts from transportation, lighting, outdoor amplified music, and tree clearing. Both development and use of the special use permit will need to comply with the applicant's concept plan and the final adopted special use permit conditions.

As a result, this proposal is not expected to be a substantial detriment to adjacent parcels.

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

The proposed special use permit amendment does not propose significant changes to the site which would result in a noticeable change in character. Camp uses will be limited to existing areas, with some limited expansions, as shown on the concept plan.

Many of the properties in the nearby area contain agricultural uses, with some residences. The property is currently used for production of hay (25 acres) and corn (20 acres), while about 60 acres are managed as a tree farm, and those activities could continue along with an expanded camp use.

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

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

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

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

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

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

In this case, the proposed amendment is in harmony with the purpose and intent of the chapter because the outcome would preserve agricultural land and activities, which can be sustained with limited services from the County. The Health Department has verified there is sufficient water supply for the requested increase in people at the camp, and no significant impacts are expected to natural, scenic, and historic resources.

with the uses permitted by right in the district,

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

with the regulations provided in Section 5 as applicable,

Section 5.1.05 provides supplemental regulations that are applicable to all day camps and boarding camps. These regulations are in addition to all other requirements of County Code and all other applicable laws. The proposed expansion will be subject to the regulations in Section 5.1.05 listed below.

> a. Provisions for outdoor cooking, campfires, cooking pits, etc., shall be subject to Albemarle County fire official approval whether or not a site development plan is required;
>
> b. All such uses shall conform to the requirements of the Virginia Department of Health Bureau of Tourist Establishment Sanitation and other applicable requirements.

The applicant is in compliance with these supplemental regulations. The Fire Marshall's Office has approved the outdoor cooking areas, and the Health Department has issued permits for the camp and its dining facilities.

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

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

Staff from Zoning, Engineering, Inspections, Fire Rescue, Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), and Virginia Department of Health have all reviewed this application and provided input into the special use permit process.

The site is served by an internal private access, Camp Watermarks Lane, located off of James River Road. James River Road is a public two-lane, asphalt road that's classified by VDOT as a rural collector and is approximately 18 feet in width. The entrance of Camp Watermarks Lane onto James River Road has been evaluated for additional vehicle trips and no entrance improvements have been identified by VDOT. Internal access roads have been evaluated by the Fire Marshal's office and provide adequate emergency access and are well maintained.

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has reviewed and issued permits for several different aspects of this proposal. VDH issued a "food establishment" permit for summer camp food service that expires on March 31, 2027. It also issued a "summer camp" permit that expires on June 30, 2027.

The camp is served by private well and septic system. VDH approved a waterworks operation permit on May 18, 2026 for 14,400 gallons per day (gpd). The average daily demand for a group of 250 people is estimated to be 8,780 gpd. On June 11, 2026, VDH approved the exiting sewage treatment system to serve a capacity of 250 people. The septic permit will expire on June 11, 2031.

To comply with Chapter 16 of County Code, a central sewer request has been submitted and is under review. This approval from the Board of Supervisors is required for any system that includes more than 3 connections, and this system has four connections.

If the special use permit amendment is approved, the expanded use cannot commence without the appropriate approvals from the Fire Marshal, Inspections, and Zoning. These approvals include the building and zoning permits needed to resolve any outstanding building permit or other issues. These processes will ensure that all State and County regulations, special use permit conditions, and all necessary improvements have been constructed, inspected, and approved.

Staff is recommending a condition that the owners apply for an annual zoning clearance so that staff can conduct annual inspections and verify compliance with health and safety regulations on an on-going basis.

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

The Comprehensive Plan (AC44) land use designation for the property is Rural Area. The property and all of the abutting properties along James River Road are also designated as Rural Area within Comprehensive Plan. Staff found consistency with the Comprehensive Plan throughout the RA land use objectives (RALU), as well as an objective focused on agribusiness from the Thriving Economy (TE) chapter. The properties will primarily be used for agricultural uses and remain in the Hatton Ferry Agricultural and Forestal district.

Supportive statements from the Rural Areas chapter of AC44 include:

- **RALU, Obj. 4: *Support local agricultural and forestry production and value-added processing.***

This proposal seeks to retain approximately 100 acres of agricultural activity, including crops (hay and corn) and tree farming. Please refer to the highlighted yellow areas on the applicant's exhibit in Attachment 3.

- **RALU, Obj. 6: Encourage land uses that support large and unfragmented rural properties while mitigating their potential impacts.**

This proposal includes over 190 acres of rural land and its potential impacts are mitigated through the special use permit process. The built camp facilities and structures remain in a concentrated building and parking envelope. Outdoor recreation and activity areas are limited as indicated on the concept plan and do not lead to fragmentation.

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

The proposed special use permit amendment supports both agricultural and recreational activities. The expansion of the camp facility is within already existing, improved portions of the property and this special use permit reduces the overall acreage associated with the camp.

- **TE, Obj. 7: Encourage the growth of a thriving and modern agricultural economy**
    - **Action 7.3: Consider modifications to expand opportunities for diverse revenue streams for agribusinesses (e.g., lodging, food service, recreation, agritourism activities related to the primary agricultural use).**
    - **Action 7.5: Support the growth of existing agricultural activities, including, but not limited to, the wine industry, craft breweries, distilleries, and agritourism.**

The applicant cites revenue diversification as one reason for the expanded camp proposal. The applicant's narrative states, "We would have to consider selling or developing [our land] without the opportunity to operate [with additional camp sessions and campers due to] the impacts of inflation and overall costs… our farming sections… aren't as great for revenue any longer."

RELIGIOUS LAND USE AND INSTITUTIONALIZED PERSONS ACT (RLUIPA)

RLUIPA is a federal law that prohibits a locality from imposing or implementing a land use regulation that imposes a substantial burden on religious exercise. It applies broadly to religious assemblies and institutions, including religious camps and retreat centers.

The U.S. Department of Justice has expressly noted that RLUIPA protections extend to "religious schools, religious camps, [and] religious retreat centers…" Camp Watermarks' application describes its mission as "impacting the lives of young people for Jesus" and providing a setting where participants may "hear from the Lord," indicating that the camp's operations constitute religious exercise.

This special use permit amendment has been evaluated under Albemarle County's neutral, generally applicable zoning standards for rural-area assembly uses. The primary use of this parcel is for an overnight boarding camp, not a religious assembly use. The recommended conditions expand the camping use, rather than restrict, the camp's ability to conduct its activities, and they address typical land-use impacts such as traffic, noise, lighting, and occupancy limits. The proposed conditions would not impose requirements more burdensome than those applied to comparable non-religious assembly uses, nor would they deny or limit the camp's operations in a manner that would constitute unequal treatment, religious discrimination, or a substantial burden on religious exercise under RLUIPA.

Based on this review, the County's consideration of this application is consistent with RLUIPA's requirements and treats Camp Watermarks at least as favorably as comparable secular assembly uses.

SUMMARY

Staff have identified the following positive aspects with this request:

1. Existing agricultural and timber uses could continue along with expanded camp.
2. Majority of the property would remain available for agricultural and forestal use.
3. Additional structures are located within area already developed for camp use.

Staff have identified the following concerns with this request:

1. The owner is still working to resolve outstanding code violations related to structures added to the property without permits.

RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the findings contained in this staff report, staff recommends approval of SP-2026-0002 Camp Watermarks Special Use Permit Amendment with conditions.

Staff is providing the following draft conditions for consideration:

1. General Accord with Conceptual Plan. Development and use of improvements authorized by SP-2026-00002 must be in general accord with the Conceptual Plan dated (Month) (Day), 2026 prepared by Lineage and titled "Watermarks Camp – Concept Plan".

   To be in general accord with the Conceptual Plan, development must reflect the following major elements essential to the design:
   - The entrance location at Camp Watermarks Lane and James River Road;
   - The limits of the cabin facilities and parking area;
   - The number and location of designated activity areas;

   Minor modifications that do not conflict with these elements may be approved to ensure compliance with the Zoning Ordinance.

2. Tree Clearing. Clearing of trees for camp activities and facilities is limited to the activity areas shown on the Conceptual Plan or areas used for bona fide agricultural purposes.

3. Occupancy Limit. The total number of persons on site at any one time must not exceed two hundred fifty (250).

4. Camp Session Limits. Camp operations are limited to a maximum of fifty-one (51) sessions per calendar year, consisting of:
   - Up to sixteen (16) weeklong overnight sessions; and
   - Up to thirty-five (35) weekend overnight sessions (Friday through Monday).

5. Transportation Management. For each camp session, the total number of bus or van round trips to and from the camp must not exceed fifteen (15). Bus or van transportation must be the primary means of transportation for campers.

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

7. Lighting. Any lighting associated with the camp must comply with County Code § 18-4.17.

8. Zoning Clearance. The owner(s) must apply for a Zoning Clearance annually, to include review and approval by the Building Official, Zoning Administrator, Fire Marshal, and Virginia Department of Health.

POSSIBLE PLANNING COMMISSION MOTIONS:

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

I moved to recommend approval of SP-2026-00002 Camp Watermarks Special Use Permit Amendment with the conditions provided by staff for the reasons stated in the staff report.

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

I move to recommend denial of SP-2026-00002 Camp Watermarks Special Use Permit Amendment for the reasons stated in the staff report. *Should a commissioner motion to recommend denial, he or she should state the reason(s) for recommending denial*.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attach 1 - SP-2026-00002 Camp Watermarks - Location Map
Attach 2 - SP-2026-00002 Camp Watermarks - SP200700064 Conditions and Concept Plan
Attach 3 - SP-2026-00002 Camp Watermarks - Applicant Narrative and Exhibits
Attach 4 - SP-2026-00002 Camp Watermarks - Amended Conceptual Plan dated April 27, 2026, last revised May 4, 2026
Attach 5 - SP-2026-00002 Camp Watermarks - Public Comments Received by August 3, 2026