Albemarle County Planning Commission
Work Session and Regular Meeting
Draft Minutes August 25, 2026

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public meeting on Tuesday, August 25, 2026, at 1:00 p.m.

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

Members absent: Luis Carrazana, Chair.

Other officials present were: Michael Barnes, Director of Planning; Bart Svoboda, Director of Community Development; Francis MacCall, Deputy Zoning Administrator; Jered Tate, Senior Planner; Ben Loppacker, Planner; Rebecca Ragsdale, Planning Manager; Jenny Tevendale, Deputy County Attorney; and Carolyn Shaffer, Clerk to the Planning Commissions.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Carolyn Shaffer called the roll.

Karen Firehock established a quorum.

Public Comments

Neil Williamson, President of the Free Enterprise Forum, stated that last week, he spoke to the Albemarle County Economic Development Authority (EDA) about the cost of delay for development projects. He said that project carrying costs typically ran between $7,200 to $9,500 per month for every million dollars of valuation. He said that meant a $10 million project can carry costs of up to $95,000 a month. He said the reason he was telling this to the Planning Commission was because, knowingly or not, they were part of the problem.

Mr. Williamson said that the Virginia State Code had several statutory deadlines that force timely Planning Commission action in development-related matters. He said that currently, once the Community Development Department (CDD) had an application to move forward, they scheduled it about three months out. They then waited for the public hearing, and then they scheduled the Board of Supervisors public hearing for another three months out. He said that was six months, resulting in a six-month delay on something that could be actionable.

Mr. Williamson stated that for a $10 million project, those six months added up to $570,000. He stated that if Albemarle County truly wanted development to occur in the Development Areas, it had at least two clear options to remedy this. He said that they could hold a joint public hearing with the Board of Supervisors, as the City of

Charlottesville did. He said that staff could schedule the Board of Supervisors public hearing when they scheduled the public hearing, and schedule it three weeks out so that there was time for any kind of advertising or any kind of changes to the program.

Mr. Williamson said if they did this, they could eliminate six weeks of work and reduce carrying costs by $150,000 on that $10 million project. He said that some might call this low-hanging fruit. He said that the Free Enterprise Forum called on the Planning Commission to direct staff to investigate this applicant's timing concern and to improve the use of a new planning device, a calendar, to fix this problem.

Consent Agenda

Mr. Moore motioned that the Planning Commission approve the consent agenda. Ms. Brown seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0). (Mr. Carrazana was absent)

Public Hearing

SP-2026-0001 Alberene Yoga Retreat Center

Ben Loppacker, Planner, said that he would give the staff presentation for the Alberene Yoga Retreat special use permit (SUP). He said that the property was located in southern Albemarle County along Secretary's Sand Road, approximately one mile south of the intersection of Secretary's Sand Road and Green Creek Road. He said that the surrounding area was of rural character with a variety of rural uses, including low-density single-family residential, forests and open space, and agricultural and forestal uses.

Mr. Loppacker said that the parcel was currently zoned Rural Areas (RA) and designated Rural Areas on the AC44 Comprehensive Plan. He said that while critical slopes and Water Protection Ordinance (WPO) buffers did exist on the site, the proposed development and structures associated with it would not impact either, and there would be no disturbance within critical slopes or Water Protection Ordinance buffers.

Mr. Loppacker said that shown before the Commission was the concept plan that was submitted by the applicant, including the proposed campsites, the retreat building, as well as some other amenities for people utilizing the boarding camp. The factors for consideration for special use permits were shown per the analysis included in the staff report. He said that staff found that the proposed boarding camp would cause no substantial detriment to adjacent parcels, would not change the character of the area, would be in harmony with the purpose and intent of the chapter, and was consistent with the AC44 Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Loppacker said that the request also included two special exceptions: one for grade for vehicle access aisles not adjacent to parking spaces, and the other being curb and gutter in parking areas along travel ways. He said staff had identified the following positive aspects of the request, which were the use was consistent with the review criteria for

special use permits contained in the Zoning Ordinance. He said that a majority of the property would remain forested, and no detrimental impacts to adjoining properties were anticipated.

Mr. Loppacker said that staff was not able to identify any concerns at this time, and staff did not object to the special exceptions. He said that staff included conditions for the special use permit for consideration, which included limiting the amount of events per calendar year, establishing quiet hours, and preserving buffering between the use and the property boundaries.

Mr. Moore asked if the special exception applications were also going to be included with this item.

Mr. Loppacker said those would be acted on by the Board of Supervisors, and they were included in the presentation just for information.

Mr. Moore said he was curious about what it meant regarding the vehicle access aisles not being adjacent to parking spaces. He said he was wondering what the grading for vehicle access aisles might look like when they were used together.

Mr. Loppacker said that the vehicle access aisles not adjacent to parking spaces were limited to no more than a 10% grade without a special exception granted by the Board of Supervisors, which was what they were applying for.

Mr. Moore asked if these may be more than 10%.

Mr. Loppacker said yes, they would not be allowed to exceed 16%, but in some areas, it would be over 10%, which was what the proposal contained.

Mr. Murray asked if the road was paved.

Mr. Loppacker said yes, it was a paved public road maintained by Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT).

Michael Barnes, Director of Planning, said that Secretary's Sand Road was paved all the way down to Route 6, and then Old Sand Road was unpaved.

Mr. Clayborne asked how they came up with the range for quiet hours.

Mr. Loppacker said that this range was consistent with the County's Noise Ordinance, as well as other boarding camps that had recently been approved within the County.

Ms. Firehock said that she did not realize the County had an ordinance that discussed quiet hours and had a set time for those.

Mr. Loppacker said that they limited the amplification of outdoor music during certain hours.

Ms. Firehock asked if the Planning Commission could determine that an earlier quiet hour was appropriate.

Mr. Loppacker said that was correct; it would just be a modification of the condition.

Ms. Firehock said that because of the agricultural uses in the Rural Area, people went to bed early, so it may be appropriate to have an earlier hour for that range.

Jenny Tevendale, Assistant County Attorney, said that the Commission would just need to be able to find that it was mitigating an impact of the special permit being requested.

Ms. Firehock asked if the applicant had a presentation.

Justin Shimp, Shimp Engineering, representing the Gates family, said that he would let the applicant come up and tell the Commission a little bit about their vision for the property and how they came to the site. He said that they had reviewed staff's proposed conditions, and they had no objection to those. He said that they would be happy to answer other questions related to changes in those at the end of this presentation.

Mr. Shimp provided a rendering of the building proposed. He said that it was essentially a slightly large house that could accompany these wellness-related events, including yoga and a variety of other wellness retreat options that worked well in these rural settings. He said that he did not think anyone would want to play loud music at an event like this.

Mr. Shimp said that the site was located on Secretary's Sand Road and primarily surrounded by forest land on their side of the road. He said that the driveway on the far right was an existing farm road that was cut in, and the reason they had the special exception was because that the road was about 13% or 14% at its steepest. He said that to meet the County requirement of 10%, they would have to tear out more trees, probably grade over critical slopes, and essentially cause more impacts than were necessary.

Mr. Shimp said that 16% was the common standard for a Rural Area driveway. He said that because they could not achieve the 10% without substantially more impact and detriment to the woodlands there, they applied for the exception. He said that the existing parcel had a couple of existing roads coming in. He said that they were potentially trying to use that infrastructure for the project. He said that coming in off Secretary's Sand, down the hill, there was an easement; the applicant owned the adjacent property, but it was not part of this special use permit.

Mr. Shimp said that looking at the proposed layout, the two roads followed the existing infrastructure. He said that the structure sat on grade and had a basement walkout. He said that they had defined the camping areas, a picnic area, a labyrinth, and various nature areas in the space. He said that in phase one, they would have tent camping sites, and then in the future planned to develop some small cabin-type structures that would be for the folks who come to stay for the events.

Mr. Shimp said that they did not know the timing of the build-out of that, but they did want to start with the event building and then work their way up with camping for the project. He said the special exception regarding the curb and gutter was asking for there to be no concrete curb, gutter, and drainage; instead, they would have gravel to better suit the rural setting. He said that for the small amount of impervious area, they could manage the drainage without curb and gutter.

Mr. Shimp said that to illustrate the lack of visibility, he had provided another rendering of the site. He said that it showed more of the building than what was actually visible, but the grade picture at the top was useful as it demonstrated how far below the road the structure was and the depth of the trees. He said over 200 feet of trees between the structure area and the road were maintained with the plan.

Mr. Shimp said that there was the existing buffer by the stream and a proposed open space of 14.5 acres. He said that the entire back portion, essentially 50% of the property, would be untouched in the application.

Christopher Gates, owner of the property, said that he was an Army veteran and part of his work involved working with other veterans on healing, personal growth, meditation, and reconnecting with themselves. He said that this Yoga Retreat Center was an extension of that work, which meant a great deal to him and was work that he had dedicated the rest of his time on this planet to. He said that additionally, Charlottesville had been part of his family story for a long time. He said that he and his wife met here when he was a West Point cadet and she was a student here at University of Virginia (UVA).

Mr. Gates said that his wife's family had deep connections to the area for years and for many years were UVA season ticket holders. He said that their children grew up going to Saturday football games. He said that although he currently lived in northern Virginia, he loved Charlottesville. He said that they intended to permanently move here in the next few years, once their son completed high school. We said that they believed there was an under-served need for healing, coaching, meditation, yoga, and small intentional retreats.

Mr. Gates said that they found this property and fell in love with this part of Albemarle County: the forest, the quiet, the rural landscape, the view of Appleberry Mountain, and the feeling they had when out there. He said that they did not intend or want to change that, and preserving that was fundamental to what they were trying to create. He said that there was also something about the history of the land that had become deeply symbolic to him. He said that one of the long-term neighbors down the road told him that the property had been timbered so many times that the land had really struggled to recover.

Mr. Gates said they even tried dropping fertilizer from the air to help the trees grow, but it was unsuccessful. He said that he thought that was one of the reasons that the property owners cut it up and decided to sell the property. He said that he could not help but see the parallel; some of the people who came to retreats like there may feel the same way:

life was taking a lot out of them, and they may wonder whether they could still grow, change, or heal. He said that there was something symbolic to him in creating a place for those people on a piece of land that itself needed love, care, patience, and restoration.

Mr. Gates said that his intention was to care for both. He said that the majority of the property would remain forested, with roughly 14.5 acres designated as a conservation area. He said that they wanted to steward the land, not conquer it, because the rural beauty and quiet were what made that healing possible. He said that they also owned the adjacent lot and intended to keep it undeveloped except for their permanent home.

Mr. Gates said that ultimately, they hoped to create a place where people could slow down, reconnect with themselves and with nature, and leave it a little better than when they arrived. He said that over the years, he hoped to leave the land a little better than he found it.

Mr. Moore said they received a letter from a neighbor who was not opposed to the proposal but stated that he liked to shoot targets with fairly loud guns. He asked how that impacted their yoga classes at the retreat.

Mr. Gates said he thought the yoga classes would take place inside and did not think it is going to be an issue. He said that children would not be attending the retreats; they were for adults. He said that he did not think any of the concerns in the letter were going to be an issue with this project.

Mr. Murray said that Mr. Shimp had mentioned the steepness of the driveway, and he appreciated him trying to minimize disturbance on that. He said that, however, when there was a steep slope and a gravel driveway, it was prone to erosion. He asked what measures they planned to take to prevent erosion, given the steepness of the gravel driveway that was being proposed.

Mr. Shimp said that even though this was a rural type of use, it did still have a site plan component. He said that even though it was gravel, the County had essentially performed a drainage review of that, so they would typically put in cross pipes, ditches, and all that was required. He said that depending on the circumstances, there may be some pavement or consideration for surface treatment in the steepest portion, but that was generally something they worked out with the County Engineer during the site plan review.

Mr. Clayborne asked if there would be open fires at the campsites.

Mr. Shimp said that he believed there was a note in the staff report regarding fires rules in this particular special use permit.

Mr. Loppacker said that there were supplementary regulations for outdoor fire pits, which would have to be met through approval by the Fire Department. He said that this would

need to be part of the site plan, and the Fire Department would analyze whether the measures being taken met their standards.

Mr. Shimp said that this was an organized event space rather than a campsite for families. He said that if they did have a fire, it would likely be put on by the host, rather than the individual attendees. He said that they certainly had to follow County regulations.

Mr. Clayborne asked if there needed to be a condition regarding compliance with seasonal burn bans and droughts, or if that did not matter since this was not a traditional campground.

Mr. Loppacker said it was staff's opinion that it would be covered through compliance with the Fire Department when the site plan was submitted. He said that if there were any issues with that, the Fire Department would bring them up in their review.

Ms. Firehock asked if the applicant was envisioning people coming for the weekend to participate in various yoga activities, of if there were daily classes a few times a day. She said that she was trying to get a sense of the rhythm of visitation to the site and the number of people.

Mr. Gates said that initially, they would have day classes, and the reason for the camping component was so that they did not have to come back into town and can stay in the environment. He said that initially, after day classes, they would love to be able to host people overnight where they could come in and do morning yoga and have classes.

Ms. Firehock asked if they were successful, what sort of visitation they expected to be coming and going from the site.

Mr. Gates said that they were limited in the proposal to a maximum of 50 participants. He said he would be overjoyed if they had that many. He said they were not anticipating that the retreats would be that large at all. He said he preferred to work at a smaller number, but that was in accordance with VDOT and other requirements.

Ms. Firehock asked if it would just be yoga; there would be no other events.

Mr. Gates said that there would be no weddings and no birthday parties. He said that this was a space to reconnect with nature, to take classes, to do healing work, and just to get better; it was a place where people could escape for a little. He said that people could enjoy the view, walk the labyrinth, and get time away from the busy schedules and lives that they wanted to provide.

Mr. Gates said that this had been beneficial to him as a veteran and to the people he had worked with. He said that they were just trying to bring more of that and have a space for them to do that. He said that right now in northern Virginia, he sent them right back out into the busy world when they were done with these things. He said that was not preferred;

being able to have a space where they can enjoy the calm was what they were looking for and why they bought the property.

Ms. Firehock opened the public hearing. Seeing no speakers, she closed the public hearing.

Ms. Firehock motioned that the Planning Commission recommend approval of SP-2026-00001 Alberene Yoga Retreat with the conditions listed in the staff report. Mr. Clayborne seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0). (Mr. Carrazana was absent)

SP-2025-00008 and SE-2026-00017 The Barns Special Events/Exceptions

Jered Tate, Senior Planner, said that he would be giving staff's presentation for SP-2025-00008, the Barns Special Events. He said that the two subject parcels were located on the southern side of Garth Road, approximately 0.25 miles west of the intersection of Garth Road and Fork Union Road in the western part of the County. He said that the surrounding area was of rural character with a variety of Rural Area uses, including low-density single-family residential, forest and open space, and agricultural uses. He said that he had provided a view of the site as one was traveling west on Garth Road.

Mr. Tate said that those familiar might know it as the parcel that had Longhorn cattle in the past. He said that two subject parcels totaled just under 10.5 acres. He said that the existing zoning of this parcel and all surrounding parcels was Rural Areas. He said that the property was gently rolling and falls away from Garth Road as it moved south. He said that there was a small portion of Water Protection Ordinance (WPO) buffers across the southeastern, but no impact to the buffer was expected.

Mr. Tate said that a conservation easement held by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation was located on the parcel immediately adjacent to the west. He said that provided was the applicant's concept plan. He said that the primary use of this property would be agriculture, which was permitted by right under Section 10.2.1 of the Zoning Ordinance. He said that the request that they were reviewing was for special events as regulated by the supplementary regulations in Section 5.1.43.

Mr. Tate said that these would be events determined not to be usual and customary at agricultural operations. He said that he would like to highlight a couple of things here that were associated with this request. He said that number four on the plan indicated the approximate location where the applicant intended to set up portable toilets associated with special events. He said that also of note were two areas marked with the number two; those would be the overflow parking areas for the special events.

Mr. Tate said that number nine, which included all the areas immediately adjacent to Garth Road and the property to the west, indicated the proposed landscape screening for the use. He said that the provided chart detailed various types of events at agricultural operations as regulated by the supplementary regulations of Section 5.1.58. He said that

this was included as the majority of the applicant's proposed event schedule would be regulated by the standards of this section.

Mr. Tate said that as the applicant had noted, they cannot entirely rule out the possibility of having a limited number of non-agritourism-related events each year, special use permit approval was required for special events under Section 5.1.43. He said that in particular, staff would like to call attention to the fact that they mentioned renting out the space. He said that prioritizing events that were in line with their mission while still renting the space to another user was a use that would be classified as event rental and not agritourism.

Mr. Tate said that the request was for up to 24 events per year, with no more than 150 attendees at any single event. He said that to reiterate, these were events determined to be not usual and customary with agricultural operations. He said that regardless of the outcome of the review, further review would be required for the establishment of the primary use and for events at agricultural operations to commence under Section 5.1.58.

Mr. Tate said that the factors for consideration for special use permits were shown on the screen. He said that for the analysis included in the staff report, staff found that the proposed special events request would cause no substantial detriment to adjacent parcels, would not change the character of the area, would be in harmony with the purpose and intent of the chapter, and was consistent with the 2015 Comprehensive Plan. He said that the applicant had requested three special exceptions associated with the special use permit.

Mr. Tate said that overall, staff found that no detriment would come from the approval of the special exception request with the conditions included in the staff report. He said that the Planning Commission was not required to make a recommendation on the special exception request; however, if the Commission chose to provide comments on the special exception, staff would include those in the transmittal summary to the Board of Supervisors.

Mr. Tate said that staff found the following three positive aspects of the special use permit request: the use was consistent with the review criteria for special use permits contained in the Zoning Ordinance; the primary use of the property would be agriculture; and no detrimental impacts to adjoining properties were anticipated. He said that staff had not identified any concerns associated with the special use permit nor the special exception request.

Mr. Tate said that staff recommended four conditions of approval for the special events special use permit: in accordance with the conceptual plan; event and occupancy limits; installation of landscaping; and outdoor amplified music limited per the noise standards of the ordinance.

Mr. Clayborne asked if staff could discuss how traffic would be controlled coming into and out of the site for those large events of 150 folks.

Mr. Tate said that the entrance itself would be reviewed and permitted by VDOT, and that happened regardless of the approval of the request. He said that was one of those supplementary reviews that occurred for the by-right use and for any agritourism events that would occur under Section 5.1.58. He said that the entrance would have to be in accord with VDOT standards, and they had requested as part of that review that the applicant consider doing a turn analysis to see if a turn lane needs to be added. He said that if a warrant analysis deemed it necessary, the applicant would have to do that in order to get VDOT's permission for the entrance.

Mr. Murray said that since this was on a national bike route, he wanted to ensure they were aware of that. He said that he had passed five bikes just coming here on Garth Road, and they were talking about 150 more cars and potentially more cars going down that road. He asked what sort of leverage there was and what kind of discussions there had been about making sure there was a place to safely pass bikes in that section of the road.

Mr. Murray said that it was a long-standing concern on Garth Road that they had not accommodated bikes on a national bike route. He asked if there had been any discussion about offering a couple of extra feet of pavement so that when cars were going down the road, they had a little space to pass the many bicyclists on that route.

Mr. Tate said that as part of staff's review, they of course coordinated with Transportation, but this did not come up. He said it was an excellent question, but it had not been considered as part of the proposal.

Ms. Brown said that she was concerned about the bicyclists and also the intensity of traffic. She asked if the turn lane being required by VDOT's study factored into changing the character of the area.

Mr. Tate said it would not. He said those similar turn lanes had been required in other Rural Area uses and had been added. He said that if it was not required, then of course no change occurred.

Ms. Firehock asked if they could elaborate on the finding that the applicant was proposing events not usual and customary to agriculture.

Mr. Tate said that usual and customary would be events such as a workshop on one of the proposed uses under the agricultural primary use, which was apiculture. He said that if they were to offer a class, such as a series of lectures on how to harvest honey, that would be considered usual and customary with the agricultural use. He said that an example of not usual and customary would be renting the space to host a leadership retreat. He said that would not be related to the agricultural use of the property and therefore would not be deemed usual and customary.

Ms. Firehock asked if they were to only have events that were agriculturally related, such as harvesting honey or canning tomatoes, they would not need to be here tonight.

Mr. Tate said that was correct. He said that as they looked at the chart, he noted that most of the items fell under Section 5.1.58, either by right or by right with a zoning clearance review. He explained that that was a different section of the Ordinance regarding events at agricultural operations, which covered agritourism and farm tours. He said that all of those events regulated by that section were not being considered as part of this proposal and would be reviewed on their own merits under that section.

Ms. Firehock asked if that review would not come to the Planning Commission for a public hearing.

Mr. Tate said that it would not. He said there were certain criteria that required a special use permit under 5.1.58, but those listed here would not come to the Planning Commission.

Ms. Firehock asked if staff could elaborate on the finding of no substantial detriment.

Mr. Tate said that what they were looking at in particular with this specific use was potential immediate impacts from special events to surrounding properties. He said that things like light from the headlights of cars as they entered and exited the property after dark, and the noise of outdoor amplified music would be some examples. He said that because of the conditions that they authored to limit those things, they believed that with those conditions, there would be no substantial detriment to adjoining properties.

Ms. King said that she had a clarifying question about the type of special events and the amount that would be restricted by the current application. She said that for special events not deemed usual for agricultural purposes, they were proposing 150 people or fewer. She asked if that was in addition to what they would be allowed by right for agricultural, or would it be 150 in total.

Mr. Tate said that there would be a limit of 24 events, and per staff's analysis, that would be a limit on the events that could be held under Section 5.1.43. He said it would be in addition to events that could be held under 5.1.58.

Ms. Firehock asked if the applicant had a presentation.

Kate Gilman said that her partner, Jess Forsyth, was the applicant. She said that her family lived at 2149 Garth Road, which was the parcel right next to the one in question. She said she was here with a team of ecologists, landscape architects, and engineers who had worked to bring their dream to life over the last two years. She said that representatives from Nelson Byrd, Woltz and Woolley Engineering, in addition to her family, were here for any questions, as were the community members in the audience.

Ms. Gilman said she had spent the last 15 years in sustainable agriculture, environmental advocacy, and flower farming. She said her partner, Jess, went to New York University (NYU) and practiced herbal medicine and was a master breathwork and meditation teacher. She said that their application had been an ongoing dialogue over months with

the County staff, who had provided constructive comments that they had taken into deep consideration in multiple revisions and improvements.

Ms. Gilman thanked staff and informed the Commission how thorough they had been, so that she felt they had a sound application in front of them today. She thanked them for their efforts and also thanked the neighbors and community members for coming to listen and provide feedback. She said that their adjacent neighbors on the south side of Garth Road had reviewed their plans and were in support of the project, many of whom wrote in.

Ms. Gilman said that any questions others have, they had probably also had, as they lived right next door. She said they had discussed them in countless back-and-forth discussions as a family at the kitchen table, with County staff, with VDOT, with the Fire Marshal, and with everyone they had consulted to form this application. She stated that what she was proposing was the product of real consideration and hopes that was reflected tonight.

Ms. Gilman said the Barns was a sustainable farm with the mission of tending to both the soil and soul. She said that she would transform her family's current cattle pasture into a productive, ecologically diverse, regenerative farm. She said that they would enrich the soil and cultivate habitat with native plantings, a native orchard, pollinator meadows, a flower garden, a medicinal garden, and a culinary garden, all of which would inform what they sold and the related educational workshop programming and community experiences they planned to offer on site.

Ms. Gilman said that in order to enable folks to experience what they were growing, they would build two small barns, each around 1,200 square feet, connected by a breezeway, where they could both process crops and hold land-based curriculum. She said the structure was much smaller than the surrounding residential and agricultural buildings on Garth Road. She said that it would be made of high-quality natural materials with Dark Skies-appropriate lighting set to timers to automatically turn off when programming closes.

Ms. Gilman said that one barn was open and would contain quieter reflection, housing herbalism, meditation, and community conversation. She said that the other structure contained hands-on work, housing botanicals, honey, and cooking from the garden. She said that they would have a portion of their programming free to the community, as well as a portion targeted specifically to children and seniors, two populations they believed especially benefited from land-based healing.

Ms. Gilman said that they had provided an aerial shot of the property, noting the view of Timber Creek Farm, the Gordons (formerly the Wells), the Blakemores, and her parents' property. She said that the two stars were the property she was speaking about tonight. She said that when they decided to build this farm, they created an in-depth tree study of the property so they could assess the health of every one of the hundreds of trees on the farm.

Ms. Gilman said they were proud to have designed everything around those old trees. She said that not a single healthy tree would be removed for either the drive or the barns. She said that she believed the future of sustainable agriculture was a dynamic one where small growers were not isolated individual monoculture farms. She said she wanted to be able to be a part of the community to lift up other growers, makers, writers, artists, and creators as an extension of their already vested right.

Ms. Gilman said she believed that special use programming twice a month would allow them to cross-pollinate, bringing people onto the farm by way of events and public outreach. She said she believed it will allow them to foster partnerships within the community and that it will make the community a more interesting, engaged, and vital place. She said she believed they would give the community a beautiful space to gather for unique, intimate, quiet land-based learning and experiences that was not a university, a church, or a vineyard.

Ms. Gilman said that these might range from a monthly cooking class with a local chef, a yoga class with a local yoga instructor, or an acoustic classical quartet with local musicians. She said that it might look like a book signing by a local author. She said the intimate explorations they would offer the community in the barns and on the farm would allow people to get curious about what nature offers and to remember their place within the living world, not in isolation, but together.

Ms. Gilman said these would never be rowdy, loud parties, late nights with amplified music, or weddings. She said these experiences were by nature quiet, soulful, and thoughtful. She said that any loud noise would be incongruent with their mission, with the plants and animals that lived on the land, as well as her family right next door. She said that she reminded the Commission that, by right, they were able to gather and hold agricultural workshops and related gatherings in larger numbers than what they were applying for under this special use permit.

Ms. Gilman said what they were asking for was the ability to collaborate and be a part of the community in a wider way, while keeping their mission and keeping to quiet use. She said that on the slides were examples of some of the habitat work and infrastructure they were planning, such as meadows, cutting gardens, and poultry farming. She said they already had hives, but planned for an expansion of the apiary, local habitat, bird and bat boxes, lowland native planting, and climate resiliency measures like stormwater management and catchment systems.

Ms. Gilman said she wanted to talk about road safety and traffic, as she knew this was a chief concern for the community and also for them, as they lived on the same road. She stated that they knew this road and the community well, and they agreed with comments shared by neighbors regarding how people drove on it. She said that they shared the concern over cycling, as they were cyclists themselves. She said that it was a real concern, and she was sure it was one she received a great deal of feedback on.

Ms. Gilman said that she was happy to be an ally to the Board in bringing safety solutions to Garth Road to the extent that they could be helpful. She said they had reached out to neighbors in this process, and if any additional mailings were not received by everyone here, they were open books and happy to be in conversation. She said she gave her cell phone number at the community meeting and was happy to do that again tonight for anyone who wanted to continue the conversation.

Ms. Gilman said that with regard to the role that road safety played in this application, to the extent that they could control it, they had worked with VDOT, spending a great deal of time and energy to locate the safest possible turn-in location and measuring the sight distance along the curve in each direction. She said they would remove select existing vegetation and relocate select existing fences to improve sight distance. She said that siting the entry location for optimal safety and limiting the impact of headlights had been their top priority in partnership with VDOT.

Ms. Gilman said that the entry drive was located 50 feet west of the current entry location in the area VDOT, identified as safest. She said that it did not align with the driveway across Garth Road; it would be 60 feet east of that driveway. She said that in consultation with their landscape designers, they had laid the driveway so that headlights of any vehicles would not shine across Garth Road. She explained that when leaving the barns, all vehicles proceeded down a hill with headlights pointed down into the ground ahead.

Ms. Gilman said that as the driveway approached Garth Road and leveled, the driveway turned east so that headlights were on their property, parallel to and not across from Garth Road. She said that regarding parking, they had sited parking 570 feet south of Garth Road, consisting of 19 spaces plus 3 ADA spaces, 12 to 14 feet below the level of Garth Road. She said that it was visibly lower than the road and screened from Garth Road and adjacent properties by dense native plantings. She said that regarding traffic, VDOT reports indicated 5,500 average daily car traffic on Garth Road, and they anticipated adding another 60 trips.

Ms. Gilman said that most of this regular programming and special use would be similar to things on the road, such as Country Market, Foxfield small programming, and church services. She said they really wanted to be a partner to the community and a partner to the County as they talked through this.

Ms. Brown said that it was a very thoughtful plan, and it was very exciting to think about the regenerative agriculture use on this land. She said that she was having a hard time understanding the total of 60 trips if they were looking at such a big potential for use by looking at the maximum of 150 people 24 times a year. She asked if they had considered starting without a special use permit that requires that, or if they considered putting some restrictions on the number of people and the number of occurrences to reduce it from 24 or to reduce it from 150, because that was a big change. She said that regarding the scale of the property, it was a great plan, but she thought it was a small scale for the number of people if they looked at it from the maximum.

Ms. Gilman said that she was excited about learning what Charlottesville really wanted out of this farm. She said that part of the inspiration for coming to them for a special use permit was to be able to be open to those kinds of collaborations. She said that it was not just to traditionally grow botanicals, herbs, and produce, but if there was someone, they had a relationship with who would benefit from coming to a really special, beautiful site to show their work in collaboration with them or to teach them something that they did not know.

Ms. Gilman said that they did not come as a group trying to hold weddings or something with a big, noisy impact. She said that they were really looking for a special use because one of the ways they hoped to be great stewards within the community was by working with people who were outside of agriculture. She said that was what they had done in the decades of their work in agriculture; it was very powerful to be able to have a speaker come, or to have folks come and heal, which was not a part of their normal programming.

Ms. Gilman said that her family lived right next door, so she would not want to create something they could not live with. She said that when she heard that number, it sounded alarming and large, but really what they were after was the ability to have flexibility and collaboration. She said that these special uses were going to help bring people to the farm. She said that they wanted the future of sustainable agriculture to be able to be more dynamic than a traditional kind of farm operation that was not as accessible to the community.

Ms. Gilman said that they were trying to strike a balance where, for a few days of the week, they would be closed to the public and would just be doing farming. She said that then, a few days of the week, they would be in regular programming, which would look like a morning class and an evening class with a small class size of probably 20 people. She said that if they had a special twice a month, such as a monthly yoga session, a monthly collaboration, or a monthly rental that was in keeping with quiet use, all of that would operate the same way, with the same amount of impact and traffic that they saw in their own neighborhood with other infrastructure on Garth Road.

Ms. Brown said that she appreciated the applicant's intentions and that she did believe them, but she thought that the special use permit remained in perpetuity with the property. She said that if the property were acquired by someone with different intentions, the rights given by the special use permit would still remain, which might not be as responsible or respectful as they had planned.

Mr. Moore said that what he heard sounded almost like they were developing a rural version of a gathering space. He said it might not be quite like a country store that was open all the time, but still something where they might have regulars and people who were there quite a bit. He said his question was perhaps a bit of a 180 from his colleague's, but he wondered why they did not go bigger. He asked why they would limit their events to 150 when it sounded like a wonderful place that a lot of people might enjoy.

Ms. Gilman said that she appreciated that. She said that it was a question that had been asked before, considering it was such a beautiful space. She said that the fact was they lived there, and they had the same reservations that anyone would have who was near a functional event space. She said that it was also not the nature of her work. She said that they were dealing with live animals, plants, and trees, which were carefully cultivated investments that were going to take a few years to get in the ground and get stable.

Ms. Gilman said that if they had tons of people walking over it, it was never going to actually be what they were setting out to be, which was a regenerative farm. She said that what they were hoping for with this flexibility and extension of agritourism was really not to have a complete change from their daily operations, but to be able to attract people to this farm. She said that the amazing thing about little farms was that just with botanicals, the amount one could have on one acre with regenerative practices, rotating and cultivating great soil, was incredible.

Ms. Gilman said that it might seem unusual for a small acreage to want to do so much, but it comes from a lifetime of experience where small spaces can really grow. She said that they wanted to do that without consistent large events. She said that the special use was much more by type. She said that they wanted to walk into this openly with the Board and with the community and encourage them to come and introduce them to permaculture through events.

Ms. Gilman said that for them, the dynamism was the thing that allowed a small farm to survive, and it was something she cared deeply about. She said she cared deeply about her neighbors, and so, to the extent they could partner and put in more than the required screening, they would spend more time and energy, as they had and as they would. She said that this was something that was really a life's work for her, and they planned to be there for, hopefully, 100 years to see it grow. She said that she hoped to have everyone there, and she understood all of their reasonable concerns.

Mr. Moore said that he understood this was going to be a farm, first and foremost. He said that he had heard a number of facilities in that part of the County talk about being open to the public and being accessible, but it did not always feel that way. He asked what the applicant had in mind in terms of making it available to people.

Ms. Gilman said that from what she knew from farming, there were a few days a week where the farm had to be closed to the public just to be able to actually do the work of running a farm, which was intense and all day. She said that they imagined that it would look like, for example, being closed on Monday and Tuesday, with a closed gate and a sign posted so that people knew what to expect. She said that then, they would have targeted open hours where they had routine, similar agriculture-based, land-based classes every week.

Ms. Gilman said that they were going to have a botanical foraging and floral design class every week, or an apiary-related honey class every week. She said that they would have regulars who love those things and want to keep learning with them. She said that

regarding accessibility and Mr. Moore's larger point beyond hours, they were really looking at this as filling a void. She said that they did not think there were places that were doing what she was going to be doing.

Ms. Gilman said that she knew there were comparisons to Oakencroft or other places in the neighborhood, but those were first and foremost vineyards. She said that there were corporations, like this, which would be a small regenerative agricultural farm. She said that the accessibility they were hoping to have, especially for children and seniors, was an intergenerational space where they could partner with local organizations that served those populations.

Ms. Gilman said that they wanted them to learn together and have this be a real place of mixed, diverse learning, which they were not going to get in school or always in continuing education. She said that they found that when folks got on land and learned with their hands, they drop into something that was slower and really community-driven. She said that the comparison to a community center, or a place where people go, was what they wanted. She said that they wanted that with set hours that respected their neighbors and respected their own ability to run a farm.

Ms. Gilman said that the hope was that this would be a really treasured place. She said that this was why they wanted to go through this process, rather than starting and surprising people with wanting to have a diverse, eclectic amount of other collaborations on the land. She said that she knew it was a wide, dynamic proposal, but they believed this was going to serve as a place where folks love to be.

Mr. Murray said that he was looking at the definition of a special event and some of the uses that would be allowed by this permit for the applicant and for future landowners. He said that these would include new meetings, conferences, banquets, dinners, weddings, and private parties. He said that he was sure the public comments would speak to which uses they found most problematic. He asked if they would be willing to scratch out some of those uses that they petitioned for, such as weddings.

Ms. Gilman said that they would be happy to scratch some of those out. She said that this was not the case where they had an event space masquerading as a farm; this was a farm that was hoping to be dynamic. She said that to soothe any concerns about weddings, they would never have them. She said that she was happy to condition the permit with that.

Mr. Murray asked if they had considered any ways to provide a safe place for bikes to be parked in that area, or other ways to make their segment of Garth Road a little safer for cyclists on this national bike route.

Ms. Gilman said that Garth Road was scenic and was on the route, and it was a beautiful place to bike if there were safety and an actual bike lane that protected bikers. She said she could not be more sympathetic to that. She said that whatever they could do within their reasonable power, they would. She said the last thing they wanted was for folks to

have a beautiful experience with them and then have a hazardous experience leaving. She said they were going to work closely with VDOT.

Ms. Gilman said they were open to VDOT's recommendations with regard to safety and to screening and neighborliness. She said they would perform the maximum amount, and she was happy to condition that as well. She said the two-dimensional survey did not portray it as easily as if they were all on the pasture right now, because they could walk it. She said that there was a steep grade change as one went from the saddle in the middle of the property down to the entrance. She said there was another one going off each side of the saddle as one moved south on the property.

Ms. Gilman said that with siting the 19 plus 3 ADA spaces deep into the property, over 550 feet, and siting the barns over 750 feet south into the property, over 10 feet below eye level at the road, they did not anticipate folks even seeing the barns or parked vehicles. She said the way that they designed this was in reference to the trees, which were so important to them.

Ms. Gilman said they stewarded over a 100-year-old trees on this land, on the combined 20 acres between her family's house and the pasture next door. She said they drew the driveway thinking both about headlights and thinking about trees. She said they put the parking in a central spot on the land exactly so that they could screen it from everybody. She said that according to the Fire Marshal, they could access trucks close to the barns as needed.

Ms. Gilman said they really drew this one step at a time, talking to each person that they would need to at the County, VDOT, and Fire Marshal, and then thought in a way that, hopefully, folks can see reflected: how can they be as safe as possible while also being as thoughtful as possible with the site? She said they would be removing things that were in that site easement and sightline and then planting additional screening everywhere that was not impacted by safety or the site. She said they would be happy to be in conversation with VDOT regarding any measures they thought would improve bicycle safety and automotive safety.

Mr. Murray said that he would suggest installing more paved shoulder along the road in front of the property.

Eric Woolley, Woolley Engineering, said that he did not think they had enough land to do that. He said that if they were going to provide a refuge, they had to give someone accessibility to and from. He said that they were limited by the frontage that they had, and they were not positive whether VDOT was going to require a right-turn and taper lane. He said that they had done a turn warrant analysis, and according to VDOT's regulations, he did not believe that a left-turn and taper would be required; however, a right-turn and taper was always VDOT's prerogative.

Mr. Woolley said that he did want to point out that if they were required to put in a right-turn and taper lane, they were going to be forming somewhat of a refuge already. He said

that it was maybe 50 feet on one side and 100 on the other, so it was not a significant amount. He said that they would be agreeable to whatever VDOT required of them.

Mr. Murray asked if the applicant could provide some examples of non-agricultural activities or events that they would like to have that would require a special use permit.

Ms. Gilman said that one event they would love to have would be a movie screening with a local director to speak about the movie they made while folks sit inside and watch it. She said that it could tie to agriculture, but they would love to have something that did not necessarily tie to agriculture but still supported the arts in Charlottesville. She said that they also had some friends who were classical musicians in Charlottesville, and they would love to have them perform acoustic sessions inside.

Ms. Gilman said that they wanted to have the flexibility where they did not feel like they were operating beyond their expectations of a traditional classical agritourism farm. She said that a monthly yoga series was another example. She said that it would bring folks onto the land to discover it in a way that would be really hard for them to engineer otherwise. She said that it would raise the profile of the regenerative work that they were doing and allow something quite interesting to happen on the land, which was in keeping with that quiet and meditative use that they really wanted to inspire through nature.

Mr. Gilman said that nature touches everything, so they should not segregate a farm as if it all occurred within the four corners of the property, and that food was not also about gathering, cooking, or togetherness. She said that they would love to invite a local chef to come and cook a small dinner using things that they grew. She said that some of those programs fell under agritourism and some of which were more difficult to define. She said that she would much rather go through the County and be explicit with them and with our neighbors about the intention.

Ms. King said that the concept and presentation were beautiful. She said that while Ms. Gilman was speaking about the concept, she was thinking that it sounded like a perfect use of the historical, agricultural nature of Albemarle County, specifically for an educational purpose, which fell in line with Thomas Jefferson, the University, Monticello, and the events they had at their visitor center. She said that the applicant was also trying to teach things that were healthy to people. She said that to bring back to the community a way of living and being that was with the land, with the animals, and with food-farm to table was needed. She asked if they would have a retail component, like a farmer's market.

Ms. Gilman said that beyond the land restoration aspect of transforming this cattle pasture, they wanted this to be a place of education. She said that was part of where the conversation started, when they were speaking to the wonderful folks at the County, whether it was a school or a farm. She said that they were first and foremost a farm, but the thing that she was trying to offer was learning for all ages. She said that they were learning through the farm, through the food, through the herbs, and through the medicinal herbs.

Ms. Gilman said that what they were engaged in was slowing down and how to connect and live. She said that they did not see that happening at a lot of places that one might hear this compared to. She said that this was not a vineyard, it was not a specific house of worship, it was not a restaurant, but it was a place that she thought could offer a sacred place of gathering that tied to the land and brought people together. She said that in their neighborhood, there really was not a lot of them, and she thought that connecting to the land and then connecting to each other through being on this land, that education was exactly what she was after.

Ms. Gilman said that they were really excited to partner, whether it was with 4-H, a school, or assisted living, to have routine opportunities for folks who did not always have access to land like this on a road like this. She said that they felt lucky that their family was on this road, but they did not think it needed to all be for families with their own use. She said that being a farm could also mean something more. She said that she imagined they would have products for sale. She said that they currently had beehives and imagined they would have classes about the honey as well as sell it.

Ms. Gilman said that there would be farm products that they would sell, such as selling vegetables, herbs, or flowers. She said there would also be a side-by-side experience with every single one of those products. She said if they were growing tomatoes, they wanted to sell those tomatoes, but they also wanted to be able to learn how to cook, learn how to grow, or learn about the heirloom that had been grown in Charlottesville for 200 years.

Ms. Gilman said she wanted to pull apart every offering into as much depth as they could and not try to grow 10 acres of one thing but rather grow 100 different things on 10 acres throughout the year with permaculture practices that allowed them to use the land in ways that industrial farming just could not. She said that certainly there would be products for sale.

Ms. King asked if there was a kitchen in the building.

Ms. Gilman said that one of the barns was open and intended for versatile use, such as conversation, quiet meditation, or medicinal herb work. She said that her partner was both an herbalist and an incredible savant in her work. She said that she felt lucky to have her as a partner and Charlottesville was lucky to have someone so knowledgeable in this work. She said that they were thinking about the properties and how they could be healing.

Ms. Gilman said that the other barn was connected by an unenclosed breezeway. She said that both buildings were approximately 1,200 square feet. She said that neither building was very large. She said that the second barn had an open kitchen so that the space felt like a home. She said that in her 15 years of teaching botanical classes, she had found that people have the most fun and the most relaxing experience when they were at home while learning.

Ms. Gilman said that when they were framing this out, and they wanted food to be a part of the program, so they decided it did not all need to live separately. She said that by designing one of the barns with an open kitchen about the same size as a residential kitchen, she imagined they would be able to teach floral design work from that kitchen. She said that a local chef would also be able to stand at that kitchen to teach, and they could host a dinner in that same space. She said that they were trying to make the one barn, which was more hands-on, as versatile as possible within a small footprint.

Ms. King asked if outdoor tents would be temporary or permanent.

Ms. Gilman said there would be no permanent tent structure. She said they believed most of the things they would like to do could occur easily within the footprint of the two barns. She said that because they designed it with a courtyard in between, she imagined that they could open up all the doors and be able to walk around. She said it was a space that was indoor-outdoor, all south-facing, all in the back, and all heavily screened.

Ms. Gilman said the tent location was dictated by where the County said it could be, based on the recommendations from the Fire Marshal regarding its proximity to the building and the amount of screening they could put around it. She said that would be only temporary when they had occasional use that demanded folks be able to spill out in that way, but she foresaw that they would not require anything like that.

Ms. Gilman said they were spending a lot of time, energy, and money trying to build something that was really going to last, so having a bunch of porta-potties in a tent was not going to enhance the experience. She said she thought it was only upon necessity and not a frequent occurrence that anyone would expect.

Ms. Firehock opened the public hearing.

Dory Boudreaux said that she lived at 2710 Hunt Country Lane. She said that she opposed granting the special use permit that had been put forth by the Barns. She said that the subject parcels were zoned Rural Areas, and the permit sought to allow construction of an event space to host daily and weekend workshops and special events up to 24 times a year.

Ms. Boudreaux said that Oakencroft Farm, just three miles south of the Barns, demonstrated that farming, education, and events could successfully coexist, but scale matters. She said that Oakencroft's event programming was on par with the Barns, but it was offered on a property of roughly 250 acres, whereas the Barns was projecting this level of visitor activity on a property of less than 11 acres. She said that Albemarle County's own regulations recognized that acreage matters when adding event activity to farmland, and additional zoning review was required for properties under 21 acres.

Ms. Boudreaux pointed out that the Barns was less than half of that. She said that she reviewed several numbers from a May 22 memo prepared by Woolley Engineering. She said the first set of numbers showed workshops Wednesday through Friday with upwards

of 144 attendees daily, which was four classes a day with as many as 36 attendees. She said weekend workshops occurred one to two times per month with up to 75 guests per event. She said special events, which they had talked about, occurred two times a month with up to 150 guests. She said that workshop and special event hours will range from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Ms. Boudreaux said on-site parking, paved and unpaved, would be able to house 64 cars. She said regardless of whether it was an event or a workshop, it was a lot of cars and a lot of people. She said that other concerns included increased car and school bus traffic, a potential need for VDOT to build a turning lane, the introduction of signage, lighting, and sound pollution, and alcohol usage on the property. She asked whether alcohol would be served at special events, weekend workshops, or evening weekday workshops, and questioned if this was a farm or an event site.

Ms. Boudreaux stated that as someone who lived in this area, she hated to see more event spaces coming up. She said that as a precedent, she hoped they would all consider that everybody with 10 spare acres would follow whatever was decided by those they had entrusted. She said that she worried about that.

Emily Huddleston said that she grew up on Garth Road. She said that she recently moved back to Charlottesville, and she had noticed it had changed a lot over the years, in a lot of ways for the better. She said that she cared very deeply about what this community became and also what they preserved as it grew. She said that she believed regenerative farming was a very worthy use of the rural land and something Albemarle County would benefit from. She said that she spent the foundation of her career in hospitality, weddings, and events.

Ms. Huddleston said that when she looked at this proposal, she worried that it was not just a regenerative farm with occasional community programming; she saw a full-scale events business. She said that to total the number of annual events that could occur, it was 672 programmed gatherings per year. She said that a workshop was a broad category that covered agricultural education, but also visiting chef experiences, readings, and performances running as late as 10 p.m.

Ms. Huddleston said that the stated attendance and hours did not capture the full operational footprint of additional staff, vendors, and deliveries that increased the number of people on site, nor the setup and breakdown that extended the activity beyond the hours of the program itself. She said that all of that was being concentrated on just 10 acres; yet the proposed conditions appeared to limit only the 24 special events, not the cumulative activity across the broader programming calendar. She said that this application had also shifted in just six months.

Ms. Huddleston said that the original proposal was a wellness and learning destination centered on yoga, meditation, breathwork, and ceramics. She said that after working through the permitting process, the applicants now made regenerative agriculture the stated primary use. She said that she was not questioning the applicant's intent, but when

the business model had already changed during the permitting process, the conditions needed to ensure that agriculture remained the priority, not just under today's proposal, but as the business evolved and if the property changed hands.

Ms. Huddleston said that she would ask the Commission to consider the broader implications of whether the level of programming was appropriate on these 10 acres. She said that she did not support the approval of the special use permit as proposed, but if they were going to approve it, then at a minimum, she asked that they materially reduce the event allowance and establish clear, enforceable limits on the frequency and scope of all visitor programming, not just the 24 special events.

Ms. Huddleston said that the conditions should make community programming genuinely occasional and accessory to the agricultural use, rather than allowing hundreds of programmed gatherings throughout the year. She said that Albemarle's rural land was worth protecting, and they should be very careful about opening the door to this level of commercial activity on this small of a footprint.

Gilbert Lemieux said that he lived at 2505 Hunt Country, which was just across Garth Road from the site. He said that he loved the Longhorns and was sad to see them go, but he thought the agricultural programming looked great. He said that he had concerns regarding special events specifically. He said that his four and five-year-old boys love to ride their bikes down the hill from their house to the pond. He said that his road was the next public road that one turned into after this location.

Mr. Lemieux said that he was worried about the increase in traffic, people missing the turn, coming down the road, and turning around. He said that he was concerned about the increased traffic in his neighborhood. He said that he was also concerned about the nature of some of the events allowed by the permit, as well as the permanent nature of the permit. He said that if the events were truly quiet and small, as the application says, then he thought that was great. He said that, however, he would like the application to state that and to limit it, though he was unsure how flexible the application could be.

Mr. Lemieux said that he would love to see requirements such as half of the events being 50 people or fewer, as stated in the application, and perhaps not serving alcohol. He said that he was concerned about the noise and driving consequences near his house, as well as the idea of limiting the number of events that could happen in a consecutive space. He said that the application said 24 per year, but that could mean an event every weekend for six months during wedding season, which concerned him.

Mr. Lemieux noted that while the applicant said they did not intend to have weddings, unless this was limited in the special use permit itself, a subsequent owner could do something different. He said that he would like to see the special use permit scoped in such a way that it ensured future owners of the land could not change the use completely, such as turning it into an event venue or a wedding venue.

John Lauer, 2150 Garth Road, said that he lived directly across the street from this proposed property. He said that he had a very difficult time because he had lived in his house for 22 years and was very familiar with the Garth Road problems. He said that he had a BMW take out a telephone pole right in front of his house and had a dump truck come off the road, go through his mailboxes, and numerous other accidents.

Mr. Lauer said that one of his other neighbors had even more right across the street from where this property was going, and he was very concerned about that. He said that it is a dangerous road and that the number of trucks on this road had increased dramatically in the last two years. He said that he did not know what was going on, but there were some easements in Free Union where they had timber trucks, dump trucks, and gravel trucks full of dirt.

Mr. Lauer said that they were speeding, going 60 to 65 miles an hour right around that curve, and he saw it every day. He said that he was hoping VDOT would be represented here today; he guessed not, but they really needed to look at the conditions. He said his final problem was the perpetuity issue, which was also very important, because properties could change and everything could change.

Meredith Wu said that she and her husband, Neil Cassell, lived at 2154 Garth Road, which was directly opposite the proposed Barns, and their entrance would be directly opposite the new entrance being designed. She said that they only found out through word of mouth in the last two weeks that this special permit was being requested, and they were not contacted by the applicants or anyone else.

Ms. Wu said that she heard of it because her entrance looked directly at the new entrance of the farm. She said that she had done research through the archives, various narratives, and various maps, and she and her husband felt very strongly that they did not want the County to grant permits for special events held in perpetuity. She said that one silver lining was that she had been able to meet her neighbors who lived very close to the proposed site.

Ms. Wu said that, based on speaking with approximately eight households very near the site, they were, to the last person, opposed to the idea of having special events that added to the burden of traffic. She said that she loved Garth Road and her neighborhood for its tranquility and beauty and would not want to see it change. She said that she also had concerns about increasing traffic in the area, noting that the area around her entrance and the new entrance was very dangerous.

Ms. Wu said that cars frequently lost control because of the curve, and she had her walls smashed five times. She said that only last year, a student driver smashed into her stone wall, but fortunately, the driver was not hurt. She added that because the father was a mason, he was able to rebuild their wall. She said that the amount of traffic added by 150-person events would be enormous. She said that looking at the road that entered the site, this would mean that at night, headlights would be looking directly into her bedroom. She

said that it was possible that the applicants did not plan to have events that generate noise, but in perpetuity, that could very well happen in the future.

Ray Morgan said that he lived at 275 Hunt Country Lane. He said that over the last 44 years that he had lived there, he had driven by this property thousands of times at all times of day and night and in both directions. He said that he knew the area fairly well and lived only a few hundred yards away from the site. He said that safety was his major concern for the local community.

Mr. Morgan said that he thought it would be an unmitigated disaster to grant a special use permit to this small rural property. He said that Ms. Brown, a few minutes earlier, made the point that the special use permit transfers with the property. He said that someone in the future could easily host weddings with 200 people who were potentially inebriated and dumped onto the road at night. He said that this was a big concern.

Mr. Morgan said that few drivers obeyed the posted speed limits on the curved portion of the road. He said that just this morning, while he was driving, there was a lady walking with earbuds in, a bicyclist, and a truck coming at him. He said that all he had to do was stop because he had nowhere to go. He said that was how tight it was. He said that he thought they were potentially creating an unmitigated disaster, and he opposed it.

Zachary Miller said that he owned and operated Timber Creek Farm, which was a working thoroughbred breeding and training operation. He said that they shared approximately a mile of border with the property on which the Barns were proposed to sit. He said that his was likely the property that was most impacted by this project. He said that he was in favor of the project. He said that in the 50 years that his family had been at Timber Creek, they had managed pasture restoration. He said that they had integrated regenerative land management practices onto his farm. He said that they worked to balance active farming operations with community and environmental responsibility. He said that he understood what serious agricultural stewardship looked like.

Mr. Miller said that the applicant's vision was really compelling. He said that while there had been a few concerns, he wanted to refocus on the business plan that had been proposed, which would be transformative to the piece of land that they were working on with this project. He said that the design, which had been developed with a team of accomplished landscape architects and engineers, was thoughtful, very sensitive to the rural character of the neighborhood, and respectful of the neighboring properties.

Mr. Miller said that after 20 years in agriculture, he knew that preserving and activating farmland required the kind of entrepreneurial vision that the applicant had shared tonight. He said that projects like the Barns demonstrated that working farmland could be both economically viable and genuinely enriching to the public, and he believed the County should be eager to support landowners who were willing to make that commitment. He said that it was, after all, the economic viability of farmland that would ensure the long-term preservation of Albemarle County's farmland.

Mr. Miller said that he believed the Barns would beautify this landscape, put the land to productive use, and offer meaningful access to the community, all while remaining well within the character of the surrounding Rural Area. He said that, most importantly, they saw the great care and sensitivity that Kate and Jessica had brought to the design and the presentation of their plan, and they knew that this would translate into the way they operated their agricultural business and any special events that they hosted. He said that he encouraged the Commission to recommend this for consideration by the Board of Supervisors.

Richard Fox said that the purpose of an SUP in the County generally seemed to boil down to vested rights versus granted rights. He said that the one-size-fits-all model for special event SUP applications that Albemarle County often used muddied the waters regarding the clarity of what granted rights the applicant was truly seeking. He said that this oftentimes raised community concerns and fear of the unknown, and reasonably so. He said that this was precisely why the Barns proposal was refreshing.

Mr. Fox said that what the applicant was seeking was merely a slight, intentional, and minimal impact expansion of their already vested rights within the Rural Area. He said that they were seeking ways to incorporate the community into the fold of their regenerative farm and nothing more. He said that the occasional yoga class on site, occasional farm-to-table courses with local chefs, and small book readings all aimed to bring in attendees to experience the peace and serenity of the County's Rural Area while being able to share and educate them on regenerative agriculture and permaculture.

Mr. Fox said that these small-capacity attendance events would not generate any noise or light pollution, would not generate any additional traffic beyond what was already vested to the property through production agriculture by right use, and most importantly, the products raised and grown on this farm could be incorporated into these gatherings. He said that what was currently open cow pasture monoculture was already in the early stages of being amended and repurposed into a biodiverse regenerative operation.

Mr. Fox said that bees and honey, free-range chickens and eggs, medicinal herbs, vegetable and flower gardens, native grasses, and the preservation of the stunning arboriculture were all part of the vested rights to this property. He said that the applicant had gone above and beyond by ensuring and promising to employ all standards for entrance and traffic control proposed by VDOT. He said they had promised screening for neighbor protection. He said that they had been more than respectful to the natural landscape insofar as positioning the barn structure in a way that would not harm the natural flora and fauna of the property.

Mr. Fox said that this project was not a wedding venue and it was not for large, late-night gatherings. He said that this project was not going to promote amplified music. He said that this project was simply not an event center, and the applicant was willing to accept conditions to codify that. He said that, speaking as a generational cattle farmer in Albemarle County, this was the perfect use of this property. He said that by asking to be granted the slightest extension of their vested rights, the property owner would be able to

become something the County could be proud of and used to educate the community and other farmers about the positive attributes regenerative farming has on the land. This should be heralded as a model moving forward, and he urged the Commission to support the Barns SUP.

Stephen Dunston said that he had been a gardener for almost 40 years. He said that he first started working for the Gilmans in 2011, and they had been incredible stewards of the land and their trees. He said that they had so many wonderful, huge live oaks there that they had spared no cost to take care of them. He said that they were very much concerned about nature, about making the property better, making the land better, helping the trees, planting the right trees, and taking care of nature.

Mr. Dunston said that this was a wonderful educational opportunity for the community. He said that his daughter and her Montessori school would be welcome to come there for some educational information, and the applicants were incredibly well-educated for that. He said that it would be a fantastic opportunity, and he would hate to see the community lose that chance to have such a great opportunity.

Kyle McCrory said that he was in support of the Barns project. He said that he was born and raised in western Albemarle County and had worked with plants for his entire career. He said that he had been involved in starting and operating three agricultural businesses in Charlottesville and had been previously involved in larger-scale sustainable farming in other cities. He said that he had moved back to Charlottesville twice now to prioritize raising his family here and currently resided in western Albemarle County a few miles from the Barns site.

Mr. McCrory said that he had gotten to know the folks behind the Barns project and gone through a lot of their materials, and he believed this was a well-thought-out, community-focused, passion project that had real potential as a sustainable local business. He said that it would be a shame not to grant them their special use permit. He said that he firmly believed that they would enrich their community by providing access to their uniquely beautiful landscape in a way that taught and promoted stewardship of the land through regenerative and sustainable practices and hyper-local, vertically integrated product offerings.

Mr. McCrory said that through working and playing on their land with his own three young kids and through volunteering in their school gardening programs, he had seen firsthand the benefits that access to and education in their natural world could bring to young and old minds alike. He said that there was a real educational opportunity here for their community. He said that he hope they could welcome and support their project moving forward.

Mary Carr, said that she also grew up in western Albemarle County, and her father lived just on the other side of Foxfield nearby. She said that she was very familiar with the safety and traffic issues on Garth Road and felt all the things that everyone had said. She

said that she believed that the County had a larger issue with safety and traffic on Garth Road that was separate from, but related to, the conversation they were having today.

Ms. Carr said that she could speak primarily to knowing Kate Gilman, who was behind this project with her partner. She said that she had the great pleasure of knowing her for over 20 years and had heard about this idea from its inception and could speak to her as an incredibly thoughtful, caring, and warm community member. She said that she had heard her speak of this from day one as a small community space where small groups could learn about the land, regenerative practices, and the environment that surrounded them.

Ms. Carr said that it was a wonderful thing and an asset to bring to their community. She said that she believed that this space would be good, not only for the community, but also the neighborhood on Garth Road. She said that they had the opportunity to bring people closer together, and she could not think of anyone better equipped to do so. She said that she was aware of the safety concerns, and she had full respect for them. She said that that was an issue they needed to take on as a County together.

Barbara Walter said that her property concerns had already been covered, but she wanted to make them doubly underlined. She said that the perpetuity of this project was what concerned her, specifically the event portion. She said that there was no doubt that the applicant had done an incredible job and had wonderful ideas for the project. She said that she supported the agribusiness part, but the event section was totally out for her. She said that she was fully opposed to it.

Ms. Walter said that she had recently read through the project materials, and it initially looked feasible, but it had grown and was asking too much too soon within a time span like this. She said that it had gone from four events a year with 150 people to 24 events. She said that if they stacked what they could do every day, it was a significant amount. She said that regarding the analysis for transportation, the basis of that document was a 2024 report where they talked about the 5,000 trips. She said that probably once a month a car drives off the road into the ditch. She said that the hours and number of events were too high for this project.

Heather Hardy said that she lived at 2720 Hunt Country Lane and had been there since 1987. She said she traveled that road multiple times a day for school drop-offs, pick-ups, and after-school activities, and she had noticed over almost 50 years how the traffic has grown on that road. She said the project that Ms. Gilman proposed was wonderful and she would love to have something like that. She said she just wished there were another entry, not through Garth Road, but somewhere else, because Garth Road cannot handle that much more traffic.

Ms. Hardy said it was not just impacting those living there immediately, but all the neighborhoods past that point, such as Whippoorwill and River Run. She said that there were multiple neighborhoods whose residents had to travel multiple times in and out past

their entrance, and it also affected the neighborhoods before that property because people coming from town to the property would cause traffic for people even in Ivy Farms.

Ms. Hardy said that her main concern was that while she loved the project and thought it was perfect, if there were somewhere they could airdrop those people in, it would be perfect. She said Garth Road could not handle the anticipated traffic, and she could only see that it was going to lead to more accidents. She said people would be complaining while going to work, coming home from work, and taking their kids to school; it was just going to be a mess.

Blair Kelly, 2140 Garth Road, said that he had lived here almost for 22 years, and prior to that, he lived on a farm just west, about 40 years in that general direction. He said that he thought this project was interesting and fascinating; there was a lot about it that he really liked. He said that the thing that concerned him was that they might be losing distinction between the business plan and aspirations for the project and the special use permit. He said that hearing them talk and reading the specifics of the plan, 95% of what they planned to do could be done without the special use permit.

Mr. Kelly said that it was the special use permit that had all of his neighbors here very concerned. He said that it was not only because the volume of the traffic and the pacing of the events for a property that was only 10.5 acres seemed excessive, but there was no guarantee that the next owner would put those kinds of parameters on that type of activity.

Mr. Kelly said that in a worst-case scenario, weddings with 150 or more people on a 10-acre property surrounded by very quiet residential properties absolutely would change the character of the neighborhood and be significantly detrimental, which was what the Planning Commission was supposed to consider. He said that if the Commission did decide to approve the special use permit, which he did not think was necessary for most of what they wanted to do, he would at least hope that they would take them up on their offer to codify the fact that there would not be any weddings, so that it cannot be the case for the potential future owner of the property.

Ms. Firehock asked if the applicant had a response to the comments from the public.

Ms. Gilman said she knew some folks in the community might read the iterations in this process as a negative, but she thought it was actually a testimonial to how this worked. She said that they really worked hand in hand with the County to establish what the right place was for her dream. She said they felt thankful and confident that they were coming to the County authentically, and that they were coming to them after participating in this process as it was meant to be participated in.

Ms. Gilman said that she wanted to make a distinction that the frustration about Garth Road was shared. She said that as a neighbor, they shared that concern. She said that she thought it would be a shame to hamstring farms that were trying to be dynamic because of the nature of a road that was not being addressed at a larger scale. She said

that she wanted to offer up their energy, their support, their participation, and whatever she could do as a Garth Road resident to make that happen.

Ms. Gilman said that as she was listening to folks give their feedback, she thought it was really great to see them and that was great to meet neighbors. She said that whatever the context was, she thought they were all aligned on safety on this road. She said the question of what came next for them was the ability to be collaborative, to be dynamic, to be a really special place that they would safeguard, that they were happy to condition, and that they were participating in the most honest way possible in this process.

Ms. Gilman said they were here with open minds and that they had a lot of work behind them and a lot of time they had devoted to this. She said she took it very seriously. She said that she also wanted to remind folks that 150 people did not mean 150 cars; the math on that was 60 cars, with anticipation of carpooling. She said that she wanted to make sure they were all interpreting those numbers the same way. She said that with a place like Oakencroft, their operational acreage was not dissimilar to what they were talking about in terms of accessible acreage.

Ms. Gilman said she knew this was not traditional because they were not trying to do something traditional; they were trying to be an engaged, accessible small farm. She said they were happy to pave the way for small farms that were going to have true regenerative practices and actually secure the future of a pastoral Albemarle County. She said this happened because they were able to keep this land and invest in the soil and have folks devote acreage to it. She said that she offered a sincere thank you, thanked the Commission, and thanked her neighbors. She said she was happy to chat afterward and continue a dialogue.

Ms. Firehock closed the public hearing.

Recess

The Commission took a brief recess.

Ms. Firehock called the meeting back to order. She asked the Commissioners if there was any further discussion or deliberation on The Barns Special Events.

Mr. Moore said that agricultural and farm events were allowed by right and would happen anyway. He said that food-related workshops could just happen at any other duration. He said that if a chef uses some of the ingredients to serve a meal to 40 people, that was sort of agriculture-related , so that could just happen. He asked staff if that was correct.

Mr. Tate said that yes, those examples would fall under Section 5.1.58.

Mr. Moore said that with that clarification, this special use permit was really about other kinds of events, like a film screening or acoustic music, or even if this place was rented for a corporate retreat or banquet; that was what this would cover. He said that several of

them probably had a similar idea regarding the friendly amendment to the condition to just add that weddings were not permitted.

Ms. Firehock asked their legal counsel weigh in on that and their ability to change zoning.

Jenny Tevendale, Assistant County Attorney, said that she would like to remind the Commission that the applicant was seeking a special use of the property. She said that in doing so, the Commission may add conditions that reasonably related to the impacts of the special use. She said that the conditions needed to be roughly proportional to the impacts of the use. She said that special use permits could not change the Zoning Ordinance. She said that special events were defined in the Zoning Ordinance to include certain types of events but were not limited to them. She said that there may be others as well, so it would be difficult to provide a condition excluding events that were already defined as allowed special events in the Zoning Ordinance.

Ms. Firehock asked if they could limit the number of special events if they thought that impacts to traffic, noise, etc., were of concern.

Ms. Tevendale said that was correct. She said that the Commission could limit the number of events that could take place, or perhaps the time or duration of the special events. She said if there was a reasonable relation to the impact that may be caused, there could be a condition to restrict or limit that.

Ms. Firehock said that as she understood it from the applicant, part of their rationale for wanting to host yoga classes was to try to bring in people who did not necessarily think of regenerative agriculture as the first thing they thought of when they get up in the morning. She said the goal was to have them exposed to it, get excited, and then go home and grow organic tomatoes, for example. She said that was what the applicant was after with these events.

Ms. Firehock said the question was whether these non-agricultural events were too numerous for the community. She said the applicant would be able to host events and have people come out for agricultural activities, such as learning how to jar jam. She said the point was that the applicant would still be able to do all those things. She said the question was whether the applicant could host non-agricultural related events at a frequency that would cause excessive or unacceptable disruption to the community.

Ms. King said that the last speaker said it very clearly: there was the use, and then there was the impact. She said she heard what the community was saying about the impact and understood the fear that could be had when it was related to safety and traffic. She said that to the people who lived in the area, 150 people sounded like a lot, but to her, that was not a lot.

Ms. King said that therefore, she thought restricting it to 150 people was very reasonable. She said that she also thought the number of car trips was proportionate to what currently happened on Garth Road and was extremely minimal. She said that there was a way to

verbalize it to make it sound scarier than it actually would be, and while she could understand why people had feelings that way, she did not think that impacts the actual facts of the trips and the impact to the community. She said that in her opinion, it was a wonderful project and she had no problems with it.

Mr. Clayborne said that first, he would like to thank the applicant and thought their proposal was really well done. He said that he appreciated the authenticity of their presentation, noting that was not always the case with requests that came before the Commission. He said that he did think there was some merit in discussing the future in light of what counsel had shared. He said that he thought there was space to discuss what kind of parameters could be put in place if the land changed uses or changed owners, and he believed that deserves merit.

Mr. Clayborne said that one of the things he heard throughout the presentations was what those non-primary uses could be. He said that part of him was wondering if the applicant's project would even generate 150 people; it was possible they could, but it did not seem like that would be a normal occurrence. He asked if it was worth discussing right-sizing the number of people or right-sizing the number of non-essential events for the program space. He asked what that started to look like over 24 times with 150 people each. He said that none of the potential events discussed so far were concerning, but he could see how that could change in the future.

Ms. Firehock asked staff if they could decide to limit the number of events, as well as the number of people per event.

Ms. Tevendale said that was correct; the Commission could make a recommendation for approval with a condition that it was limited to X number of events and X number of attendees per event.

Ms. Firehock said that it seemed like some of the things they were talking about doing would be 25 or 30 people, and it was not their intention to have a lot of events with 150 people. She said that to Mr. Clayborne's point, the zoning runs with the land; so, a new owner in the future could decide to have weddings, and all of their events could be weddings. She said it was not necessarily germane to the applicant's intent; she did not doubt their intent at all.

Ms. Firehock said that in order to ensure that the future owners of this property held reasonably sized event, she thought that maybe the number of people and the number of events was what was causing some of the concern. She said that she believed that the Commission might do a good service to the community and to the applicant by restricting the number of events and the number of people per event, under the idea that they were trying to limit the impacts of traffic, noise, etc.

Mr. Moore said that he was struck by the fact they could have 200 people at an agricultural-related event 24 times a year. He said that he did not really find it substantially different if they were watching a film instead of learning about botanicals.

Ms. Firehock said that the Commission did not have a lot of power to substantively limit the amount of visitors and activities.

Ms. King said that by right, they could have 200 or fewer people and 24 or fewer events by right per Section 5.1.58.

Ms. Firehock said that she understood that.

Ms. Moore said that this would be like if they also added, for the argument of some folks they heard from, in a worst-case scenario, that there were also now 24 weddings a year with 150 people, on top of a bunch of events where there were 200 people picking apples or whatever. He said that if they already allowed 200 people to do agriculture-related events, he did not think it was concerning to allow 150 people to attend non-agricultural-related events.

Ms. Firehock said that the application as proposed would essentially double the number of events they could have.

Ms. King said that they were only doubling the number of events and that the other 24 events would be completely agricultural in nature. She said they were not having 50 events that were weddings.

Mr. Clayborne said that he understood that aspect; his point was to protect the futureproofing of it. He said that allowing 48 events would be almost one every week, and that would not be appropriate on Garth Road. He said that he did not believe that was the intent of the applicant, but it was the worst-case scenario. He said that they should discuss whether it needed to be right-sized.

Mr. Murray said that was where he was at too, and he agreed with the uses. He said that he thought it was a shame they could not strike weddings. He said that they had just gone through this process with staff regarding their Zoning Ordinance. He said that he did not know whether in that process, they had identified some of the classifications for rural uses that would be a little bit narrower than what they had here.

Mr. Murray said that, however, he did think this needed to be right-sized. He asked about the fact that the applicant said they were not interested in amplified music, and yet this did include a provision for outdoor amplified music. He asked if they could strike that.

Ms. Tevendale said that if there was a concern that outdoor music would have an impact on the property, that was a condition that could be proposed to the Commission to limit outdoor music, perhaps during a specific time frame or in general. She said that if the Commission found there was an impact that needed to be addressed, they could recommend a condition to address it.

Mr. Murray said that, for example, limiting outdoor amplified music to daylight hours would be one thing they could do, or they could just strike it all together. He said that he also

thought the total number of events, when adding it to the agricultural events that could already occur, maximizing both those things together, became concerning. He said that properties changes hands over time, and there were loopholes that occurred when people inherited a property that had some additional use.

Ms. Firehock said that this was an agricultural site, zoned Agricultural. She said that, however, it was not a large site, which was why there was a concern with sound carrying. She said that a certain number of people opening and closing car doors, gathering, and coming and going. She said there was noise associated with that. She said that the applicants already said they had no interest in having outdoor amplified music.

Ms. Firehock said they could not negotiate conditions from the dais; however, they could look at the one thing they did have control over and decide whether limiting the number of those extra events was appropriate. She said that, as the applicants said, these events were not central to their core business and were mostly intended to get people exposed to their agricultural operation. She said that therefore, she thought one could argue they did not necessarily need that many events.

Ms. Brown said that she completely agreed with that. She said it was nice to hear community members suggest in many of the comments that they could be more supportive if there were fewer events or if there were less frequency. She said that this opened the door to perhaps finding a way that the neighbors could get behind the project if they revisited the frequency number. She said that it sounded like even larger events for collaboration could fall under what the by-right gathering was allowed.

Ms. Brown said that she was thinking about how they could right-size the frequency, perhaps by reducing that number of events, or adding events that were not related to agriculture. She said that ultimately, with or without the special use permit, her hope was that this was a catalyst for VDOT to address a bigger issue. She said that she felt that there was probably a lot of room for the applicant to accomplish what they wanted to do with a lower number of events under the special use permit.

Mr. Murray said that he would suggest 12 events, and if the Board of Supervisors wanted to amend it to be more or less than that, they could do so at the public hearing.

Ms. Firehock said that was correct; the Commission served as advisors to the Board.

Mr. Murray said his recommendation to the Board was that they go with 12 events. He said that his concern, given the size of the property, was the proximity to neighbors and people across the street. He said that he would like to condition that there be no amplified music outdoors.

Mr. Moore said that he wanted to let the community members know that he understood Garth Road was a serious concern. He said that road safety was a real issue, and he recently heard someone state that no one could pay him to ride his bike down Garth Road. He said that it sounded like VDOT's purview rather than the County's. He said that maybe

they could somehow telegraph to VDOT that there were speed limit issues; perhaps the limit could be lowered, or there could be better signage, some strips, or maybe a stoplight at the intersection of Hunt Country Store. He said that there needed to be something to address the safety of the road because it was not safe.

Mr. Moore said that with that being said, he did not think this parcel had a lot to do with that; one parcel was not the issue with the road. He said that he heard some people use the term "right sized," and he did not know what that meant specifically. He said that it sounded like it was just "vibes." He said that he also did not think limiting outdoor amplified music made any sense when there was already a sound ordinance for how many decibels could be heard at the edge of the property.

Mr. Moore said that he was taking a bit of a libertarian view of this because he was not an advocate for a planned economy; he thought folks around here leaned toward a market economy. He said that what they had here was a proposal for an agricultural educational business with a sideline of supporting arts, community gatherings, and perhaps yoga or similar activities. He said that even if it did include banquets and corporate retreats, or the occasional wedding, he understood they had to think about the future in that way.

Mr. Moore said that it made him ask what the purpose of their Rural Area was. He asked if it was for agricultural business, and if it was economically viable, one that the community could appreciate, learn from, enjoy, and come out and be a part of. He said they had so many rural spaces, including a lot of these conservation easement spaces, where people did not get to enjoy them; they just drive by them.

Mr. Moore said that this was actually a way for people to be a part of their Rural Area. He said that the question that he kept coming back to was whether their Rural Area was for the people or was for the exclusive use of a few. He said he would like to have a Rural Area that was for the use of the many, and what he heard sounded like a facility that could do that; he found it pretty refreshing. He said that while he was sometimes critical of "farms" that just bush-hogged grass a few times a year, he was very much in favor of an actual thriving agricultural economy.

Mr. Moore said that he thought there was a lot more they could do to achieve that in terms of County support and policies they could put in place to encourage young producers, land access, co-ops, and all the rest. He said that that was another conversation, but this proposal on its own was something he thought was pretty great. He said that he did not know why the Commission would want to limit the economic viability of what seemed like a good business proposal.

Ms. Firehock said that there was a reason why the County, in its Ordinance for agritourism, limited the number of events. She said that if there were no impact on surrounding communities, they would allow unlimited agricultural events with unlimited people, but that was not what the Ordinance said. She said that the question tonight was whether they were going to allow non-agricultural events to occur, and if so, were they

were inclined to limit what the base ordinance had, which was what they had come forward with.

Ms. Firehock said it was also possible the applicant may work with staff in the interim between the Commission's decision and the Board to create something that would be more palatable. She said there was no calculus being used to determine that 75 people was too many, 30 was perfect, and 150 was outrageous; they did not have an equation they were using. She said that it was a small parcel, and sound carried far. She said that when a lot of people were added, it increased the number of times there was extra disturbance in the general area.

Ms. King said that it was by nature limited and not unlimited. She said Mr. Moore was not suggesting that they be given unlimited access, but rather that the limit the applicant had proposed was actually the right size. She said she was hopefully echoing what Mr. Moore was saying in that she did not know if there was enough information to determine whether 24 or 12 was the right size, because what was correct was going to depend on a matter of opinion.

Ms. King said she did not believe that the frequency of people visiting the property, based on what they had asked for, was any more or less impactful at 12 or 24. She said she just felt that reducing it by half gave the impression that they were doing something, but she questioned if it was really helping or if it was just making it harder for the applicant to have the type of business they wanted to have. She said that personally, she did not see the difference between the types of special events; she did not see a need to restrict the type of special events.

Ms. King said the Ordinance defined special events and weddings as one of those, but the Commission was not allowed to change that, which had been mentioned a couple of times. She said that she was not trying to advocate for weddings, but she did not really understand the difference between what was seen as a negative impact of a wedding event versus a corporate event.

Ms. King said she did not think there was a subjective judgment there that they could place on that. She said that they had the time restrictions, and she did not hear her say that they did not intend to have amplified music; she heard the applicant say that they did not regularly intend to have it. She said that they might want to have it occasionally for certain special events, but not all events; therefore, she would not feel comfortable asking them to restrict that.

Mr. Murray said that they had two different applications before them that night. He said they were very different; one was very much isolated in a Rural Area on a larger property. He said that every application and situation was different. He said that there was a lack of opposition to the first applicant. He said that while they were dealing with this, it was worth noting there were two development rights on this property.

Mr. Murray said that if they thought about this from a residential use perspective, the water use associated with something like two houses, compared to the water use of 150 people at an event, meant the amount of sewage generated by 150 people at an event was not inconsequential. He said that from a natural resources perspective, when looking at the uses of the Rural Area and the impacts that occurred, those were real impacts. He said that they were trying to balance these competing needs within the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Murray said that they had to look at things like how overburdened Garth Road was and how overburdened the water supply was in Ivy. He said that within his lifetime, the whole reason Ivy was downzoned was because it ran out of water. He said that a whole housing subdivision was built, but their faucets were dry. He said that this was why he was in support of limiting this, understanding that there was going to be dialogue between the applicant and the Board of Supervisors. He said the Commission was not making the final determination, but they were setting some groundwork for where negotiation could occur between now and the Board of Supervisors meeting.

Ms. King said that she did not think water was a factor here because they were on a well.

Mr. Murray said that it was very much a factor.

Ms. King said that they were going to have port-a-johns for the big events.

Mr. Murray said that it was not public water, so they had a limited water supply. He said that was relevant to the use.

Ms. King said that to clarify, the actual use of water and the use of the septic field would not be based on the number of people that would visit the property at different times; since it was not being inhabited by a family of five in two houses, the usage would be less. She said that it was going to be less because when they have 150 people, they had a port-a-john. She said that this was less impactful than two houses.

Ms. Firehock said that she did not think they wanted to get into a debate about exactly what their water yield was going to be, because they did not have that data. She said it was fine to bring up the concern, but they could not really get into a lengthy debate because they did not have the facts before them regarding what the demand would be. She noted that the applicant did say they would use port-a-johns for larger events.

Ms. Firehock said that it appeared that some on the Commission seem to have an appetite to limit the number of events, some had no appetite to put limits, and perhaps the rest of them were somewhere in between. She said she would like to see if they could get to a motion to let these people get on with their lives and prepare for the next step of the process.

Mr. Murray motioned to recommend approval of SP-2025-00008 The Barns Special Events/Exceptions with the conditions of events up to 150 people to be limited to 12 per

year; and to not allow outdoor amplified music, and with the other conditions recommended in the staff report. Ms. Firehock seconded the motion.

Ms. King asked if there were a number of events they would allow a smaller number of people to attend. She said that she would suggest they change either the frequency or the number.

Ms. Brown said that she thought the frequency of events mattered more, and 12 still sounded like a lot. She said that she would be more supportive of eight events.

Mr. Moore said that he had no problem with 24 events, but perhaps they could limit them to 65 people. He said that this also may serve to address the concern about future wedding events, because there would not be many wedding events with only 65 people.

Mr. Murray withdrew the motion.

Mr. Clayborne said that he was not sure how he felt about banning outdoor amplified music. He asked if the Commission could discuss the thinking behind that a bit more.

Mr. Murray said that it had a lot to do with the size of the property. He said that these conditions allowed for events that go up to 10 p.m. He said that it was also the association; when adding in the amplified music and the kinds of events that one might have along with the amplified music, such as people leaving at 10 p.m., there was a confluence of things where the likelihood of that impact on the community felt higher. He said that was why he initially said amplified music only during the daytime.

Ms. Firehock said that the applicant stated they did not indent to have outdoor amplified music; however, they must consider future potential uses.

Mr. Murray said that they could always come back to the Commission and ask for that.

Ms. King said that she wanted to make one more quick statement about traffic, since they were discussing it. She said that she lived in this neighborhood in her early twenties and currently traveled the roads of Albemarle County regularly. She said that she had a background in an engineering field that included traffic. She said that from her perspective, there were safety concerns for many areas of roads throughout the County.

Ms. King said that everyone had their own litmus test or range of what was safe and what was not safe, based on where they lived and what the roadway was like. She said that when she looked at the County roads as a whole, she thought of Garth Road as a thoroughfare. She said that it was a 50-miles-per-hour road that carried people to all different communities, not just this community. She said that it was important that they did not limit a viable agricultural business based on concerns for road safety because, in her opinion and based on her observation of many roads in Albemarle County, it did not feel like it was one of the least safe roads.

Ms. King said that when they lived there, and it was their front yard, it obviously felt very personal. She said that she had lived on that road and on many other roads, and it was just not a cul-de-sac. She said that it was going to have a lot of traffic, and those cars were not just going to be going to the Hunt Country area; they were going to be going to White Hall, Owensville, and many other places. She said that the impact of this one small business and the number of trips and cars that were going to be turning in and out of this driveway was very minimal compared to Garth Road from beginning to end.

Mr. Murray said that he understood Ms. King's point, but it was death by a thousand cuts. He said that this had been designated this as a national bike route, and they proceeded to ignore it throughout his entire lifetime. He said that they had failed to do the infrastructure improvements on it that should have been done when adding so many uses to the area. He said that someone recently referred to it as "the Crozet Bypass." He said that people in Crozet were frustrated with going on Route 250, so they were deciding to go down Route 810 and then take Garth Road into town instead.

Mr. Murray said that while they were looking at this one isolated case, it was worth looking at this from a planning perspective in the sense that they needed to have a philosophy regarding roads that were starting to become overburdened. He said that until VDOT and County staff worked together to make improvements on this road, they needed to think carefully about the uses that occurred on it.

Ms. King asked if they had evidence that the road was overburdened.

Mr. Murray said that they heard evidence from citizens tonight that this road was overburdened.

Ms. Firehock said that they did not have data from VDOT tonight because they were not required at this stage in the planning process. She said that she would go back to the fact that this was a small site, sound carried, so there was more disturbance. She said that the Commission was not here tonight to rule on whether they could have agricultural events. She said they could have all the agricultural events and agricultural education that their current Ordinance allowed, and there was no way to restrict that.

Ms. Firehock said the question really was how many events they would host. She said that Ms. Brown had suggested eight events as the maximum, and she was leaning more toward that. She said she would prefer that they host a handful of events, perhaps eight, where they could have poets or guitarists or similar performers to expose different audiences to her business model. She said that those customers would then return, hopefully in a business model that involved attending a jam event or a canning event, whatever they were doing. She said it was a promotional tool to bring in more people, and the space would serve the community.

Ms. Firehock said that as a Commission, they had to decide whether the applicant's desire was worth the additional impacts on the community. She said whether they agreed or not that it was an impact, she felt like it was a little more germane to whether the people who

lived there felt that it was an impact. She said that she understood Ms. King was the one with a daily lived experience on that road a long time ago, but there was a lot more traffic there today.

Ms. Firehock motioned that the Planning Commission recommend approval of SP-2025-00008 The Barns Special Events with Conditions #1 and #3 as proposed in the staff report; changing Condition #2 to eight events with 60 or less participants; and Condition #4 to not allow amplified music. Mr. Murray seconded the motion.
Ms. King asked if the Commission could make a recommendation for a lower number of attendees without getting into specific numbers.

Ms. Tevendale said that the Commission could make a recommendation to limit the number of events, attendees, or other factors based on the discussion of the Planning Commission.

Ms. King asked if they could make a recommendation that the applicant work with staff to reduce those numbers before it was presented to the Board of Supervisors.

Ms. Tevendale said yes.

Ms. King said that she would be in favor of that rather than placing specific limits on the applicant.

Ms. Tevendale said that if the Commission made such a recommendation, staff would review the minutes and listen back to the discussion and also work with the applicant to revise the conditions before going to the Board. She said that additionally, the transmittal summary that went to the Board would reference the discussion the Commission had and the concerns regarding impacts on those specific conditions.

Ms. Brown asked if that would delay the process.

Mr. Barnes said he did not believe there would be any delay.

Ms. Firehock said that to clarify, the Commission's recommendation this evening was not binding. She said that it was a recommendation to the Board and did not establish any number. She said that the Board would review the Commission's recommendation and determine whether it was appropriate.

Ms. King said that she understood that; she would be more in favor of recommending a lowering without naming a specific number.

Mr. Moore said that he agreed with that. He said that the Commissioners had differing opinions of what the right numbers were. He said that he felt they were suggesting so many specifics that would be better worked out between now and the Board meeting.

Ms. Firehock said that the events they described were smaller in nature; however, they were trying to address potential future impacts beyond this applicant's request.

Mr. Moore said that from his perspective, he would rather limit the number of attendees than the number of events. He said that this was something the applicant and staff should work on prior to bringing it before the Board.

Mr. Clayborne said that he was supportive of giving a more specific recommendation to the Board. He said that the Board could debate whether they were appropriate numbers. He said that he agreed there was no scientific formula for what they were discussing; they were putting forth these numbers after much debate and discussion regarding what they heard, both from the community and the applicants, so they were defensible. He said that he was fine with supporting the numbers put forward in the motion, and those numbers could be changed by the Board.

Ms. Firehock said that she suspected the applicant would be working with staff on her application to further adjust it before it goes to the Board. She noted that it was not for them to tell the applicant to do that, but each of them will talk to their individual board members about why they held the perspective they did, and then they will go forward. She called the vote on the motion to approve SP-2025-00008 with conditions as amended.

The motion carried (5-1). (Ms. Firehock, Mr. Clayborne, Ms. King, Mr. Murray, Ms. Brown voted aye; Mr. Moore voted nay; Mr. Carrazana was absent)

Committee Reports

Mr. Murray said that the Crozet Community Advisory Committee (CAC) met; Mr. Barnes and County staff were there to give an update on the Crozet Master Plan and the achievements toward the goals of the Plan. He said that they were also there to talk about the Activity Centers in the Comprehensive Plan, which ones have been prioritized, and moving forward on that. He said that there were a lot of questions from the public, mainly about prioritization, and some disgruntled opinions about whether and when the things prioritized in the Crozet Master Plan were going to be addressed. He thanked Mr. Barnes and other County staff for sitting through that.

Ms. Firehock said that the 5th and Avon Community Advisory Committee (CAC) met and had the same presentation on the Activity Centers and next steps for the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. She said that one point of contention brought up by one of the Supervisors was the concern that the County was moving away from master plans and that activity center planning was replacing them. She said she was a little unclear on that because it was not her understanding that as a County there would be no more master plans. She asked Mr. Barnes if he could weigh in on that or help them understand that point.

Michael Barnes, Director of Planning, said that the master plans were still part of the Comprehensive Plan. He said that as someone who started his career here 20 years ago and did rezoning when they did not have master plans, he thought the context provided by those plans had been invaluable. He said that they made for better reviews of

legislative permits as well as the planning that they did; but they were a lot of work to maintain. He said that their intent, as they would recall with the Comprehensive Plan, was to fold the land use plans for all these different master plans into it.

Mr. Barnes said that they actually diverged and had different Comprehensive Plan districts, so they tried to bring them back into a single land use map for the County. He said one of the things they were going to be trying to do with the multimodal transportation plan was to create a comprehensive view of what transportation improvements needed to be built in the community. He said that a lot of the plans or proposed items that were in those master plans would be incorporated into that multimodal plan for the community.

Mr. Barnes said that part of what that enabled them to do was to judge, with the very scarce resources that they had, where to build transportation projects. He said that they needed to consider what projects they wanted to build across the County and not just within the individual planned areas. He said that it would help them try to meet larger goals as they needed to provide for multimodal transportation. He said that the list kept going. He said that the Parks Department was developing plans for the parks.

Mr. Barnes said that regarding what the master plans provided, especially for someone who started with Albemarle, they provided a lot of context for the community and what the issues were in those individual neighborhoods. He said the bigger challenge they had right now was that when going to a certain neighborhood, a lot of it was going to be single-family housing and would have their own transportation needs. He said the real issue they faced was how they accommodated 31,000 people in their community over the next 20 years.

Mr. Barnes said that he did not think the intent was to go back to the single-family neighborhoods, though there may be some people who would, where they might be able to change the Zoning Ordinance at some point with a zoning modification to allow for accessory dwellings or other density there. He said the real density gains that they might be able to make to accommodate these people were going to be in these activity centers.

Mr. Barnes said that many of the recommendations and thoughts in all these master plans would continue. He said they would live on more in plans that were Countywide, especially when it came to some of the infrastructure projects that the County needed to build. He said that when it came to land use decisions, they were not likely to change in many of those stable single-family neighborhoods where the property had already been subdivided. He said there were opportunities in these activity centers, such as these older shopping centers or other places where redevelopment might happen.

Mr. Barnes said the goal of the Comprehensive Plan was to move toward creating walkable, dense, and more urban places. He said those were their activity centers, and they had ranked them. He said that their focus was to try and take on those higher-rank, regional ones that could be found around Route 29, such as Hollymead Town Center and Lower Pantops. He said they should look at those places as locations where they could expect to welcome the people who would be moving to the community in a way that was

beneficial for everyone and hopefully started to set forth what types of coordination they needed to do with the private sector.

Mr. Barnes said that in the development of those properties, they needed to consider what kind of investments the County needed to make to have the infrastructure to support that increased density. He said that the master plans had not gone away; they still informed much of what they have done. He said that, however, they were eventually moving towards something that was more focused on certain areas. He said they would continue to have land use recommendations for those lower-density neighborhoods, but for the activity center areas, they needed to figure out what to do and how to change either their land use plan or their Zoning Ordinance in those areas to help promote the vision for them.

Ms. Firehock said that perhaps they should have named them "opportunity centers." She said that regardless, it was confusing at the CAC meeting.

Ms. King asked if it was correct to state that they did not want to spend a lot of time and resources reinventing this plan idea over and over again by holding themselves to the need to update it every 10 years when they could actually do planning in a more efficient way.

Mr. Barnes said that yes, by focusing on these areas, they would expect to see more investment and redevelopment.

Mr. Moore said that the Land Use and Environmental Planning Committee (LUPEC) took a tour of Birdwood over by Boar's Head, which he had not seen since the renovation, and he could report that it was quite lovely. He said there was a part of him that would advocate for having their Planning Commission meetings there with fancy little sandwiches instead of their current location. He said that it was a nice thing to see. He said that it was also very strange in some ways to see that a building that was once slave quarters now popular for bachelor’s to stay there for bachelor parties.

Ms. Firehock said that she was sad to report that the Historic Preservation Committee did not achieve a quorum, so they did not meet on Monday.

Review of Board of Supervisors Meeting: August 19, 2026

Mr. Barnes said that the Board had their first Affordable Rental Housing Incentive Program (ARHIP) request. He said this was for the Attain property, the one on 5th Street that the Commission reviewed toward the end of last year. He said it was the Cavalier Crossing property, where at one point the applicants were aiming to convert the excess parking that was there to infill some more buildings.

Mr. Barnes said that it was delayed in part because the applicant wanted to make sure that the ARHIP application would be in place. He said they spent multiple months negotiating that, and then they went back to the Board. He said that in the afternoon, the

Board approved the ARHIP application and incentives for that property. He said that the Board also received a presentation on the Zoning Modernization project that the Commission received a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Barnes said that in the evening, they had the public hearing on the Attain ZMA, as well as SEs for parking modification to even further reduce the amount of required parking, as well as waiving the step back requirements. He said that those were approved that evening. He said that the first thing they did that afternoon was a presentation of an Achievement Award from the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo), which was presented to his staff for AC44. He said he was very proud of the work they did and, by extension, the work that the Commission, the Board and the community did on that project.

New Business

Mr. Barnes said that he had one item in new business, which was that everyone had received a couple of phishing emails. He asked that they please do not open those emails, and he had already reported them to IT.

Ms. Firehock said that she was teaching a class at UVA called Green Infrastructure. She said that for cities, they were going to take a look at the urban ring around Charlottesville, County property, and look at the land cover, how well-treated it was, impervious surfaces and stormwater runoff, and opportunities for connectivity. She said that this was work that they were doing using a new one-meter land resolution map that was created by the Virginia Department of Forestry, which they had access to.

Ms. Firehock said that they were going to hopefully take some of the ideas from the Comprehensive Plan and the strategies and work on some ideas for how they could actualize this. She said that she hoped to have the students come and present to the Commission in December, depending on their agenda. She said that if not, then she would record their presentation and share it with them later. She said that it was her hope that the students would be able to uncover some new ideas.

Ms. Firehock said that she had also applied for additional funding to potentially map out large forest areas, forest blocks, and corridors in the Rural Area that might help with the Rural Area Plan, but that was a totally separate proposal. She said she was seeing if the Virginia Department of Forestry would be willing to help with that work. She said that for right now, she could promise that they would take a look at the urban ring and the livability around there. She said that she would provide more information to the Commission as things happened during the semester.

Old Business

There was none.

Adjournment

At 9:20 p.m., the Commission adjourned to September 8, 2026, Albemarle County Planning Commission meeting, 6:00 p.m.

Michael Barnes, Director of Planning

(Recorded by Carolyn S. Shaffer, Clerk to Planning Commission & Planning Boards; transcribed by Golden Transcription Services)

Approved by Planning Commission
Date:
Initials: