

ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT

Project #/Name	ARB-2025-27: 400 Rio Rd. West Major Amendment
Review Type	Major Amendment
Parcel Identification	04500-00-00-025C0, 04500-00-00-025C1
Location	400 Rio Road West
Zoned	Light Industrial (LI) / Entrance Corridor (EC) / Airport Impact Area (AIA)
Owner/Applicant	Charlottesville Rio Rd LLC/Williams Mullen (Valerie Long)
Magisterial District	Rio
Context	Most of TMP 45-25C is paved. Additional paving is adjacent on TMP 45-25C1. Chain link fence encloses much of the paved area. The property contains two structures, a brick-faced office building at the front of the site along Rio Rd. and a large metal shed towards the rear of the paved area. To the north, TMP 45-25C2, which is owned by VDOT, splits TMP 45-25C1 into two parts. The portion of TMP 45-25C1 located to the north of TMP 45-25C is characterized by wooded terrain, and no modifications are proposed for this area. To the south across Rio Rd. and separated from it by a solid wood screening fence is the Four Seasons residential development. Additional single-family detached homes are to the east. To the west is a light industrial parcel housing an HVAC company. (See Fig. 1.)
Proposal	Ferguson Enterprises, a wholesale plumbing business, proposes to occupy the existing office building and establish outdoor storage, display, and sales (storage) of equipment and plumbing materials in the paved area north and west of the building on TMP 45-25C and a portion of 45-25C1. Site changes include creating a landscaped berm between the storage area and the EC, adding landscaping near the southwest corner of the site and along the south and east sides of the building, and replacing chain link fencing along the frontage with security fencing.
Visibility	Based on the site and landscape plan, some visibility of the materials and storage area is expected from Rio Rd. through and above the proposed security fencing and landscaped berm until the proposed landscaping matures, with increased visibility expected from the storage area entrance along Rio Rd.
ARB Meeting Date	November 24, 2025
Staff Contact	Khris Taggart

PROJECT HISTORY

The development of this site predates the establishment of the Entrance Corridor overlay. The ARB reviewed the Special Use Permit application (ARB2024-71) on January 21, 2025, and requested revisions to the concept plan that focused on screening of the storage area. On March 3, 2025, the ARB reviewed the revised concept and forwarded a recommendation of approval with conditions to both the Planning Commission (PC) and Board of Supervisors (BOS). On May 21, 2025, the BOS approved the special use permit with no alterations to the recommended conditions.

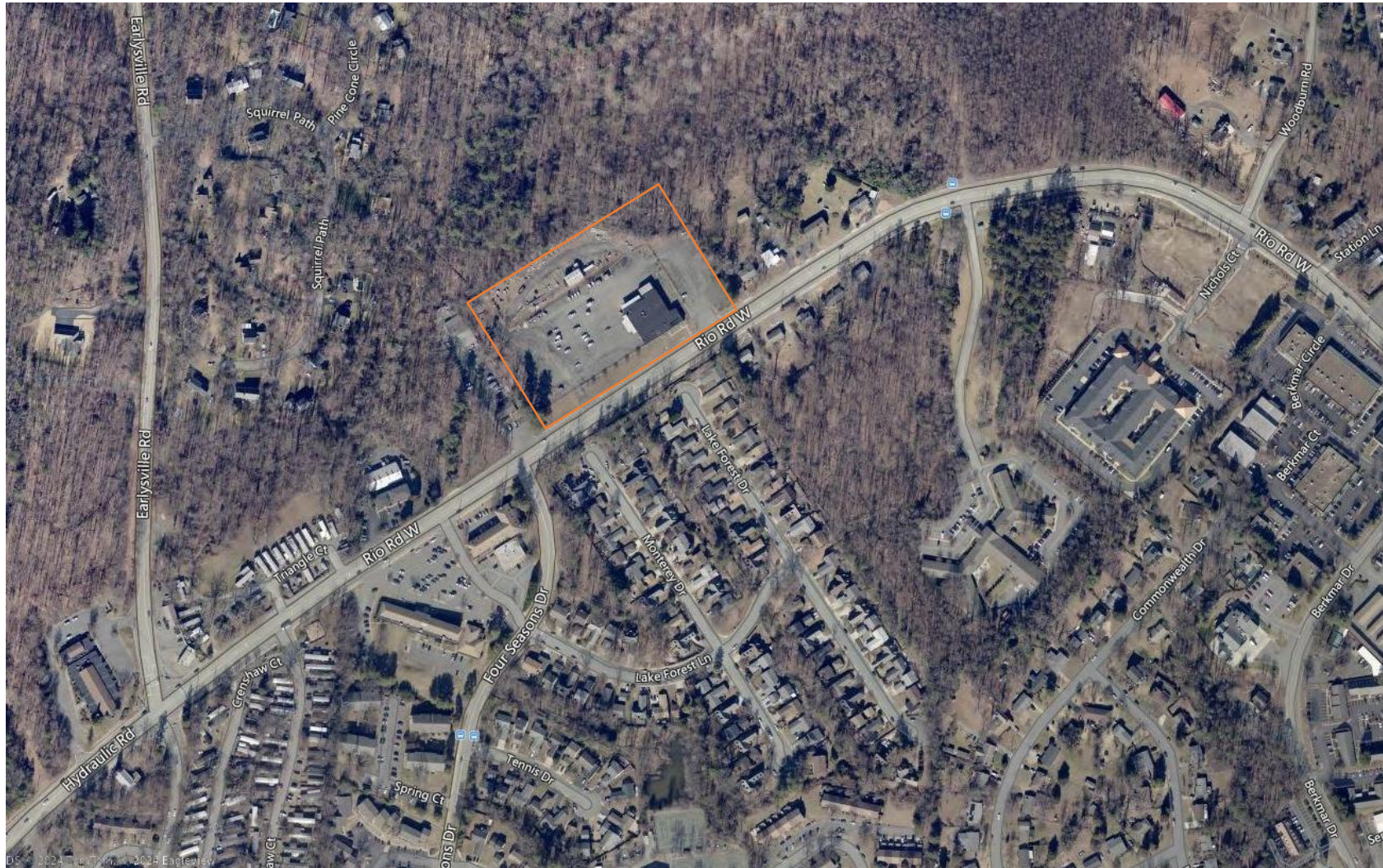


Figure 1: Pictometry image showing the project area along the Entrance Corridor.

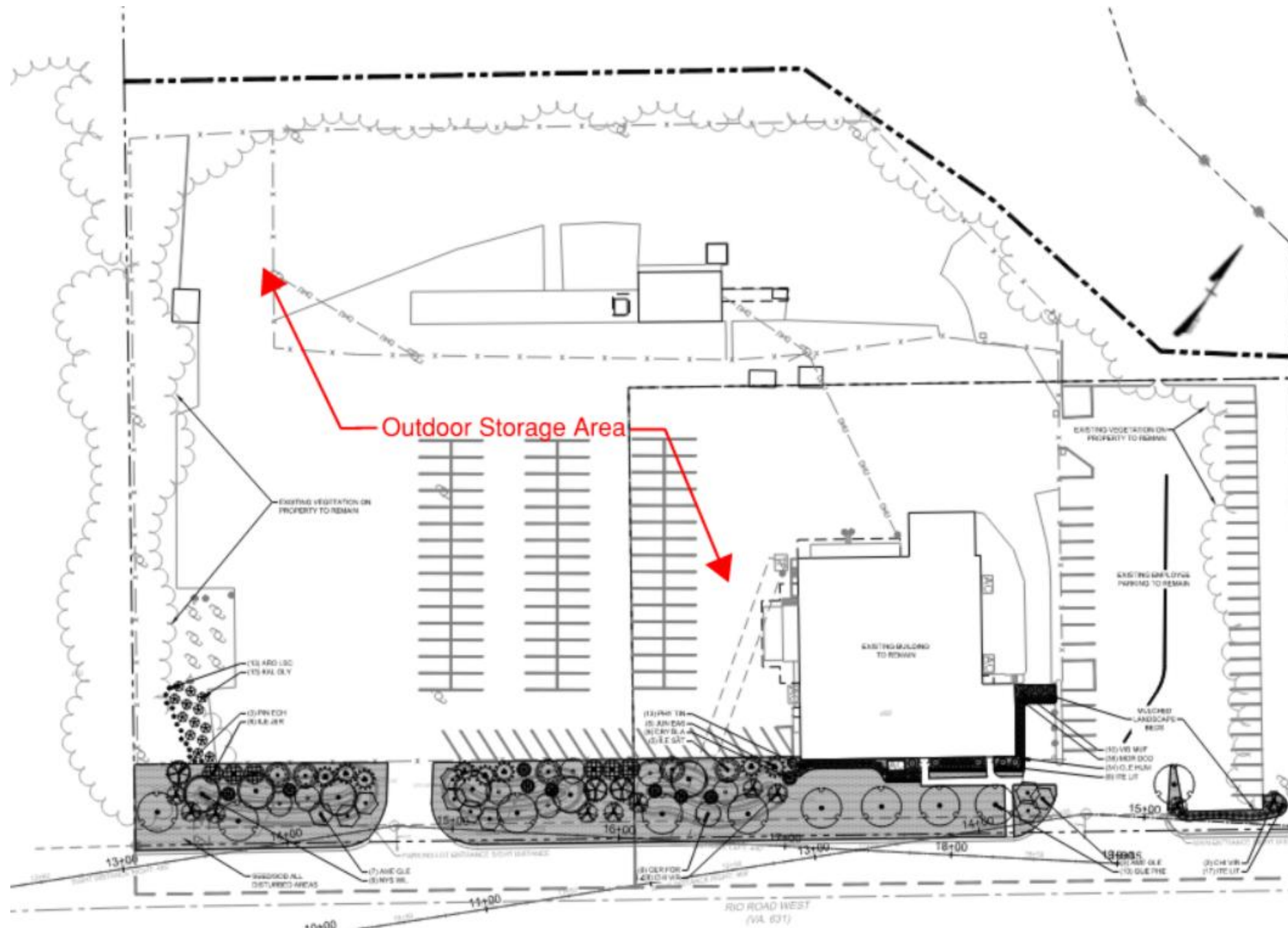


Figure 2: Proposed landscape plan showing the plantings and berm along the frontage, the buildings, travelways, outdoor storage area, and parking.

ANALYSIS

REF	GUIDELINE	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION
	Purpose, <i>Compatibility with the Character of the Entrance Corridor</i>		
1	The goal of the regulation of the design of development within the designated Entrance Corridors is to ensure that new development within the corridors reflects the traditional architecture of the area. Therefore, it is the purpose of ARB review and of these Guidelines, that proposed development within the designated Entrance Corridors reflect elements of design characteristic of the significant historical landmarks, buildings, and structures of the Charlottesville and Albemarle area, and to promote orderly and attractive development within these corridors. Applicants should note that replication of historic structures is neither required nor desired.	This portion of the Rio Rd. EC is characterized by small- and large-scale (Cville Rio Rd. Apartments) residential developments with large trees near the frontage and wooded areas behind the developments on the north side of the street. The frontage of the subject parcel currently features a broad grass strip with little landscaping and unobstructed views of paving beyond. The proposed landscaping will help to fill in this area, visually connecting the parcel with the surrounding context and increasing the continuity along the EC.	See site recommendations, below.
2	Visitors to the significant historical sites in the Charlottesville and Albemarle area experience these sites as ensembles of buildings, land, and vegetation. In order to accomplish the integration of buildings, land, and vegetation characteristic of these sites, the Guidelines require attention to four primary factors: compatibility with significant historic sites in the area; the character of the Entrance Corridor; site development and layout; and landscaping.		
5	It is also an important objective of the Guidelines to establish a pattern of compatible architectural characteristics throughout the Entrance Corridor in order to achieve unity and coherence. Building designs should demonstrate sensitivity to other nearby structures within the Entrance Corridor. Where a designated corridor is substantially developed, these Guidelines require striking a careful balance between harmonizing new development with the existing character of the corridor and achieving compatibility with the significant historic sites in the area.		
3, 4, 9-16	<i>Compatibility with significant historic sites, Structure Design</i>	No new buildings or changes to the exterior of the existing buildings are proposed.	
	Accessory structures and equipment		
17	Accessory structures and equipment should be integrated into the overall plan of development and shall, to the extent possible, be compatible with the building designs used on the site.	No accessory structures are proposed. The landscape plan shows primarily evergreen shrubs added to screen existing ground-mounted mechanical equipment at the front of the building.	None.
21	The following note should be added to the site plan and the architectural plan: “Visibility of all mechanical equipment from the Entrance Corridor shall be eliminated.”	The standard mechanical equipment note is present on the site plan.	

18	The following should be located to eliminate visibility from the Entrance Corridor street. If, after appropriate siting, these features will still have a negative visual impact on the Entrance Corridor street, screening should be provided to eliminate visibility. a. Loading areas, b. Service areas, c. Refuse areas, d. Storage areas, e. Mechanical equipment, f. Above-ground utilities, and g. Chain link fence, barbed wire, razor wire, and similar security fencing devices.	The site and landscape plan closely align with what was shown in the concept plan. The applicant proposes to replace the existing chain link fencing along the southern perimeter of the property, which is situated both east and west of the current building, with black aluminum picket fencing. In the planting area located between the fencing and Rio Road, the applicant proposes to establish a 3-foot-tall berm, which will feature a mix of evergreen and deciduous plants. To further enhance the visual screening of the storage area, one of the conditions of the SP prohibits the placement of materials and equipment that exceed the height of the fence (8 feet) within a distance of 50 feet from the fence line. The installation of a picket fence and landscaped berm will not provide complete visual screening of the storage area from the EC when the use commences. However, the replacement of chain link fencing with aluminum fencing will contribute to a more organized appearance and restricting where items taller than the fence height can be stored will help reduce visibility of items stored within the storage area. Additionally, the mix of plants on the berm exceeds the frontage planting requirements and will enhance the current frontage condition and better integrate the site into the surroundings, resulting in a more orderly and visually appealing development on the corridor.	Provide the proposed locations of loading, service, and refuse areas with the site plan. Show how these locations will be screened from the EC.
19	Screening devices should be compatible with the design of the buildings and surrounding natural vegetation and may consist of: a. Walls, b. Plantings, and c. Fencing.	The section of fence located to the east of the building contains a note indicating what appears to be the length of the fence (28.5 feet), rather than its height. The provided narrative indicates that waste and recycling areas are situated internally within the site and are screened from view; however, these areas are not labeled on the plan for confirmation. Siting these areas, as well as any loading or service areas, in locations where they will not be visible from the EC would be appropriate.	Revise the site plan to correct or clarify the note related to the fence line east of the existing building.
22-31	Lighting	The site plan includes a note stating that no new ground or building-mounted lighting is proposed with this plan.	None.
	Landscaping		
7	The requirements of the Guidelines regarding landscaping are intended to reflect the landscaping characteristic of many of the area's significant historic sites which is characterized by large shade trees and lawns. Landscaping should promote visual order within the Entrance Corridor and help to integrate buildings into the existing environment of the corridor.	The site has approximately 674 feet of frontage along the EC including the site entrances. A grass strip separates the street from the building and parking lot. Its depth varies from 12 feet near the employee parking lot entrance to 55 feet along the storage area and contains five existing trees. Between the storage area and the EC, the proposed landscape plan shows the five existing trees being removed and replaced with a 3-foot-tall berm, planted with a combination of deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs. A row of large trees is also proposed between the existing building and the street, accompanied by an arrangement of shrubs along the south and east sides of the building. While this landscaping arrangement will not provide complete screening for the materials and storage area when the use	None.
8	Continuity within the Entrance Corridor should be obtained by planting different types of plant materials that share similar characteristics. Such common elements allow for more flexibility in the design of structures because common landscape features will help to harmonize the appearance of development as seen from the street upon which the Corridor is centered.		

32	Landscaping along the frontage of Entrance Corridor streets should include the following: a. Large shade trees should be planted parallel to the Entrance Corridor Street. Such trees should be at least 3½ inches caliper (measured 6 inches above the ground) and should be of a plant species common to the area. Such trees should be located at least every 35 feet on center. b. Flowering ornamental trees of a species common to the area should be interspersed among the trees required by the preceding paragraph. The ornamental trees need not alternate one for one with the large shade trees. They may be planted among the large shade trees in a less regular spacing pattern. c. In situations where appropriate, a three or four-board fence or low stone wall, typical of the area, should align the frontage of the Entrance Corridor street. d. An area of sufficient width to accommodate the foregoing plantings and fencing should be reserved parallel to the Entrance Corridor street, and exclusive of road right-of-way and utility easements.	commences, it exceeds the frontage landscaping requirements, aligns with the approved concept plan, and is anticipated to enhance the visual continuity along the EC.	
33	Landscaping along interior roads: a. Large trees should be planted parallel to all interior roads. Such trees should be at least 2½ inches caliper (measured six inches above the ground) and should be of a plant species common to the area. Such trees should be located at least every 40 feet on center.	There are no interior roads within this site.	None.
35	Landscaping of parking areas: a. Large trees should align the perimeter of parking areas, located 40 feet on center. Trees should be planted in the interior of parking areas at the rate of one tree for every 10 parking spaces provided and should be evenly distributed throughout the interior of the parking area. b. Trees required by the preceding paragraph should measure 2½ inches caliper (measured six inches above the ground); should be evenly spaced; and should be of a species common to the area. Such trees should be planted in planters or medians sufficiently large to maintain the health of the tree and shall be protected by curbing. c. Shrubs should be provided as necessary to minimize the parking area's impact on Entrance Corridor streets. Shrubs should measure 24 inches in height.	The existing parking lot on the east side of the parcel would remain. Along the east side of the parking lot, between the lot and parcel boundary, is existing vegetation that is to remain. The area south of the lot serves as the parking lot perimeter and street frontage. In this area, the landscape plan shows plantings that meet the frontage landscaping requirements. The existing employee parking lot does not meet the requirements for interior parking trees, but no changes are proposed to this area.	None.
34	Landscaping along interior pedestrian ways: a. Medium trees should be planted parallel to all interior pedestrian ways. Such trees should be at least 2½ inches caliper (measured six inches above the ground) and should be of a species common to the area. Such trees should be located at least every 25 feet on center.	The concept plan shows that the existing sidewalk along the front of the building that leads to Rio Rd. will remain. No other interior sidewalks are shown.	None.

36	Landscaping of buildings and other structures: a. Trees or other vegetation should be planted along the front of long buildings as necessary to soften the appearance of exterior walls. The spacing, size, and type of such trees or vegetation should be determined by the length, height, and blankness of such walls. b. Shrubs should be used to integrate the site, buildings, and other structures; dumpsters, accessory buildings and structures; “drive-thru” windows; service areas; and signs. Shrubs should measure at least 24 inches in height.	No changes are proposed to the buildings that are to remain. A combination of deciduous and evergreen shrubs is proposed along the south and east sides of the building. This landscaping is expected to filter the view of the existing mechanical equipment and soften the appearance of the building as viewed from the EC.	None.
37	Plant species: a. Plant species required should be as approved by the Staff based upon but not limited to the <i>Generic Landscape Plan Recommended Species List</i> and <i>Native Plants for Virginia Landscapes (Appendix D)</i> .	The species provided in the plant schedule are on the approved plant list.	None.
38	Plant health: The following note should be added to the landscape plan: “All site plantings of trees and shrubs shall be allowed to reach, and be maintained at, mature height; the topping of trees is prohibited. Shrubs and trees shall be pruned minimally and only to support the overall health of the plant.”	The standard plant health note is included on the landscape plan.	None.
	Development pattern		
	Site development and layout		
6	Site development should be sensitive to the existing natural landscape and should contribute to the creation of an organized development plan. This may be accomplished, to the extent practical, by preserving the trees and rolling terrain typical of the area; planting new trees along streets and pedestrian ways and choosing species that reflect native forest elements; ensuring that any grading will blend into the surrounding topography thereby creating a continuous landscape; preserving, to the extent practical, existing significant river and stream valleys which may be located on the site and integrating these features into the design of surrounding development; and limiting the building mass and height to a scale that does not overpower the natural settings of the site, or the Entrance Corridor.	The site is a developed light industrial parcel with no changes proposed to the existing site layout.	None.
39	The relationship of buildings and other structures to the Entrance Corridor street and to other development within the corridor should be as follows: a. An organized pattern of roads, service lanes, bike paths, and pedestrian walks should guide the layout of the site. b. In general, buildings fronting the Entrance Corridor street should be parallel to the street. Building groupings should be arranged to parallel the Entrance Corridor street. c. Provisions should be made for connections to adjacent pedestrian and vehicular circulation systems. d. Open spaces should be tied into surrounding areas to provide continuity within the Entrance Corridor.		

	e. If significant natural features exist on the site (including creek valleys, steep slopes, significant trees, or rock outcroppings), to the extent practical, then such natural features should be reflected in the site layout. If the provisions of Section 32.5.2.n of the <i>Albemarle County Zoning Ordinance</i> apply, then improvements required by that section should be located so as to maximize the use of existing features in screening such improvements from Entrance Corridor streets. f. The placement of structures on the site should respect existing views and vistas on and around the site.		
	Site Grading		
40	Site grading should maintain the basic relationship of the site to surrounding conditions by limiting the use of retaining walls and by shaping the terrain through the use of smooth, rounded landforms that blend with the existing terrain. Steep-cut or fill sections are generally unacceptable. Proposed contours on the grading plan shall be rounded with a ten-foot minimum radius where they meet the adjacent condition. Final grading should achieve a natural, rather than engineered, appearance. Retaining walls 6 feet in height and taller, when necessary, shall be terraced and planted to blend with the landscape.	Grading is necessary to create the proposed 3-foot-tall berm between the storage area and the Rio Rd. Entrance Corridor. The plan shows the berm will be landscaped with a mixture of deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs that are expected to help integrate it into the surroundings.	None.
41	No grading, trenching, or tunneling should occur within the drip line of any trees or other existing features designated for preservation in the final Certificate of Appropriateness. Adequate tree protection fencing should be shown on, and coordinated throughout, the grading, landscaping and erosion and sediment control plans.	Grading is limited to the creation of the 3-foot-tall berms between the storage area and the Rio Rd. Entrance Corridor. Near the southwest corner of the site, there are some existing trees that are to remain but no tree protection fencing is shown in this area.	Revise the site plan to show tree protection fencing along the trees that are to remain near the southwest corner of the site.
42	Areas designated for preservation in the final Certificate of Appropriateness should be clearly delineated and protected on the site prior to any grading activity on the site. This protection should remain in place until completion of the development of the site.		
43	Preservation areas should be protected from storage or movement of heavy equipment within this area.		
20	Surface runoff structures and detention ponds should be designed to fit into the natural topography to avoid the need for screening. When visible from the Entrance Corridor street, these features must be fully integrated into the landscape. They should not have the appearance of engineered features.		
44	Natural drainage patterns (or to the extent required, new drainage patterns) should be incorporated into the finished site to the extent possible.	There are no existing stormwater facilities, and none are proposed in the site plan.	None.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Primary points of discussion:

1. The size and species of landscaping within the frontage planting area.

Staff recommends approval of the major amendment with the following revisions:

1. Provide the proposed locations of loading, service, and refuse areas with the site plan. Show how these locations will be screened from the EC.
2. Revise the site plan to correct or clarify the note related to the fence line east of the existing building.
3. Revise the site plan to show tree protection fencing along the trees that are to remain near the southwest corner of the site.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attach. 1: [ARB2025-27: 400 Rio Rd. West Narrative](#)
- Attach. 2: [ARB2025-27: 400 Rio Rd. West Site Plan](#)