MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING COMMISSION

September 9, 2026

The Harrisonburg Planning Commission held its regular meeting on Wednesday, September 9, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, 409 South Main Street.

Members present: Richard Baugh, Chair; Shannon Porter, Vice Chair; KC Kettler; Rob Jezior; and Laura Dent, Councilmember. Members absent: Heja Alsindi and Randy Seitz.

Also present: Thanh Dang, Deputy Director of Community Development; Nyrma Soffel, Planner; Meg Rupkey, Planner; and Wesley Russ, Deputy City Attorney.

Chair Baugh asked if there were any corrections, comments or a motion regarding the August 12, 2026. Planning Commission minutes.

Commissioner Porter moved to approve the minutes.

Commissioner Kettler seconded the motion.

The motion to approve the August 12, 2026, Planning Commission minutes passed (5-0).

Chair Baugh asked if there were any corrections, comments or a motion regarding the August 18, 2026. Planning Commission minutes.

Ms. Dang said for the August 18 meeting, I would like to request one amendment to the draft minutes, which is a change in the heading date in two locations to reflect that it is August 18 instead of July 21, which is incorrect.

Commissioner Kettler moved to approve the minutes with the amendments as presented by staff.

Commissioner Jezior seconded the motion.

The motion to approve the August 12, 2026, Planning Commission minutes passed (5-0).

New Business – Public Hearings

Consider a request from Eastern Mennonite School to approve the required number of off-street parking spaces

Consider a request from Eastern Mennonite School to amend the master plan at 701 and 801 Parkwood Drive and 1251 Virginia Avenue

Chair Baugh read the requests and asked staff to review.

Ms. Rupkey said Eastern Mennonite School (EMS) is requesting approval of the proposed number of minimum off-street parking spaces relating to school uses and to amend the master plan for a +/- 26.3-acre property zoned R-3/I-1 and B-2/I-1. The property is addressed as 701 and 801 Parkwood Drive and 1251 Virginia Avenue and is identified as tax map parcel 47-N-7.

EMS's first I-1, Institutional Overlay District (I-1) Master Plan was approved in September 2002. The master plan provided for the planned development of the campus, including building expansions, parking areas, and athletic fields. It also approved limited relief from zoning requirements for a baseball dugout along Mount Clinton Pike that encroached five feet into the required 30-foot setback and for required parking separation along the western property line adjoining Eastern Mennonite University.

In 2016, EMS, Virginia Mennonite Missions, and Mennomedia, Inc. requested an amendment to the 2002 Master Plan and an expansion of the I-1 overlay to include three additional parcels totaling +/- 2.08 acres. The amendment supported conversion of the former Mennomedia office building at 1251 Virginia Avenue to the elementary school and established a campus with zero-foot setbacks from internal property lines and a 10-foot perimeter building setback. In 2019, a plat was recorded to vacate the internal property lines and dedicate public right-of-way along Parkwood Road creating the lot as it is today.

Land Use
The Comprehensive Plan designates this site as Institutional and Limited Commercial and states:

> Institutional
>
> These areas are planned for development by certain institutional uses, like private colleges and universities, hospitals, and retirement communities that operate on large land areas and may function in a campus-like environment.
>
> Limited Commercial
>
> These areas are suitable for commercial and professional office development but in a less intensive approach than the Commercial designation. These areas need careful controls to ensure compatibility with adjacent land uses. The maintenance of functional and aesthetic integrity should be emphasized in review of applications for development and redevelopment and should address such matters as: control of access; landscaping and buffering; parking; setback; signage; and building mass, height, and orientation. It is important that development within Limited Commercial areas does not incrementally increase in intensity to become similar to the Commercial designation. Efforts should be made to maintain the intent as described above.

Updated 2026 Master Plan Narrative and Map

If approved, the proposed 2026 Master Plan will supersede the previously approved EMS Master Plan to reflect the current single-parcel campus and to allow additional campus buildings, site improvements, and parking modifications, which are described in the master plan narrative and illustrated in the map.

The proposed plan maintains the minimum 10-foot setback along the exterior campus boundary that was established through the 2016 Master Plan amendment. This flexibility is intended to accommodate the existing dugout and the proposed athletic concessions building.

Minimum Off-Street Parking Requirements

EMS is requesting an expansion in parking areas for the EMS campus. Zoning Ordinance Section 10-3-25 (12) specifies the minimum off-street parking requirements for "Elementary schools, junior or senior high schools, or equivalent facilities" and states:

> Proposed off-street parking spaces shall be programmed by the applicable school authorities as necessary to meet state standards for use and consideration of site locations, then submitted to the planning commission for comprehensive site plan review.

The applicant used the Virginia Department of Education's Guidelines for School Facilities in Virginia's Public Schools (2021) to calculate the needs of the EMS campus. These guidelines recommend enough parking for staff, an additional 10 to 20 percent of spaces for visitors, and student parking equal to one-third of enrollment. Based on Virginia Department of Education guidance and using a 10 percent visitor rate, the applicant calculates a need for 200 spaces for staff, visitors, and students. The applicant is requesting Planning Commission's approval that the minimum number off-street parking spaces for school uses for this site be set at 200.

Master Plan Parking, Landscaping, and Access

In addition to the parking required for school uses, EMS proposes 235 additional spaces to accommodate recurring church services, athletic events, and special events. The master plan proposes a maximum of 435 off-street parking spaces campus-wide, including the minimum 200 spaces required for school uses.

The proposed parking lot landscaping modification would allow required landscaping islands to be located either within a parking lot or within 15 feet of the parking lot. This approach would still require parking lot landscaping within the campus while providing flexibility for the proposed parking configuration and drive aisle patterns. At this time the parking lots are not in final design, thus the applicant would like to keep the flexibility for the whole site to have the option to deviate from ZO Sections 10-3-30.1 (5) and (6) of the Zoning Ordinance and has indicated that all parking areas have the ability to deviate from the landscaping requirement and may be provide landscaping within 15-feet of the parking lot if Sections 10-3-30.1 (5) and (6) in the areas shown on the Master Plan Map.

The applicant is additionally requesting to deviate from ZO Section 10-3-25 (4) a. The deviation would allow a reduction in the required five-foot separation between nonresidential parking and adjoining residential property and allow the parking area to exceed 50 percent of the area between the building setback and public street frontage.

The 2026 Master Plan narrative also identifies existing and future access agreements with adjacent properties. The master plan narrative identifies an existing private access easement serving Virginia Mennonite Missions/Anabaptist Mission Partners (VMM/AMP) from Virginia Avenue to their property, proposes that EMS obtain an easement to address an existing access encroachment onto the VMM/AMP property, and provides a location for a future access easement to Parkwood Drive from 1194 Park Road and/or a shared-parking agreement with Eastern Mennonite University upon EMU's request.

Master Plan Open Space

The 2026 Master Plan Map identifies reserved open space along the drainage channel in the east-southeast portion of the site. In the previous version of the master plan map, the property had identified the athletic fields as open space. While these fields provide additional open areas and educational/recreational space on campus, they are considered developed and cannot be considered open spaces in the context of a master plan.

Transportation and Traffic

A traffic impact analysis (TIA) was not required for the requested rezoning/master plan amendment.

The Master Plan Map shows a future vehicular access drive to Mount Clinton Pike that would provide an additional connection to the campus and access to Parking Lot 3. As shown on the Master Plan Map, the driveway connecting to Mount Clinton Pike does not meet access management requirements. Staff has requested that the proposed access align with the existing driveway across Mount Clinton Pike used by Christian Light Publications. The applicant has indicated with a notation on the Master Plan Map that the final design and location of the Mount Clinton Pike entrance would be determined at a later date and would be subject to applicable City approval.

Public Water and Sanitary Sewer

Staff has no concerns with the requested rezoning/master plan amendment regarding water and sanitary sewer matters.

Conclusion

The applicant is requesting approval of the minimum off-street parking plan for the school use per Zoning Ordinance Section 10-3-25 (12). Based on the *Guidelines for School Facilities in Virginia's Public Schools (2021)*, the applicant identifies a need for 200 parking spaces to serve school staff, visitors, and students. Staff recommends approval of a required minimum 200 off-street parking spaces for the school use.

The applicant is also requesting approval of the 2026 Master Plan amendment, which reflects current single-parcel configuration and guides future development, including additional educational and support buildings, athletic facilities, parking modifications, and circulation improvements. The proposed uses are consistent with the purpose of the I-1 district and the Comprehensive Plan's institutional designation. Staff recommends approval of the Master Plan amendment.

Chair Baugh asked if there any questions for staff.

Vice Chair Porter said I have one question about the potential access from the EMU [Eastern Mennonite University] property. Are those athletic fields that are adjacent to the property?

Ms. Rupkey said there is an existing athletic field along this side.

Ms. Dang said Ms. Rupkey, I have a question. On the other slide that shows EMU, you are showing where a connection could be made. That is not the location of the future easement, which is yet to be determined. Is that correct?

Ms. Rupkey said correct. Thank you for clarifying. It is a potential location of how it could be accomplished, not the final location.

Chair Baugh said we will now invite the applicant representative to come forward.

Gil Colman, Colman Engineering, and Paul Leaman, Head of School for Eastern Mennonite School came forward. Mr. Colman said good evening, Chair Baugh, Commissioners, and Councilmember. Thank you for reviewing this application for us and considering the master plan amendment and parking requirements. We are here in case you have any questions. Everything staff presented reflects our interests.

Vice Chair Porter said I have a question about the request to relax the landscaping requirements within the actual parking [lot], and also relaxing the five-foot [parking lot] setbacks with the residential areas. What is the rationale for that, and what is the impact on your neighbors?

Mr. Colman said that is interesting because the setback we have is, I forget, five feet or a 10-foot setback. It is really more a consideration for the future, where we have one of the parking lots right adjacent to EMU that could be an issue. For the most part, that is not an issue for us because we are already more than 10 feet back in most of the parking situations. It is really more in one area that could be an issue. The consideration is to have a separation and buffer between parking and adjacent properties. Especially in this case, it is talking about residential property, to make sure there are no car lights and things like that impacting a residential neighborhood and residential use. But there is no residential use right now surrounding EMS.

Vice Chair Porter said can we bring the map up really fast? I want you to point out where that would be the case.

Mr. Colman said [referring to the campus map] on the left side, that is just a narrow part where that could be an issue. That is the only place right now that could be an issue. There is not really another place right now. That is right adjacent to the athletic fields for EMU. One of the things that could be put in there is a fence, for example. A fence satisfies that requirement. I do [unintelligible] in terms of blocking light or anything like that, but it satisfies the requirement.

Vice Chair Porter said if there were a larger residential neighborhood around this, I might have a different feeling.

Mr. Colman said that is right, there is none.

Mr. Leaman said EMU is considered residential. I am not sure what would be considered on the other side of Parkwood Drive; there are some houses, but that is across the street. There on the left of the diagram, where there is just the little green strip before EMU's property begins, there is a pretty large green buffer between that boundary and EMU's turf soccer field. The City also put in, very close to that boundary, the generators to save on electric demand. They are not shown [on the campus map] because they are on EMU's property, but they are probably right around that boundary line as well.

Vice Chair Porter said I know there is a close association between the school and the university. Would you be effectively offering up your parking for potential athletic venues at EMU as well?

Mr. Leaman said yes, it happens a lot.

Mr. Colman said there is a lot of collaboration between the entities there, which makes sense. It is a good way to use that parking lot as they put in more parking lots. It works out pretty well.

Mr. Leaman said I was thinking where you were talking about the setback being limited, it was along Parkwood Drive because of the added width there and making that closer to Parkwood Drive. It is pretty much a culverted area.

Mr. Colman said the requirement is 50 percent of that space, and we are not even there. We will be all right with that. The offset of landscaping, which was the second part of your question, is also to allow placement of landscaping other than within the islands. In this case, even in our plan, we are showing landscaping within the islands. I feel like if that is doable, we will do it. Otherwise, we are reserving the opportunity to put landscaping around the edges. Another point to make is that most of this parking is already there. From the standpoint of redeveloping that parking, because it is existing parking, we do not have to comply with parking landscape requirements in that case. If it is new parking or new areas, then we do. That does not mean that we will not

necessarily add more islands. In fact, this shows some more islands where there are none right now. That may occur that way or not. Right now, we are reserving the option of having landscaping surrounding the parking area. It is within a limited space, within 15 feet of that area. We are probably going to stay within that space anyway. There is already some landscaping that is compliant with that.

Commissioner Jezior said based on the tables, you are really only adding 25 parking spaces, correct? It is just allocating 200 for the school specifically.

Mr. Colman said yes. The parking spaces are added because of some displacement of the bus parking, which right now is occurring on the tennis courts. We hope to clean up all of that and arrange it a little better. We have an area that was already impervious or semi-impervious, and we are working with that. We are going to use that for parking and move the buses to the side where they can be more easily accessed and not in front of these buildings.

Councilmember Dent said it seems to me that since it is already zoned R-3 and B-2 with institutional overlay, the setbacks normally associated with residential, even though it is zoned residential, would not really apply. Is that correct?

Mr. Colman said that is correct. We have a 10-foot setback throughout the property. That is the setback. That was also by master plan. We did that a couple of iterations ago, and we are maintaining that.

Commissioner Kettler said I have a question on the calculation for the parking spots. Can you go back to that slide? I am not terribly familiar with these guidelines. I was wondering, are these guidelines that are generally brought up by the state that you ought to follow, or are there other calculations that work here?

Mr. Colman said I am not as familiar with them either. That is something that staff made us aware of. In the past, we had discussed certain numbers that EMS was comfortable with, saying this is the number of parking spaces we need, and that is what we were going with. Staff pointed out during this time that the requirements are in the ordinance to follow the guidelines of Virginia public schools. I do not know if it is guidance or a firm requirement, but that is what we utilized for it. We certainly have more parking than what we need.

Mr. Leaman said we certainly have ample parking. Often, we share our parking lots with VMRC [Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community] and with EMU.

Commissioner Kettler said part of what I am thinking is that it seems like the guidelines suggest that every single staff member drives a single-occupancy vehicle.

Ms. Dang said these are recommendations from the Virginia Department of Education. They are not requirements, and our ordinance does not require it. Staff has used this to help guide us in the absence of other guidance or available standards.

Commissioner Kettler said is there a way to approve this with the option of them making less parking if they so desire?

Ms. Dang said I suppose you could recommend less.

Commissioner Kettler said to be clear about my thinking, I do not want to delay this anymore or deny it in any fashion. I am wondering whether there might be a way to provide some flexibility for the applicant.

Ms. Dang said we were comfortable with what they are comfortable accepting with the 200, because they are proposing to provide 435 total spaces on the property. We thought the requirement is only 200, which is less than half of what they are going to provide. Meaning they do not have to construct the other 235 if they choose not to. The master plan is only going to require the 200.

Commissioner Kettler said I was not clear on that, so I appreciate that.

Mr. Colman said I do not know how many students drive either. Maybe the students pick up some of those spaces.

Councilmember Dent said I found it interesting that one-third of the enrollment is for student parking. They are middle and high school, and elementary school. Only the high school students would actually drive. Is the high school included in this map as well?

Mr. Leaman said yes.

Councilmember Dent said they would be the only ones actually driving, the high school students.

Mr. Leaman said I do not think we would have close to 200 cars parked on campus every day. However, there are events that fill the parking.

Vice Chair Porter said how often would you get up to 435?

Mr. Leaman said I would say rarely. What happens is particular event spaces will be too small. If we are playing a local public school, the gym lot is not quite adequate, so it spills out front. If we have a large event in the auditorium, that spills over to the dining-area parking. People just need to walk farther, which is what happens now.

Vice Chair Porter said you host a couple of churches on-site for the weekends as well. I have seen those parking lots pretty full.

Mr. Leaman said yes.

Commissioner Kettler said it sounds like some of the uses we are talking about, gym uses, general school uses, and church uses, would tend to be at different times depending on the event. Is that fair?

Mr. Colman said they are, but they tend to fill whichever parking lot they are utilizing. I have seen all the parking full sometimes, but it is very rare to have everything full.

Vice Chair Porter said I wanted to ask a quick question about changing the circulation pattern for pickup and drop-off.

Mr. Leaman said there would be a limited amount of parking at the very front of the school for guests. We have a lot of visitors and guests. We are an enrollment-based school. We want families to come visit, and it is disappointing when they cannot park in the front and have to find their way to the front entrance by parking at the gym or the dining hall. Parking is not exciting money for donors to give toward, so I am not promising parking will be a high priority because we do meet our general needs with parking. Long term, we would love to have much more parking in the front. That would allow a connection without going out on Parkwood Drive from the gym parking lot to the dining hall parking lot, with angular parking that would designate the direction of traffic flow. Sometimes we have people going backwards in our current circular drive because parking is parallel. It is hard to know which way to go if you are a guest and not familiar with the campus.

Vice Chair Porter said you would make it one way?

Mr. Leaman said it would be one way.

Vice Chair Porter said is there any eventual desire to try to connect the elementary school in a way where you can actually drive from one side to the other? My concern is that there is a lot of congestion on Route 42, particularly early in the morning and in the afternoon for pickup. I would be concerned about traffic trying to leave the campus through the elementary school. I was curious whether there would be any attempt to try to do that.

Mr. Leaman said topography really does not allow for that, which is why we have forced parents of elementary students to park in the gym parking lot. There is very limited parking on the elementary side, really only for handicap accessibility or elderly individuals. We like kids to walk, so we are good with the footbridge.

Commissioner Kettler said it looks on Google maps like there is about five spaces...

Mr. Leaman said for special events we partner with Virginia Mennonite Missions with that parking lot pretty regularly.

Mr. Colman said one of the plans for the loop behind the school was also to provide a queueing line for the elementary school. That is part of it, to try to get traffic in there instead of anybody going out to Route 42. This is concentrating everything in two entrances. Right now, there are four entrances. We will limit it to two, although it will be three with a double entrance on the west side. We are trying to minimize that because of traffic conflicts. Better circulation works for everybody coming in and out. I have had a child there before, and I know how it is. People trying to get in and out makes it a little difficult.

Councilmember Dent said it all seems really complicated for something that ought to be fairly simple.

Mr. Colman said I think those are good questions.

Councilmember Dent said you know what you are doing, so it sounds like you have planned it well.

Chair Baugh asked if there were any questions for the applicant's representative. Hearing none, he asked if there was anyone in the room or on the phone wishing to speak to the request.

Ron March said good evening, members of the Commission. I am the owner of Sit Means Sit in Harrisonburg. We are a dog training franchise. I have been working with the City zoning staff for—

Chair Baugh said this is to speak on the matter that was just presented.

Mr. March said oh, sorry. I am sorry.

Chair Baugh said we will get to other public comments at the end of the meeting. For anybody who wishes to comment on the proposed master plan amendments for Eastern Mennonite School and the parking issue.

Chair Baugh closed the public hearing and opened the matter for discussion.

Vice Chair Porter said I guess my question is, do we take these separately or together?

Commissioner Baugh said any objection to taking them together?

Commissioners said no.

Commissioner Kettler said unless somebody wants to vote on them separately, I do not. The only thing I am thinking is that since we recently had a work session in large part on parking and this kind of issue, I am thinking again about why this is before Planning Commission. I am struggling

to think of a reason why I would ever vote no for something like this. I think that is something to consider in the zoning reform process.

Councilmember Dent said I had a similar question. Why do we even need to go through this?

Commissioner Kettler said it says in the ordinance that it requires it.

Councilmember Dent said there ought to be some way of streamlining it. You can do what you want with your parking. I do not know.

Chair Baugh said staff, do you want to speak to that?

Ms. Dang said we have proposed some amendments. At the last work session, we were seeking your input on what those numbers and values should be. What we have proposed is that for public schools, kindergarten through 12th grade, it would be determined based on the public school entity. For private schools, we would consider their parking with their special exception review and consider a parking plan at that time. I am going off memory. I do not know that we have resolved the colleges and universities question.

Mr. Russ said correct, we have not resolved that part yet, but we are still working through it [for private colleges and universities].

Chair Baugh said it is not rocket science. Under the existing ordinance, we have a master plan, and if you are going to change it, you have to come tell us. Hopefully, this will be part of looking at streamlining things that look like they could be handled administratively. We cannot do that tonight.

Vice Chair Porter said I move that we approve the request from Eastern Mennonite School to approve the required number of off-street parking spaces and also approve its request to amend the master plan at 701 and 801 Parkwood Drive and at 1251 Virginia Avenue.

Commissioner Jezior said second.

Chair Baugh called for a roll call vote.

Commissioner Jezior	Aye
Vice Chair Porter	Aye
Councilmember Dent	Aye
Commissioner Kettler	Aye
Chair Baugh	Aye

The motion to recommend approval of the required number of off-street parking spaces and the master plan amendment for Eastern Mennonite School passed (5-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on October 13, 2026.

Consider a request to amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow placement of qualifying manufactured homes where single-family dwellings are permitted

Chair Baugh read the request and asked staff to review.

Ms. Soffel said in 2026, the General Assembly of Virginia enacted SB346/HB655 (https://lis.virginia.gov/bill-details/20261/SB346), which amended Sections 15.2-2247 and 15.2-2290 of the Code of Virginia and became effective July 1, 2026. As amended, Section 15.2-2290 requires localities to allow the placement of qualifying manufactured homes in all zoning districts where site-built housing is permitted and prohibits localities from treating manufactured homes differently or more restrictive than a single-family site-built dwelling in the same zoning district. If approved, the proposed Zoning Ordinance (ZO) amendment will bring the ZO into compliance with Code of Virginia Section 15.2-2290 by amending the definition of "Dwelling, single-family" as follows:

> *Dwelling, single-family:* A building occupied by or designed for occupancy by one (1) family or occupancy as described by the specific zoning district. This use includes a manufactured home, provided the manufactured home is (i) converted to real property in accordance with Virginia Code § 46.2-653.1, (ii) constructed so that the certificate of occupancy is issued within five years following the date of manufacture listed on the home's data plate, and (iii) placed on individual lots.

State requirements for converting a manufactured home to real property involve removing mobility equipment, attaching the unit to real property, surrendering the title to the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, and filing an affidavit of affixation with the local circuit court. Permits and inspections are required for the permanent foundation, installation, and utility connections. Conversion to real property will also require coordination with the City's Real Estate Office and the Building Inspections Division.

No amendment is required to comply with the changes to Section 15.2-2247.

Staff recommends approval of the ZO amendment.

Councilmember Dent said I do not remember exactly where this came from, whether it was federal, state, or just technology advancements. As I recall, manufactured homes are approved or beginning to be made without the chassis or any other mobility equipment, so they are designed to be

permanently installed on a foundation. In any case, it either has to be removed, or it does not have it in the first place, right?

Ms. Soffel said the chassis would remain. It is just the mobility equipment that would be removed.

Councilmember Dent said some of them in the future will not even have a chassis for mobility purposes.

Ms. Soffel said the state definition and our definition include that chassis. The federal changes that occurred still have not gone through the rulemaking process. From what I understand of the rule HUD [US Department of Housing & Urban Development] put out, there are some manufactured homes that are two stories, and the second story would not be required to have a chassis. The first story still would. It is still in rulemaking and in flux.

Councilmember Dent said I think that is where I was thinking of it, the new Road to Home federal legislation.

Ms. Soffel said this Zoning Ordinance amendment brings us into compliance with the State requirements.

Councilmember Dent said which means we do not really have an option to pass it.

Commissioner Jezior said that was my question.

Chair Baugh said no, you do not have to do it. You will just be bound by it even though you did not agree.

Ms. Soffel said it reduces confusion.

Chair Baugh asked if there were any more questions for staff. Hearing none, he opened the public hearing and invited anyone in the room or on the phone wishing to speak to the request. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and opened the matter for discussion.

Commissioner Kettler said I am excited for the possibilities of lowering housing costs. Also, we have to.

Vice Chair Porter said I think this is a recognition that manufactured housing quality has improved significantly. Some of the standards these homes are being held to now are extremely high. I think it is a wise choice on behalf of the legislature to make this opportunity available for people and eliminate some of these barriers to folks being able to live in these types of homes.

Commissioner Kettler said when more of these get built, people will probably have no idea that they are manufactured.

Chair Baugh said there was a time when people thought it was an issue.

Councilmember Dent said yes. I am glad it is becoming a nonissue.

Commissioner Kettler said motion to recommend approval of the Zoning Ordinance amendment as presented by staff.

Councilmember Dent seconded the motion.

Chair Baugh called for a roll call vote.

Councilmember Dent	Aye
Commissioner Kettler	Aye
Commissioner Jezior	Aye
Vice Chair Porter	Aye
Chair Baugh	Aye

The motion to recommend approval of the Zoning Ordinance amendment passed (5-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on October 13, 2026.

Consider a request to amend the Zoning Ordinance to reduce the minimum lot width for single-family detached dwellings in R-8

Chair Baugh read the request and asked staff to review.

Ms. Soffel said in 2026, the General Assembly of Virginia enacted HB 1212 (https://lis.virginia.gov/bill-details/20261/HB1212), which amended the Code of Virginia by adding Section 15.2-2286.2. The new section requires localities with populations of 50,000 or more to adopt and maintain at least one zoning district classification that permits a single-family dwelling on a lot with a minimum lot area not exceeding 3,000 square feet and a minimum lot width not exceeding 30 feet. The amendment became effective on July 1, 2026. If approved, the proposed Zoning Ordinance (ZO) amendment will bring the ZO into compliance with Code of Virginia Section 15.2-2286.2 by having one zoning district classification satisfy the lot area and lot width requirement.

The R-8 district currently requires a minimum lot area of 2,800 square feet, which is below the 3,000-square-foot threshold established by the new state requirement. However, the minimum lot width is 35 feet, which exceeds the maximum width threshold established by the new state requirement. The proposed amendment would amend ZO Section 10-3-59.5, Area and dimensional regulations, to reduce the minimum lot width for a single-family detached dwelling from 35 feet to 30 feet to comply with the new state requirement. All other requirements within ZO Section 10-3-59.5 would remain the same.

Staff recommends approval of the ZO amendment.

Councilmember Dent said again, we do not have to, but we are bound by it.

Chair Baugh said we might as well. If somebody wants to do one at 30 [feet of lot width], we have to approve it. We cannot say it is a violation of the ordinance.

Vice Chair Porter said I am going to ask staff whether this is something you generally support. It is a small change, but it is an important change. I am curious whether you would have any concerns with this change.

Ms. Soffel said there are some concerns with driveways.

Councilmember Dent said I was wondering about that. Does that mean they might not have room for a driveway, or however the layout might work?

Ms. Dang said if they build it where it is 30 feet of lot width, that means there are a lot more driveways serving each of the single-family homes. Correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Russ, but your findings are that this is a lot-width number that is uncommon in the state, if it exists at all.

Mr. Russ said virtually every urban area, for their by-right districts rather than a district you would have to rezone to, has 50- or 60-foot-wide lots as relatively standard. Charlottesville is the only one with something smaller, at 40 feet, and then us. Most urban areas have by-right districts around 50 feet, and then you rezone and address things like driveways in the process.

Vice Chair Porter said I find it interesting that communities with fewer than 50,000 citizens are exempted from this or not included in this change. I do not understand the rationale, and you may not be able to explain it either.

Ms. Dang said I do not either.

Chair Baugh said it captures us because we are more than 50,000. We are right around there, and I have not looked at it lately. Charlottesville and Danville are the two [localities] around our size, but less. Everybody else is either considerably more or considerably less. My sense is that it is driven by more urban jurisdictions. You can make an argument that it would not be the end of the world for Harrisonburg, and 35 feet would probably be okay as well. Please feel free to lobby your local representatives in Richmond to amend this if you think that is appropriate. We have what we have. Particularly in Richmond, I know of some infill projects where they may be 30 feet. They have managed to get some infill in older areas with narrow, townhouse-type structures. Somebody obviously thought it was a good idea.

Vice Chair Porter said fair enough.

Chair Baugh asked if there were any more questions for staff. Hearing none, he asked if there was anyone in the room or on the phone wishing to speak to the request. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and opened the matter for discussion.

Commissioner Kettler said at a certain point, I wonder how meaningful reducing the minimum lot width, or having a minimum lot width, is for small-lot single-family home developments, because the effective limit there is really side setbacks. Even if you have a side setback of five feet, you have a house that is 20 feet wide, and not much smaller, you can make it narrow at that point. The driveway point is well taken. In the zoning reform process, there will probably need to be more discussion about what functional changes might be needed. I am thinking particularly about the townhouse regulations. In terms of this change, once again, we have to, so it makes very little difference.

Councilmember Dent said especially since R-8 is designed to be higher density, right? Duplexes by right, am I remembering that right?

Ms. Dang said you can apply [for a special use permit] to have townhomes.

Councilmember Dent said townhomes, right. Obviously, the minimum would be wider than that. Are there minimums for a duplex side-by-side or a townhome?

Ms. Dang said minimum lot area dimensions and lot-width dimensions.

Councilmember Dent said this is strictly for single-family, with a minimum of 30 feet?

Ms. Dang said that is correct.

Vice Chair Porter said do we know how many potential infill lots in our community might be affected by this and might make it easier for someone to build? Do we have a sense? I do not know if there is an answer. It is probably a very involved question, but I would be curious to find out whether it actually affects anything.

Mr. Russ said in the R-8 district, there are only a handful of lots in that zoning district right now. Very few are a string of R-8 properties where you would be able to go from five lots to six, or something. In practice, I do not know that there is really anything that gets squeezed out of this.

Councilmember Dent said are there areas zoned R-8? I have only seen it as a spot rezoning if somebody wants a porch or whatever.

Ms. Dang said that is correct. That is how properties become zoned R-8. When we created the R-8 district, we did not, on the City's initiative, preemptively rezone properties R-8. People have had to come through a rezoning process to become R-8.

Vice Chair Porter said can I ask what that looks like in the proposed rewrite? I know that might be getting a little ahead, but what would that zone be called?

Ms. Dang said it would be the Urban Neighborhood District.

Mr. Russ said that would impact more properties. Some are older, nonconforming properties that are already fairly close, and some may be a little wider.

Vice Chair Porter said I am not sure how impactful this ends up being, but I appreciate the mindset of our legislature attempting to make it easier to build in general. Particularly with the accessory dwelling unit change, I appreciate the fact that there is some attempt to simplify the process, make it a little more accessible, and make it easier to build. Even though this is nibbling around the edges, it widens the strike zone ever so slightly. I appreciate it.

Chair Baugh said I cannot help but think this is targeted toward something that does not really apply to us in our current configuration. I go back to places I know of where this has come up in Richmond, where you have older residential and narrow lots with zero setbacks. Somebody wants to do this, and when it is a special use permit item, you get a lot of objection because people have decided they do not want another house in the neighborhood. When you are sitting there thinking they want to build one in there, why not let them? I cannot help but think that those types of things are the driver here. When we ask where our section of old, zero-setback residential is where this would apply, the answer is that we do not have it.

Commissioner Kettler said I agree with you, Vice Chair Porter. In terms of the general direction the General Assembly has taken with respect to some land-use options and increasing housing options, these seem like relatively modest changes, keeping in mind that a wide variety of localities are affected. I think they are modest steps in the right direction.

Vice Chair Porter said that is the thing about being a Dillon Rule state. When they are making these things, they have to apply everywhere. Although, in this case, it is cities that are over 50,000 people.

Councilmember Dent said there was the case where we considered it overreach, involving the proposed legislation that said you must be able to build by-right multifamily in all commercial districts, and whatever variations there were. We said, wait a minute, that would negate what we do in Planning Commission and zoning. In general, we want to preserve local authority. However, I appreciate the State making these efforts to make it easier to build housing.

Chair Baugh said for what it is worth, I just checked. Charlottesville and Danville do not make the cut. It is us, and then after us, it is Lynchburg.

Commissioner Kettler aid Danville's population has actually decreased considerably over the last 30 years.

Councilmember Dent said and Charlottesville is smaller than us. That was a surprise to me.

Chair Baugh said City limit, probably.

Commissioner Kettler said motion to recommend approval of the Zoning Ordinance amendment as presented by staff.

Vice Chair Porter said second.

Chair Baugh called for a roll call vote.

Commissioner Kettler	Aye
Vice Chair Porter	Aye
Commissioner Jezior	Aye
Councilmember Dent	Aye
Chair Baugh	Aye

The motion to recommend approval of the zoning ordinance amendment passed (5-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on October 13, 2026.

New Business – Other

Consider requests to initiate Zoning Ordinance amendments related to refuse collection facilities

Chair Baugh read the request and asked staff to review.

Ms. Dang said staff request Planning Commission initiate consideration of Zoning Ordinance amendments related to Refuse Collection Facilities, Article T. – Modifications and Adjustments – Section 10-3-110, General modifications – To amend subsection (h) to expand the screening and location requirements of private refuse collection facilities to include public refuse collection facilities that are not associated with single-family detached and duplex dwellings.

The intent is to complement upcoming amendments to Title 6 – Public Works – Article C. Solid Waste Collection and Removal – Section 6-2-38 Refuse disposal for multifamily projects. The amendments to Section 6-2-38 would allow the City to provide toter-based service for multifamily developments of 6-11 units.

Chair Baugh asked if there any questions for staff.

Commissioner Jezior said would this be changing it from one large dumpster to individual cans at each unit?

Ms. Dang said yes. When somebody has to provide private collection service, they could provide private toter service, but we usually see dumpsters. There have been a few developments that have proposed private toter service. Generally, instead of the dumpster, as you described, we would have a collection of City toters on the property. When it comes to trash collection day, residents would have to pull their toter cans to the public street because City sanitation crews do not enter onto private property to do the collection.

Vice Chair Porter said that was going to be my question. If a private street had been created for the development, would you come onto that street?

Ms. Dang said we would not.

Vice Chair Porter said it is not a question, but it is a statement. My day job is with Habitat for Humanity, and we will be building a lot of these types of smaller developments. This is a wonderful thing; to provide some flexibility and allow people to have this option. A lot of times when we are developing, we want to sell all these properties off. We do not want to have an HOA or some other overlay to handle things like trash collection. This allows people to effectively access City services and pay the fees. I think it is an outstanding change. Thank you for considering it.

Commissioner Kettler said I am going to go ahead and make the motion now if no one else has anything they want to say. I move that the Planning Commission initiate consideration of Zoning Ordinance amendments to the City of Harrisonburg Zoning Ordinance to amend provisions related to refuse collection facilities. The Planning Commission finds that such amendments are required by the public necessity, convenience, general welfare, and good zoning practice, and hereby directs staff to prepare appropriate draft ordinances for public hearings and recommendations in accordance with Section 15.2-2286 of the Code of Virginia.

Commissioner Jezior said second.

Chair Baugh asked if there was any further discussion and then called for a roll call vote.

Commissioner Jezior	Aye
Councilmember Dent	Aye
Vice Chair Porter	Aye
Commissioner Kettler	Aye
Chair Baugh	Aye

The motion to initiate the zoning ordinance amendment passed (5-0).

Consider appointing Nyrma Soffel as Planning Commission's Deputy Secretary

Chair Baugh read the request and asked staff to review.

Ms. Dang said as you all are aware, the bylaws state that the secretary would serve at the request of the Commission and that they be elected every January. Currently, Ms. Montigney is the person who was appointed by the Planning Commission in January, and she has been absent for the past few meetings. Until she returns, we would like to ask that you appoint Ms. Soffel to be the Deputy Secretary.

Chair Baugh said is there a motion to that vote?

Commissioner Kettler said I so move.

Vice Chair Porter said second.

Chair Baugh called for a voice vote. All in favor, say aye.

Commissioners said aye.

Chair Baugh said any opposed?

There was no opposition.

Discuss future amendments to Planning Commission bylaws

Chair Baugh read the request and asked staff to review.

Ms. Dang said staff have proposals for several amendments to the Planning Commission Bylaws and will introduce them at Planning Commission's September 9, 2026 meeting. Please review the current Bylaws in advance of that meeting so that the Commission may discuss proposed changes. Commissioners may also recommend additional changes.

Section 11-1 of the bylaws states:

> These Bylaws may be amended by a majority vote of the entire membership after twenty-eight days prior notice to the Commission members.

To comply with this notice requirement, staff propose presenting draft amendments to the Commission at its October 14, 2026, meeting. The Commission could then consider adoption of the amendments at its November 12, 2026, meeting.

Ms. Dang said what I would like to propose is an amendment to Section 4.4-1, related to the item that you all just voted on about the secretary. I would like to amend it so that it would state that the Director of Community Development would designate an employee of the City of Harrisonburg to serve as secretary. That would address any future turnover or absences that we might have. We would amend Section 4.2 to make it all work together as well. Is there any other section that you all would like to consider [amending]? I could give you all another week or so to think about it and get back to us if anything comes up.

Chair Baugh said okay. I do not think anybody has anything burning right now. Certainly, over the next week or so, if it comes to mind, let staff know.

Ms. Dang said then we will bring the amendments back to you at the next meeting.

Public Comment

Chair Baugh invited anybody to come forward who wants to speak on a matter not on the agenda.

Ron March, owner of Sit Means Sit, came forward and said I apologize for interrupting earlier. We are a dog training business. I have been trying to find a location to conduct on-site, facility-style dog training, which is a little different than what most people know as dog training, since December. Unfortunately, the M-1 zoning has not worked out too well for me. What I wanted to bring to you today is that I believe I have run into an issue that the current ordinance did not anticipate. Currently, the City classifies paid dog training in the same category as kennel operations. I do not operate a kennel. I do not operate a daycare. We do not house dogs overnight. That puts me in a tough place. Dogs come to me in the morning, usually around 9:00 a.m., and then go home to their family in the evening after I provide training to the family as well. Generally, I am asking the Council to consider whether this low-impact use should continue to be governed under a high-volume use like kennels. For comparison, B-2 already permits a lot of animal-related businesses, including veterinarians and groomers. Retail stores have training right within the retail store, which would be a much higher volume than a situation like mine or a similar business. Puppy sales are also allowed, which is pretty high volume for things you might consider waste, et cetera. Ultimately, what I am asking of the group today is to consider separating professional dog training without boarding from kennel use. I would like to seek this Commission's feedback and permission to work with the zoning team to create a draft amendment regarding what animal services would be considered.

Vice Chair Porter said I had a question of staff related to exactly the point that was brought up. For example, I believe PetSmart has a training facility right within its store. I do not have the zoning map in front of me, but what is the zoning for that facility, and how is that different from what he is proposing?

Ms. Dang said B-2. The principal use of PetSmart would be a pet store or a retail use. I know they have accessory uses in there. I was not aware of the dog training, but I suppose we would treat that as an accessory use to the retail use. I am not sure, actually.

Vice Chair Porter said I think this would probably be even lower. [To Mr. March] How many dogs would you be working with on a given day?

Mr. March said if I live my wildest dream, or anybody with a similar business, I might have 10 dogs in a facility. That would mean I would need four to five trainers, so they are supervised the entire time. It is not like a daycare where we have one person managing 10 dogs. We are high-end obedience and high-distraction obedience. Most of our time is spent in public spaces because that is where dogs have the most distraction, but the facility is very useful for dogs that are aggressive or very timid, so that we can get them in a great place before we bring them back out into our community.

Vice Chair Porter said how would the dogs be held during the day if you are not working with them directly? [unintelligible]

Mr. March said no. Dogs cannot work constantly for eight hours. We have to give them breaks, hydration, et cetera. We would use kennels, not like a boarding facility, but like the kennels you have in the back of your vehicle. We use [unintelligible] kennels in our case, which are high-impact molded kennels. We are there with them, keeping them quiet, because noise control is part of the training.

Chair Baugh said your request is specific because the issue is running into M-1.

Mr. March said yes. I can go into M-1, but the challenge is that the spaces are very large. For a small business like me, it is high cost. To be frank, the language in the leases is very predatory for a small business. I think if you are a large business, you can handle some of the risk that is there. Working with my real estate broker, there has never been a good fit over the last nine months. Currently, I have taken on a B-2 space as an office space, but the ideal outcome for me would be in a smaller space, like B-2, for the bigger picture.

Councilmember Dent said did you say that veterinarians and such are allowed in B-2?

Mr. March said yes. Animal services that are defined as veterinarians, groomers, companion pet sales, and a couple of other things.

Councilmember Dent said maybe a solution would be to add to that list something like a non-boarding training, or whatever you might describe.

Mr. March said that is what I would suggest.

Chair Baugh said all right. I think we get what you wanted to hear. Let us go ahead and complete the public comment period. Maybe we will circle back to this one that you are interested in. Thank you. The public comment period remains open if anybody else wants to come forward. Otherwise, I will be looking in the back to see whether anybody has phoned in. I am getting a signal that no one has phoned in, so we will close the public comment. Now, before we move on, let us see if we want to talk a little bit about Mr. March's request. Mechanically, we are back to the thing where we need staff to recommend maybe taking some action to invite staff to work on an ordinance. I think that would be the most direct way to do this procedurally. Does that sound right?

Ms. Dang said my recommendation would be to allow us to explore this, as we have been doing. Mr. March has been working with one of our colleagues, Ms. Bright, on this matter. She shared with us their discussions and what his hope is. The team working on the Zoning Ordinance update has been talking about all the animal-related uses and how to make that fit in the ordinance. I would like to continue exploring it through that means. The other option you have is you could direct us to work it into the current ordinance, but that will take some time as well.

Chair Baugh said is everybody okay with that? We have the sense that we would like staff to continue to work on it with an eye toward bringing some sort of proposal forward.

Ms. Dang said ultimately, we would come back to you with a proposal to officially move forward with an ordinance amendment through the list of uses and the Zoning Ordinance update, in conjunction with that project.

Councilmember Dent said preferably, to me at least, in the shorter term, not waiting until phase two, months or a year from now...

Ms. Dang said yes.

Vice Chair Porter said again, to provide the potential applicant the opportunity to move forward with his business. Is it reasonable to ask whether this is something that Mr. Blanks can look at to see if other communities might have already addressed this issue or provide us with some boilerplate language to follow?

Ms. Dang said that is Mr. Blanks' work with Mr. Russ and me through the Zoning Ordinance update project.

Commissioner Kettler said this appears to be a somewhat unique example, but I think it relates back to the broader point of use restrictions being overly restrictive compared to what they probably ought to be. Other examples that we have seen in previous work sessions have been at-home, by-right, commercial uses. I think this is in keeping with the general direction that I would like to see.

Vice Chair Porter said sometimes, when I read these things, it almost seems like it would be better to say what we will not allow as opposed to listing all of the things that are permissible by right. Sometimes it is a significant list. This is something that falls in a gray area and clearly probably should be permissible with a lot of these other types of businesses that are already allowable. It is just how zoning is done, but it is unfortunate that it is limiting this gentleman's ability to run his business.

Report of Secretary & Committees

Rockingham County Planning Commission Liaison Report

Commissioner Kettler reported on the September 1, 2026, Rockingham County Planning Commission meeting. The following items were on the agenda, and all were recommended for approval:

- Request from Cobblers Valley Development Inc. to amend approximately 11 acres of an existing R-5 (Planned Neighborhood) Master Plan. The property is located west of Wingtip Way (Rt 849), adjoining Cobblers Valley Subdivision.
- Request from Paul Duane Johnson requests to rezone 1.738 acres from R-2 (Medium Density Residential) to PSF (Planned Single Family).
- Request from Lee Sonifrank to rezone 19.518 acres from R-3 (General Residential) to A-2C (General Agricultural with Conditions).
- Staff generated ordinance amendment to sections 17-201 Definitions, 17-607 Supplemental standards for certain land uses, and table 17-606 Land Use and Zoning Table to create a definition, land use permissions, and supplemental standards for the use 'Biomass conversion facility, small scale', and to modify the land use permissions and supplemental standards for the use 'Biomass conversion facility'.

City Council Report

Councilmember Dent reported on the August 25, 2026 City Council Meeting. The following items were on the agenda:

- Consider a request from Trenton Inc. and Bernard LC to rezone 435, 445, 457, 473, 483 & 495 South Main Street and 282, 288, 294 & 298 South Liberty Street (The Lindsey Apartments) - Approved (3-0)

At June 9, 2026 City Council Meeting:

- Consider a request from Caitlin Denbigh for a special use permit at 387 Monticello Avenue – Approved
- Consider a request from VG Harrisonburg Storage LLC for a special use permit at 291 West Wolfe Street and 336 West Market Street - Approved

- Consider a request to amend the Comprehensive Plan to incorporate the Northeast Neighborhood Small Area Plan – Approved
- Consider a request to amend the Zoning Ordinance to create a new term and definition for "poultry hatchery" - Approved
- Consider a request from Jose Antonio Lopez Montiel for a variance from the Subdivision Ordinance at 704 North Liberty Street - Denied

Councilmember Dent said the request for a variance on North Liberty Street was interesting because of the big debate about the sidewalk that we got into. As I recall, the recommendation to approve the request came from Planning Commission at four to two. In Council, it flipped the other way and went with staff's recommendation to deny at four to one. I was the one who voted not to deny it, just not to be changing my vote from what I came to in Planning Commission. There was an understanding of the issue. It is just a matter of where we draw the line if we do not go by the letter of the law.

Vice Chair Porter said I have a question about that. I was disappointed that Council went the direction it did, obviously, because I was a heavy proponent for the variance. I still believe the ordinance is written, Section 10-2-61, paragraph C, regarding this issue with sidewalks and having an adjoining sidewalk and what have you. I would like to see that ordinance looked at simply because the discussion we had was about the cost of those infrastructure improvements on a large project versus a small project. I really feel, in this circumstance, that this particular property is not, under the way it is written, necessarily a hardship due to topographical or unusual conditions. You are not going to meet that standard in this case. I understand why our two lawyers voted in favor of denying the variance. But I think that ordinance is a blunt instrument. I think there needs to be some delineation between the size of the development. Where we draw that line is up for debate. I would ask, I do not know what the process is to get that reconsidered or looked at by staff to make a recommendation, but I really feel that a small development, one or two homes being subdivided within an infill neighborhood, has the cost of putting in a sidewalk placed on a small developer in a way that is disproportionate compared to a developer who can spread that cost out over more units. I feel like there should be some sort of delineation between small developments and larger developments. I know staff was very much in support of denying the variance, but I felt the ordinance as written is not nimble enough to allow for anything other than what is currently written, which is pretty much that if you subdivide and there is an adjoining sidewalk, you are stuck with the infrastructure. I do not know what that process is. I do not know if that is a motion we would have to make, and it would certainly need to be a lot cleaner than what I have just presented. But what is the process of looking at that? I think Commissioner Seitz felt fairly similar to me on this when we discussed it. I think it is worthy of more discussion. I was hoping Council would debate it a little more along those lines than they did. I think Vice Mayor Fleming nibbled around it, but never really got to the meat of that issue. I do think it is something worthy of looking at.

Ms. Dang said at this point in time, the process is that you all could request staff to look at it and evaluate it. We can come back with a recommendation.

Councilmember Dent said do we want to do that?

Vice Chair Porter said is that possible for us to do? Do we need to submit some sort of request to allow you to work with it, or do we need to provide you more guidance?

Ms. Dang said you can provide us with as much guidance as you would like to. We will do the work that we usually do, which is to evaluate and coordinate with other City departments. Admittedly, it will not be a quick turnaround if you are expecting something to be presented in the next month or two. It will take some time for us to evaluate. I do not know at this time what our recommendation will be, because I am already seeing some challenges. But I am going to try to keep an open mind as we explore and consider it.

Vice Chair Porter said I understand. Council was concerned about opening Pandora's box as it related to everybody getting a variance because of the precedent. But it seems to me that we should be able to delineate this a little more. I felt that if there was ever a point where a variance should have been allowed, it was because this was a smaller development. I think it is worth looking at and seeing if there is value in it. I reject the notion that somehow, we are going to complete our sidewalks along Liberty by doing this piecemeal, waiting for people to subdivide and put this infrastructure in place. I feel like we are putting that developer through something in terms of cost that is not going to produce much public good. That was my other concern. I understand the reasons why we ended up where we are, but I think it is worth looking at.

Ms. Dang said we can look into it. Once we come back to you all, I am trying to think through this because we do not usually go through this type of process. I expect that if there is an ordinance amendment to be considered, it would be presented as a request for you all to initiate. Let us think about this more so that we know what we are asking. If we come back and recommend that you initiate something, we know what we are considering.

Vice Chair Porter said is it clear what I am asking for? I am basically saying, let us delineate whether it is worth making an exemption for a certain development size and, if so, where that line would fall.

Ms. Dang said that is where I think it is going to be challenging, figuring out what that line is and what size development.

Mr. Russ said realistically, it will be calling other communities and asking what they do. I know there are certainly some communities that, for a duplex, would not require sidewalks to be installed. With the ADU [accessory dwelling unit] legislation, that was one of the things the state included. You cannot try to require improvements like sidewalks when someone wants to convert their

single-family home into a single-family home with an ADU. We could take that a step further and say that if it is an existing lot intended for a single-family home, and all you are doing is subdividing to make it a duplex, then you do not have to install sidewalks. You could set the bar very low, just moving it one step beyond what we currently do rather than undertaking a full evaluation, if that were something.

Vice Chair Porter said this is a very unique circumstance. I do not know if there are a lot of infill lots in the area with a sidewalk on one side. It is just something to consider. Again, it did not sit right with me. I feel like it is worth creating better public policy by potentially looking at an exemption.

Commissioner Kettler said speaking for myself, I voted against the variance, but I am very interested in that policy discussion as well. As you suggested, my decision had more to do with following the guidelines as they are currently set, but it is not necessarily opposition to reevaluating those guidelines themselves. I think what Mr. Russ just highlighted, in terms of conversions and duplexes, is a good example of that. I think that might be a good example where it makes sense to consider it. If we can get some right-of-way where there is an existing right-of-way, that is a different matter. If someone is trying to convert a single-family home into a duplex, I do not want to add additional costs like that. Certainly not if they are subdividing and hoping to sell one part of it and increase housing stock that way as well. The only other thing I would add is, in terms of infrastructure costs, as we move into the broader zoning reform process, I mentioned a few months ago the townhouse regulations. I really like those regulations in that they allow for an alley in the back, require an alley in the back for rear parking, and do not require other additional parking beyond that. It neatly deals with parking in relation to increased density, but also increases the walkability of the space by allowing trees where there otherwise would just be parking lots or driveways. But it is also increasing infrastructure costs. I think evaluating different ways to encourage more housing and lower costs more broadly while still meeting the needs that we have is important. I do not think we are going to solve that anytime soon.

Vice Chair Porter said in this particular case, is it simply just making a request, or do I need to make a motion?

Chair Baugh said as long as everybody is satisfied and staff is good to move forward, that is fine.

Vice Chair Porter said I am perfectly fine with that. I did not know. This is more about protocol or procedure than anything else.

Ms. Dang said let me recap and see what, as far as procedure goes, you all agree to, and if Mr. Russ agrees with this: the Planning Commission is asking staff to explore this topic. Staff will come back at some point in the future with a recommendation, whether it is to amend or not amend. If we have a recommendation to amend the ordinance, then that would be when you would make the motion to initiate the amendment. We will work on the amendment at that point in time. I feel

like we need to explore this topic a little more to see what options there are and what the thresholds may or may not be before we can put together what that ordinance might look like.

Vice Chair Porter said I appreciate you taking it on. I know it is putting more on your already full plate. Again, it is something we may look at down the road. We may not ever have a case come before us again like that, but I think it is a worthwhile thing to consider. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Councilmember Dent said several things that some of us had put on the agenda included passenger rail. Thank you, Commissioner Kettler, for presenting in Mr. Morey's absence. That was from Blue Ridge Rail, which Commissioner Kettler and I are both on the steering committee for, to submit a comment to the Department of Rail and Public Transit, DRPT [Department of Rail & Public Transportation], to provide passenger rail service to Harrisonburg. Those comments were due September 30. In response to the presentation, City Council agreed to direct the City Attorney to come up with a letter or a resolution to vote on at the next meeting in September and send in time to DRPT. That was a good two-step process that we had time to do.

Councilmember Dent shared updates on additional items on the Council agenda.

Other Matters

Chair Baugh said does anybody have anything before we ask staff to tell us about next month?

Commissioner Kettler said briefly, two things. First, I want to echo what Councilmember Dent was saying about bringing passenger rail back to Harrisonburg. In addition to City Council's support, as of right now, there are also 680 comments in favor going to DRPT. You can learn more at blueridgerail.org, or just ask me.

Vice Chair Porter said I did not get to watch your presentation, but when did we stop having passenger rail, and why?

Commissioner Kettler said I believe it was 1946, but it was sometime in the 1940s. I do not remember why.

Chair Baugh said the rail system here is awkwardly laid out, and that is a big piece of it. It was compounded by major rail regulation in the 1980s, when abandonments went from being hard things that needed substantial justification to asking why we were bothering the railroads if they said they did not need a line. We are an example of one of them. There used to be rail access to Harrisonburg from the north. They abandoned some little, tiny segment, presumably for no reason other than [unintelligible]... Because the poultry industry still needs a lot of feed, that meant the only way to get here directly was that the line runs up basically Page Valley. You have to go to Elkton and get a train that just comes to Harrisonburg. If it went north, it cannot move very far

because it eventually dead ends. You can go south and connect to CSX at Staunton. In between is a short line, the Shenandoah Valley Railroad, which I helped form many years ago. When Norfolk Southern abandoned that line, we got a little private short line. The short version is that the poultry industry and local poultry groups still need that railroad. It is essentially owned by them. At the time, they said it was the only time they had ever had a joint venture. The economics were such that, even though it was more expensive to bring grain in using the two railroads through Staunton, they understood that once that option went away and they were totally captive shippers on Norfolk Southern, then guess what was going to happen to the rates. Because of the way the lines are set up, it is challenging to figure out how to get in and out of Harrisonburg with other places. The lines go through Staunton, and they go through Elkton. We are sort of the end of the line, really. Certainly, from Norfolk Southern's standpoint, which serves Harrisonburg, we are the end of the earth. They come to Harrisonburg, and then they basically stop.

Commissioner Kettler said in terms of the basics, the reason this is happening right now is that they need comments by September 30 as part of their four-year plan. We can do it now, or we can do it four years from now. Doing it now is generally better. The approach right now is route-neutral, which means south through Staunton or east through Elkton. Part of the rationale is that if you ask for a particular route or a particular kind of service, they can just say no. If you ask for a study to evaluate options and so forth, then they may have to do a study. That is the first step to actually getting the thing done.

Councilmember Dent said they being the General Assembly, directing DRPT to do a study? Is that how it works next?

Commissioner Kettler said Gabriel [Morey] is really the best person to ask about that, but in general, yes, that is my understanding. Thank goodness for him. He was raised in Harrisonburg, and he is a project manager at DC Metro. This would not be happening without him.

Councilmember Dent said it is a long-term vision anyway. It may happen five, ten, or 20 years from now, or not. But it will not happen if we do not ask for it.

Commissioner Kettler said exactly.

Chair Baugh said presumably, Staunton is on Amtrak, but then you have the Shenandoah Valley Railroad in there. You have a little short line between Norfolk Southern and CSX connections.

Commission Kettler said the state has been making a lot of investments in right-of-way, which really improves travel time. The only other thing I wanted to mention is that I would like, not necessarily today, some kind of update on what is going on with the housing fund. Is that next month, or [unintelligible]?

Ms. Dang said we will talk to our Housing Coordinator to see when a good time for some discussion is. I know that has been on her mind, but I do not know about the timing, so I will ask.

Councilmember Dent said I do not remember exactly where it is, but I believe there is a study in the [unintelligible] and then the consultant.

Vice Chair Porter said that was my understanding that there was another...

Councilmember Dent said we need to know the legalities, the constraints, the financing, and this and that. It is not just, voilà, poof, housing fund, which would have been nice over these past few years if we could have done it. But we are working on it slowly but surely. That is the gist of it.

Review Summary of next month's applications

Ms. Dang reviewed the items anticipated for the October 14 agenda:

1. Subdivision Ordinance Variations & Exception – The Lindsey
2. Zoning Ordinance Amendment – Shopping Center Parking

The meeting adjourned at 7:47 p.m.

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Richard Baugh, Chair Nyrma Soffel, Deputy Secretary