



COUNTY OF LOUISA

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Chris Coon, Deputy County Administrator

DATE: May 05, 2026

RE: Zoning Ordinance Amendment – CUP for Electric Transmission Facilities

Purpose

The purpose of this memorandum is to present a proposed amendment to Chapter 86 of the Louisa County Land Development Regulations to establish Conditional Use Permit (CUP) requirements and performance standards for electric transmission facilities.

This amendment is intended to operationalize the recently proposed Comprehensive Plan Addendum by creating a clear, consistent regulatory framework for evaluating transmission infrastructure proposals at the local level.

Background

As regional demand for electric transmission infrastructure continues to increase, localities are increasingly impacted by large-scale infrastructure proposals that can have long-term effects on land use patterns, rural character, and community development.

While the siting and approval of electric transmission facilities ultimately fall under the jurisdiction of the Virginia State Corporation Commission and may involve the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, local governments retain authority over land use and zoning decisions. This includes the ability to require Conditional Use Permits and establish reasonable standards to evaluate impacts on the community.

The proposed amendment ensures Louisa County has a defined, transparent, and defensible process for reviewing transmission-related infrastructure, rather than relying on case-by-case determinations without established criteria.

The amendment applies broadly to all transmission infrastructure meeting defined thresholds and is not tied to any single project. While recent regional discussions, including projects such as the Valley Link Transmission Line, highlight the importance of this framework, the ordinance is intended to provide long-term guidance for all future proposals.

Connection to Comprehensive Plan and Survey Results

This amendment is directly supported by the County's recent Comprehensive Plan survey, which received over 2,100 responses and demonstrated strong community consensus on growth management and land preservation priorities.

Key findings supporting this ordinance include:

- **Protection of Rural Character and Agricultural Lands**
 - 1,811 respondents identified preservation of farms and forestland as *very important*
 - 1,518 respondents identified rural character as a top value
- **Strategic Infrastructure Planning**
 - 1,237 respondents prioritized infrastructure improvements
 - 1,616 respondents support requiring utility usage analysis for major projects
- **Growth and Development Controls**
 - 1,610 respondents support focusing growth where infrastructure already exists
 - 1,271 respondents identified overdevelopment as a major concern
- **Expectations for Development Oversight**
 - 1,148 respondents support requiring Conditional Use Permits for developments
 - 1,749 respondents support requiring traffic impact analysis with VDOT concurrence

Collectively, these results demonstrate clear public support for:

- Careful evaluation of major infrastructure projects,
- Protection of rural and agricultural lands, and
- Stronger oversight mechanisms for large-scale development impacts.

Summary of Proposed Amendment

The proposed ordinance establishes a new section for Conditional Use Permits for Electric Transmission Facilities.

Key components include:

1. Applicability

- Requires a CUP for:
 - Substations, switching stations, and related infrastructure associated with transmission lines ≥ 69 kV
- Applies to:
 - New facilities
 - Expansions or modifications that increase capacity or footprint

2. General Standards

Applicants must demonstrate:

- Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan
- Compatibility with surrounding land uses
- Minimization of impacts to adjacent properties and communities

3. Siting and Routing Requirements

- Requires evaluation of alternative routes, including:
 - Existing transmission corridors
 - Utility easements
 - Transportation corridors
- Requires demonstration that the selected route:
 - Minimizes residential impacts
 - Avoids fragmentation of agricultural lands
 - Reduces impacts to scenic and historic resources

4. Setbacks and Buffers

- Establishes case-by-case setbacks based on:
 - Voltage
 - Structure height
 - Surrounding land use
- Encourages vegetative buffering and screening

5. Visual and Design Standards

- Requires:
 - Non-reflective materials
 - Design consistency
 - Visual impact simulations

6. Environmental and Agricultural Protections

- Requires:
 - Minimization of land disturbance
 - Protection of active agricultural operations
 - Post-construction restoration plans

7. Construction and Infrastructure Protections

- Requires a Construction Management Plan, including:
 - Traffic and haul routes
 - Noise, dust, and lighting controls
- Requires:
 - Pre-construction road condition surveys
 - Repair or replacement of damaged infrastructure
 - Potential financial assurances

8. Community Coordination

- Requires:
 - Advance notice to property owners
 - Designated local contact for issue resolution

9. Vegetation and Long-Term Maintenance

- Requires:
 - Vegetation management plans
 - Long-term maintenance responsibility identification
 - Decommissioning provisions if facilities are abandoned

10. Flexibility and Legal Consistency

- Allows for waivers where:
 - Engineering or regulatory constraints apply
- Ensures consistency with state and federal authority

Relationship to Comprehensive Plan Addendum

This ordinance amendment is the implementation tool for the Comprehensive Plan Addendum.

- The Comprehensive Plan establishes policy direction (what the County wants)
- The CUP ordinance establishes regulatory authority (how the County evaluates and conditions projects)

Together, they:

- Provide a consistent framework for decision-making
- Strengthen the County's position in state and federal proceedings
- Ensure alignment between long-term planning and day-to-day land use decisions

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission:

1. Review the proposed zoning ordinance amendment;
2. Provide feedback and direction;
3. Authorize advertisement and referral to the Planning Commission for public hearing and recommendation; and
4. Consider adoption following the public hearing process.