



**Board of Supervisors
County of Louisa
Monday, September 21, 2026
Louisa County Public Meeting Room
3:30 PM**

CALL TO ORDER - 5:00 P.M.

Chairman Adams called the September 21, 2026, worksession of the Louisa County Board of Supervisors to order at 3:31 p.m.

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Tommy J. Barlow	Mountain Road District Supervisor	Present	5:00 PM
Fitzgerald A. Barnes	Patrick Henry District Supervisor	Present	5:00 PM
Christopher C. McCotter	Cuckoo District Supervisor	Present	5:00 PM
H. Manning Woodward, III	Louisa County Supervisor	Present	5:00 PM
R. T. Williams	Jackson District Supervisor	Present	5:00 PM
Duane A. Adams	Mineral District Supervisor	Present	6:00 PM
Rachel G. Jones	Green Springs District Supervisor	Present	5:00 PM

Others Present: Christian Goodwin, County Administrator; Wanda Colvin, Deputy County Administrator; Chris Coon, Deputy County Administrator; Patricia Smith, County Attorney; Alexandra Stanley, Administrative Operations Manager/Deputy Clerk; Andy Wade, Director of Economic Development; Linda Buckler, Director of Community Development; and Scott Raettig, Director of Information Technology

INFORMATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS

Discussion – Rural Preservation

The Board of Supervisors held a work session to discuss rural preservation and residential growth management in Louisa County. Staff explained that the purpose was to ensure the Board and Planning Commission were working from the same information as they considered possible changes to the County's land use policies. Staff emphasized that Louisa's growth pressures are not unique, that both action and inaction have consequences, and that the various preservation tools could be considered individually rather than adopted as a single package.

Staff reviewed the pace and fiscal impact of residential growth. Louisa County had issued approximately 320 new addresses through August 31, 2026. On average, each 100 homes were estimated to generate approximately 30 students and additional demand for County services. Staff estimated an average annual County service cost of approximately \$4,700 per home, compared with approximately \$3,900 in revenue per home, illustrating the fiscal pressure associated with continued residential growth. The presentation similarly identified Louisa's location, quality of services, and comparatively low costs as factors contributing to its rapid growth.

Staff then reviewed existing zoning and preservation conditions. The majority of the County remains zoned A-1 or A-2 Agricultural. Approximately 3,945 agricultural parcels, representing roughly 202,000 acres, were enrolled in land-use taxation, with an average parcel size of 51

acres. In contrast, approximately 15,359 A-1/A-2 parcels were not enrolled in land use, with an average size of only six acres. Staff identified the increasing number of smaller parcels as an important trend to monitor because continued subdivision can reduce the amount of land available for agriculture and forestry.

The Board reviewed several existing and potential preservation tools, including land-use taxation, Agricultural and Forestal Districts (AFDs), conservation easements, zoning changes, termed Purchase/Lease of Development Rights (PDR/LDR) programs, and Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs. Staff distinguished the tools based on whether they are voluntary, permanent, and whether they create a financial impact for the County. Conservation easements and TDRs were identified as permanent preservation mechanisms, while AFDs and termed PDRs provide temporary protection.

Staff reported approximately 37,537 acres in Agricultural and Forestal Districts, with an additional 6,082 acres pending approval. Discussion included continuing to expand AFD participation, increasing education regarding land-use taxation, and improving landowners' access to conservation easements. Because establishing a conservation easement can involve significant legal, surveying, and evaluation costs, staff discussed the possibility of a County grant or cost-sharing program to assist participating landowners.

Potential zoning amendments for A-1 and A-2 properties outside designated growth areas were discussed. Concepts included increasing minimum lot sizes within a range of approximately 6 to 15 acres, increasing setbacks from approximately 50 to 250 feet, increasing road-frontage requirements from approximately 250 to 550 feet, establishing width-to-depth ratios, modifying family-division requirements, and revising or eliminating private-lane provisions. Staff stressed that these ranges represented concepts under discussion and not agreed-upon recommendations.

For family divisions, discussion centered on establishing a minimum ownership period to discourage use of family subdivisions as a means of circumventing ordinary subdivision requirements. One concept would require at least five years of ownership before qualifying for a family division, followed by a ten-year retention period for owners who had held the property for five to nine years and a five-year retention period for owners who had owned the property for ten years or longer. Staff also discussed concerns that private-lane provisions originally intended to provide limited access to back acreage were being used to facilitate larger subdivisions.

Board members raised concerns about the unintended consequences of substantially increasing minimum lot sizes. Particular concern was expressed that very large minimum lots could still be developed for residential purposes while making land less affordable for local families and permanently removing acreage from productive agricultural or forestry use. Experience in other counties was cited where larger-lot requirements resulted in farmland being divided into expensive residential estates rather than preserving active farms. The discussion reflected interest in finding a more moderate approach, particularly within the A-2 district, while recognizing that A-1 land may warrant different treatment because of its agricultural purpose.

The Board also discussed private lanes in detail. While members acknowledged that the existing provisions can be used in ways not originally intended, there was concern about eliminating private lanes entirely. Members noted that properly limited private lanes can provide access to back acreage and reduce pressure for strip development along existing state-maintained roads.

The discussion favored examining ways to tighten or clarify the private-lane provisions rather than automatically requiring every subdivision to construct a state-standard road.

A significant portion of the discussion concerned how new zoning requirements would affect existing legal lots. Board members expressed concern that applying a substantially larger setback, such as 250 feet, to existing smaller or unusually shaped parcels could effectively eliminate their buildable area. Staff and the County Attorney clarified that, under the County's current nonconforming-lot provisions, legally existing parcels would not necessarily be required to comply with subsequently adopted setback requirements. The Board stressed that any ordinance should be carefully drafted so that new requirements apply prospectively and do not unintentionally render existing legal and buildable lots unusable.

Members emphasized the usefulness of the questionnaires completed by Board and Planning Commission members because they required participants to consider how individual changes could interact and create unintended consequences. There was general discussion that the County should proceed methodically and consider the tools individually, beginning with fundamental issues such as minimum lot size because those decisions could affect setbacks, frontage requirements, preservation programs, and other policies.

Staff described a potential 10-year termed PDR/LDR program under which landowners would voluntarily agree not to exercise development rights in exchange for annual County payments. Payments could be based on the underlying value of the land, and parcels could be prioritized based on factors such as acreage, road frontage, existing division rights, and overall development potential. Board members recognized that such a program would require a reliable long-term funding source because each agreement would obligate the County to make payments throughout the term.

The Board also spent considerable time discussing Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs). Under the concept, development rights from rural "sending" parcels could be sold and permanently transferred to "receiving" parcels within designated growth areas. Staff noted that TDRs could provide permanent preservation with relatively little direct County expense but would require a viable marketplace of buyers and sellers. Creating that market could require changes to development density within growth areas so that developers seeking additional density would have an incentive to purchase transferred rights.

Board members expressed concern about the County becoming overly involved in private TDR transactions, particularly by conducting title searches or guaranteeing that particular development rights could ultimately be exercised. Members discussed whether the County's role could be limited primarily to recording or tracking transferred rights while leaving due diligence to buyers and sellers. Concerns were also raised about potential County liability if a development right were represented as usable but later could not be exercised because of soils, topography, zoning, or other site limitations.

At the same time, members expressed interest in continuing to explore TDRs as a way to compensate rural property owners for development potential they might otherwise lose through zoning changes. Staff noted that Virginia's existing statutory framework has resulted in limited use of TDR programs and that legislative changes may be necessary to make the tool more effective. The presentation characterized TDRs as a means of redirecting density from rural areas to designated growth areas through a voluntary market.

The Board acknowledged the need to balance several competing objectives: preserving Louisa County's rural and agricultural character, protecting private property rights and land values, maintaining opportunities for local families to own property, directing appropriate development toward growth areas, and managing the increasing cost of providing public services to a growing population.

Members discussed whether the County's objective should be primarily to redirect residential development from rural areas into designated growth areas or to slow residential growth more broadly. It was noted that thousands of residential lots may already have development potential under existing approvals, meaning that some future growth will occur regardless of new policies. The central question was therefore how the County should manage development beyond what is already entitled and what Louisa County should look like after that development occurs.

No single preservation strategy was selected during the work session. Rather, the Board indicated that the issues should continue to be evaluated one at a time, with attention to both intended and unintended consequences. The discussion reflected interest in continuing existing voluntary preservation programs while further examining zoning changes, PDR/LDR and TDR programs, family divisions, private lanes, and potential legislative changes needed to provide the County with additional growth-management tools.

ADJOURNMENT

On the motion Supervisor Barnes, seconded by Supervisor Williams, which carried by a vote of 7-0, the Board voted to adjourn the September 21, 2026, worksession meeting at 4:49 p.m.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF:
DUSTIN E. ADAMS, CHAIRMAN
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
LOUISA COUNTY, VIRGINIA