

STAFFORD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION MINUTES

January 8, 2026

The meeting of the Stafford County Historical Commission on Thursday, January 8, 2026, was called to order at 3:10 PM by Anita Dodd in the ABC Room of the George L. Gordon, Jr., Government Center.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Anita Dodd, Jane Conner, Emma Dietrich, Martha Newton, Robert Orrison and Callie Knight

MEMBERS ABSENT: Aaron Mastin

STAFF PRESENT: Nancy Kotting, Harriet Donkoh

GUESTS PRESENT: Kathi Austin

CALL TO ORDER:

Ms. Dodd called the meeting to order at 3:10 PM.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Roll was called and there was a quorum.

ADDITIONS, DELETIONS AND APPROVAL OF THE REGULAR AGENDA

Ms. Kotting requested to add *Updates to the Bylaws* to Unfinished Business. Ms. Dodd motioned to approve the agenda as amended. Mr. Orrison seconded the motion. The amended agenda passed a unanimous consent.

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Election of Chairperson

Ms. Conner nominated Ms. Dodd for Chairperson. The nomination was accepted, and with no opposition, Ms. Dodd was elected Chairperson by unanimous consent.

2. Election of Vice Chairperson

Ms. Dodd nominated Mr. Orrison for Vice Chairperson. There was a unanimous acceptance of the nomination. Mr. Orrison was elected Vice Chairperson.

3. Election of Secretary

Ms. Dietrich nominated Ms. Newton for Secretary. The nomination was accepted and Ms. Newton was elected Secretary by unanimous consent.

4. Vote to Approve 2026 Meeting Calendar

With no questions, objections or changes, Ms. Dietrich motioned to approve the meeting calendar. She was seconded by Ms. Newton. The Calendar was approved by unanimous consent.

5. Review Staff Liaison Guidelines and Basic Legal Information for BACC

Ms. Kotting reviewed requirements under Virginia Code § 2.2-3707(D) regarding public notice for meetings. She noted that every public body must provide notice of the date, time, location, and any remote location of its meetings by:

- Posting notice on the County website (which serves as the prominent public location).
- Posting notice in the office of the clerk or, if there is no clerk, in the office of the Chief Administrator.
- For this commission, notices of regular meetings are posted at least three working days in advance; in practice, staff distributes notice approximately one week prior.
- The Staff Liaison sends the draft agenda to the Chair one week in advance for review and any changes before publication.

After approval, the agenda and available supporting materials are published on the County website and emailed to all commission members. Ms. Kotting stated her goal for this new year is to provide all supporting documents to members one week in advance along with the agenda.

For special or emergency meetings or cancellations, “reasonable notice” is provided as soon as possible. An example was given of a recent ARB meeting that was canceled on very short notice due to staff illness and unavailability. The liaison reminded members that, as a public entity, all materials and records of the commission are subject to FOIA. Everything on the record and any materials produced by staff for the commission and used in deliberations are available to the public upon request, are posted with the agenda on the website, and hard copies are made available at meetings.

Ms. Kotting further reported that the **Brief Overview and Basic Legal Guide for Boards and Commission Members** is now provided digitally rather than physical binders and that at the end of the meeting, members will receive an email link from Vicki Sowers with access to all documents. Members may print and create personal binders if they wish. Ms. Kotting offered to assist any member experiencing technical difficulties accessing the materials. Key legal topics covered in the guide include:

Authority of Boards and Commissions
Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)
Public record retention requirements
Virginia State and Local Government Conflicts of Interest Act
Guidance on how to conduct Board/Commission business
Members were asked to review these materials going into the new year.

6. Presentation by Freedom Forge Foundation / Hunters Iron Works

Ms. Kathi Austin, one of the founders and current President of the Freedom Forge Foundation, addressed the Commission. She expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to present and stated she would provide Ms. Kotting with a copy of her presentation for records and note-keeping purposes.

Ms. Austin introduced Ms. Jerrilynn Eby MacGregor, the organization’s resident/area historian, noting that Ms. MacGregor could answer detailed historical questions. She explained that the Freedom Forge Foundation, was established in 2025. The purpose of the foundation is to preserve, interpret, and elevate the story of local Revolutionary War figure James Hunter and the military industrial complex he established, known as Hunter’s Iron Works and/or the Rappahannock Forge, noting names are used interchangeably. Ms. Austin reported that the Freedom Forge Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization incorporated in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Foundation has obtained a tax identification number and has submitted its application to the IRS for a final determination letter, which is pending. The organization is represented legally by McGuire Woods. She stated that additional information about the Foundation is available on its website, www.freedomforgefoundation.org which provides the Mission Statement, EIN, and a list of Board Members.

Ms. Austin noted that many residents and travelers have likely passed the historic marker for Hunter's Iron Works along U.S. Route 17 at Old Forge Road without stopping. The Foundation intends to change this by promoting greater public awareness and visitation. The goal is to help locals and tourists discover and experience the Revolutionary War-era Hunter's Iron Works/Rappahannock Forge site and to advance its recognition as the "birthplace of America's defense industry." She emphasized that this proposed designation has not previously been undertaken and that the Freedom Forge Foundation intends to lead this effort.

Ms. Austin reported that a letter of intent has been executed between the Freedom Forge Foundation and the Blaisdell Baker Center developers. As part of their rezoning application, the developers have notified Stafford County of their intent to proffer approximately 35 acres of the former Hunter's Iron Works site to the Freedom Forge Foundation. Ms. Austin stated that the foundation has worked to secure this land as a fee simple donation, which would convey full title and stewardship of the property to the foundation. She noted that the foundation intends to place the site under a conservation or land preservation easement, most likely in partnership with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, which has an established record of work in Stafford County. Additionally, it was reported that the developer has committed to constructing the necessary public access road to serve the donated property, so that required access infrastructure would be in place as part of the development.

Ms. Austin stated that the Freedom Forge Foundation has received Letters of Support from the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust and the City of Fredericksburg, noting that Fredericksburg owns part of the easement on the riverfront where the site is located. She explained that the anticipated donation consists of approximately 35 acres, identified as Tax Map Parcels 53-1R and 53-1S. She noted that the site is already listed on the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Register of Historic Places under Reference No. 74002147. The property is located approximately one mile from the historic Port of Falmouth and is prominently referenced in the 2014 Master Interpretive Plan for the Historic Falmouth District. She expressed the Foundation's hope that this project will help advance and add momentum to county efforts to further establish and develop the historic district. Ms. Austin noted that James Hunter is buried at Union Church Cemetery. She reported that the historic Hunter's Iron Works site historically contained a gristmill, sawmill, blacksmith shop, tannery, nailery, carpenter shops, a blast furnace, wheelwright shop, and a large iron foundry/iron works with gun manufacturing at its center.

She stated that, except for one occupied rental residence at the end of Blaisdell Lane, the land remains undeveloped, characterized as hilly and densely wooded along the Rappahannock River. Although termites and river silt have impacted the site over time, several historic physical elements remain, including multiple foundations, stonework, and most of the canal that once powered the Iron Works.

Ms. Austin emphasized that the natural state and archaeological richness of the property retain important contextual integrity, and that Hunter's Iron Works was the largest industrial furnace and forge complex in the colonies and demonstrated key advancements in the iron industry. It is the first to harness the Rappahannock River's water power for major industrial purposes. It played a role in supplying the continental Navy, Army and Marines with muskets, pistols, swords and other military necessities, including Camp kettles to shovels, to ship anchors and more than 1500 troops were once sent to defend it. So that's how important and relevant it was during the Revolutionary War period. She stated that there are plans to get it designated as the birthplace of America's defense industry. It involved an extensive labor force that included skilled Quakers, free black craftsmen and enslaved people, and their story and contribution is necessary to elevate this very important story and noted that James Hunter had an expansion of what may be considered social conventions of the day as he lived openly with his enslaved partner and children and provided substantially for them in his will.

Ms. Austin stated that, upon acquisition of the land and development of the site for public access by the Freedom Forge Foundation, the project is expected to:

- Promote appreciation of environmental and river habitats

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- Provide recreational trails and related activities
- Establish museum and educational experiences
- Interpret the evolution of local industry, from water-powered operations and blast furnaces through electricity and, more recently, data centers

She emphasized that land acquisition is the first step. Planned follow-up activities include launching a capital fundraising campaign and conducting a thorough Phase II archaeological survey. She noted that the developer has proffered to perform this survey as part of the project but also stressed that the County should strongly encourage it, and if necessary, the Foundation would pursue completing the survey after acquisition. Ms. Austen mentioned she could provide additional historical background if requested but focused her remarks on the Foundation's vision and planned activities.

She stated that the Freedom Forge Foundation has already held conversations with Parks and Recreation regarding the development of trails, additional public access facilities, and a history program and camp schedule to be implemented once the site is open to the public.

She noted that the Foundation had previously worked with Tourism through Lisa Logan, and although she has not yet met with the Economic Development Authority since Ms. Logan's departure, there had been contact earlier to discuss promoting the site, particularly as the "birthplace of America's defense industry."

Ms. Austin reported that the Foundation has also met with representatives from the City of Fredericksburg, Friends of the Rappahannock, and the Virginia Outdoor Center to explore potential recreational opportunities. She emphasized that the project could bring significant benefits to the County. She further explained that the Foundation hopes to establish an institute for fellows and civic engagement and, as a long-term goal, to reconstruct the four-story armory on the property for multi-use purposes. She clarified that this was a long-range vision rather than an immediate action.

Ms. Austin noted that the next major step would be to elevate the story nationally during the Virginia 250 commemorations. The Foundation is planning an event for June 5–7, 2026 and has already formed a committee that is working effectively on this effort.

Ms. Austin reported that the Foundation has been coordinating with Tourism but will need to re-engage that partnership in the new year. She outlined plans for living history experiences and reenactments, noting that proposed use of cannons and horses will require coordination with the Fire Marshal and other appropriate officials. She stated that, because James Hunter was a Scottish immigrant, the Foundation has been in contact with Clan Hunter organizations worldwide and is exploring the possibility of inviting the Chief Laird of Clan Hunter to attend and hold a clan gathering in Falmouth. She emphasized that these activities present significant tourism and economic opportunities for the area. Planned event locations include the Moncure Conway property as the primary site, with Parks and Recreation reviewing use of the rugby field across the street and offering the Old Grizzle site, adjacent to Hunter's burial place, as a potential location for a large tent and related activities. On the final day, the Foundation hopes to hold a commemoration involving the Navy, Army, and Marine Corps, in recognition of Hunter's role in supplying the Continental forces.

Ms. Austin added that further historical background can be provided upon request and noted that local historian Ms. MacGregor was present and could offer additional detailed historical information.

Ms. Austin concluded by stating that her passion for the project is rooted in the fact that she is a direct descendant of James Hunter through her mother's line. She noted that she grew up with Hunter's story and that his legacy has influenced her own career. Having returned to the area after approximately 35 years working elsewhere, she views this effort as part of her personal legacy and expressed her desire to help ensure that history properly remembers James Hunter as a "forgotten hero."

7. 50-Year Rule Review Request: 899 Kellogg Mill Road (Staff Report)

Ms. Kotting presented the staff report for the 50-year rule request for 899 Kellogg Mill Road. She noted that members had been provided with the criteria used to evaluate such requests and that she relied on those standards in preparing her analysis. Ms. Nunez Eloyna, the owner, was present

She explained that, due to illness, she had been unable to conduct a physical site visit but was confident in her recommendation based on visual information obtained through the County's GIS system and other online resources. The property owner was present and available to answer questions.

Ms. Kotting described the structure as a standard center-hall farmhouse that has undergone extensive renovation with exterior replacement materials. While the original exterior materials are no longer present, and the replacement materials (believed to include vinyl siding and pressure-treated lumber) do not replicate the historic fabric, the form, scale, massing, and location of the building remain consistent with the original design. As a result, the dwelling continues to contribute to the rural landscape as a representative vernacular agricultural structure. Due to the application of modern exterior finishes, an in-depth analysis of original workmanship was not possible, although some elements remain somewhat visible. The building is not a structural reconstruction; rather, it is the original structure with altered finishes. The construction date is recorded as 1910, and the building remains in its original location on a parcel of 3.662 acres.

Based on these factors, Ms. Kotting recommended approval of the 50-year rule request for this property. She noted that, even if a second dwelling is allowed under the 50-year rule, any new construction would still be required to comply with all applicable zoning and building regulations, including setbacks and footprint limitations. A member informally noted that a new structure may not be permitted to exceed 25% of the original house's footprint, subject to verification by zoning and building staff. Staff noted that they could not confirm the specific standard referenced and would need to verify it and further explained that this rule is somewhat different from related provisions but clarified that the relatively small parcel size will inherently limit the scale of any additional construction.

Members asked the property owner about the building's location on the parcel. The owner explained that the house is situated near the corner of the lot, along one road, with another road forming the other boundary, so it does not sit in the middle of the property.

In discussion, members noted their support for preserving the structure primarily because its original massing and floor plan remain intact, despite the addition of modern elements. They observed that this type of architectural form, once common in Stafford County, is no longer being built and is increasingly rare as such structures are gradually lost. A brief question was also raised as to whether the existing fireplace is still in working condition and the owner clarified that it was not.

With no further discussion, Ms. Kotting recommended approval of the 50-year rule request for 899 Kellogg Mill Road. Ms. Dietrich moved to approve the request. She was seconded by Ms. Newton.

8. 50-Year Rule Review Request: 1163 Truslow (Staff Report)

Ms. Kotting presented the application for 1163 Truslow Road. The owner was not present. The property is a 3-acre parcel with a primary dwelling constructed in 1907. Ms. Kotting provided additional photographs showing the front façade, east façade, and a bird's-eye view of the property. She noted she was unable to conduct a site visit due to illness and apologized for not being able to confirm specific exterior materials in person. Members were advised that, if they felt a site visit was necessary prior to action, the item could be tabled to the next meeting. Ms. Kotting indicated she was comfortable proceeding with a recommendation based on available information. She summarized the evaluation as follows:

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- The original form, plan, and structure of the dwelling remain intact.
- There is a rear two-story ell which may or may not date to 1907, but is representative of the period, as is a one-story rear shed-roof addition.
- The original workmanship appears to be represented accurately in the current building materials, although replacement materials have been applied to the exterior.
- The original fenestration pattern appears to remain; the replacement windows have false muntins/mullions.
- Because a site visit was not possible, Ms. Kotting could not confirm the exact composition of some exterior materials but noted that the visible materials and details are typical of vernacular agricultural dwellings of the era.
- As with the earlier case on the agenda, the form, mass, scale, and location of the dwelling remain as built and continue to accurately represent rural vernacular architecture in Stafford County.

Based on these findings, Ms. Kotting recommended approval of the 50-year rule request for 1163 Truslow Road. Mr. Orrison moved to approve the request. He was seconded by Ms. Dietrich.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

UPDATES TO THE BYLAWS.

This was deferred to the February 5, 2026, meeting.

ADDITIONAL PRESENTATIONS BY THE PUBLIC

There were no additional presentations by the public.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The chairman had nothing to report on.

CEMETERY COMMITTEE REPORT

There was nothing to report on.

REPORTS BY COMMISSION MEMBERS

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Newton made a motion to approve the minutes from November 6, 2026. Ms. Knight seconded the motion. The motion passed 6-0.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, Ms. Dodd adjourned the meeting at 4:10 PM