

STAFFORD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION BOARD MINUTES
February 5, 2026

The meeting of the Stafford County Historical Commission Board of Thursday, February 5, 2026, was called to order at 3:00 PM by Anita Dodd, in the ABC Conference Room of the George L. Gordon, Jr., Government Center.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Anita Dodd, Jane Conner, Martha Newton, Aaron Mastin, Emma Dietrich, Callie Knight.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Robert Orrison.

STAFF PRESENT: Nancy Kotting, Harriet Donkoh.

GUESTS PRESENT: Elena Prokos, Kristen Maxson, Jeff Eastland.

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Dodd called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Roll was called by Ms. Newton. There was a quorum.

ADDITIONS, DELETIONS AND APPROVAL OF THE REGULAR AGENDA

Ms. Kotting requested to include discussion of the Magistrate's Building.

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Kristen Maxson expressed concern about the Courthouse project and relocating Belmont to the Powell Lane/Falmouth Business Center could harm historic resources and dilute Belmont's historic character under a large investment firm's control. She highlighted major stormwater changes (a nine-foot drainpipe), drew parallels between data centers and nuclear plants due to heavy water-cooling demands, and warned of unprecedented pressure on Resource Protection Areas and established historic landscapes such as Crow's Nest. She questioned whether the County's current Master Plan/Five-Year Plan—especially its lack of clear support for data centers in the southern county—is adequate and appropriate for Historical Commission acceptance in light of potential negative impacts on Stafford's historic resources.

Elena Prokos of Rock Hill District questioned the implications of the voluntary proffer to donate Hunter's Iron Works to the Freedom Foundation, noting its historic value but warning that the associated rezoning to heavy industrial would grant broad by-right development powers. She expressed concern that relaxed setbacks and intensified industrial use could negatively affect nearby older, modest neighborhoods (including townhomes on Old Forge and Musselman Road and homes within roughly a mile), and urged the Commission to consider these "trickle down" neighborhood impacts when evaluating the donation and related proffers.

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Jeff Eastland, Rock Hill District resident, community activist, and environmentalist, spoke in opposition to the Blaisdell Data Center Project, asserting that it is being shoehorned immediately adjacent to several lower-income and minority neighborhoods, and it poses significant watershed and environmental concerns within a one-mile radius that includes a school, and exemplifies everything that is wrong with siting large industrial data centers next to residential communities.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Government Island Interpretive Signage Update: Parks and Rec Replacing Existing; One New Addition in Development

Ms. Kotting reported that Parks and Recreation requested, and she administratively approved, an expedited in-kind replacement of all existing interpretive signs at Government Island after confirming the factual content remains accurate, with the understanding that content revisions can be made later. She emphasized the need for a new interpretive sign focusing on the lives and contributions of the laborers, since current signage highlights mainly decision-makers, and asked for volunteers to help draft content. Ms. Dodd stated she had reviewed Jerrilynn's book section on Government Island's workers. She offered to spearhead development of the new sign. She suggested starting with bullet-pointed themes and refining from there. Ms. Kotting agreed to provide a final edit from an ethical-interpretation perspective and stressed documenting all research sources in county files, even if not cited on the sign itself, acknowledging that available source material is limited but the language can be carefully crafted to reflect that.

2. Blaisdell Development Review-2nd Submission- Staff seeking comments

Members reviewed the Blaisdell Development proposal and discussed concerns with the proffers related to historic and cultural resources. Members questioned language that would only require submitting Phase I/II studies if disturbance is likely, stating the Commission should see such reports regardless of disturbance. Members requested updated and more comprehensive cultural resource surveys, noting that the Hunter's Iron Works resource area and associated archaeological/historic resources were originally defined in the 1970s and may be more extensive than currently shown. Members supported conveyance of the site to a nonprofit but expressed concern about the organization's long-term capacity and funding to manage and interpret a potentially nationally significant site and asked about possible Section 106 review. They found Proffer G confusing and vague—clarifying that funds would go to the County, not the Commission—and expressed a preference for specific, enforceable commitments (such as consulting a cultural resources firm, creating an interpretive trail and materials, and tying road/access improvements to interpretation) rather than a single lump-sum contribution linked to certificates of occupancy.

Ms. Knight questioned the data center's utility impacts, noting the materials lacked detail on water and energy demand. She pointed out that while the applicant referenced closed-loop cooling, it still uses large volumes of water and recommended consideration of adiabatic cooling to reduce consumption. She also observed that no information on projected energy demand was provided.

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Ms. Kotting responded that utilities and energy are reviewed by other Planning and Zoning specialists and that her role is limited to historic review. She stated she could not formally comment on those issues but would help Ms. Knight route her concerns on water use, cooling technology, and energy demand to the appropriate reviewer so they could be considered in the project's review.

Mr. Mastin criticized the proffer language for portraying as "benefits" the very historic and environmental qualities that would be damaged by the project. He stressed that the community has spent decades improving this stretch of the Rappahannock and that the data center does not fit the area's evolving historic and cultural context. He characterized the proposed \$100,000 contribution as grossly inadequate given the scale of potential impacts and the project's likely economic return and questioned how such a small amount could meaningfully fund the required interpretive or mitigation measures.

The Commission discussed options for integrating historical and aesthetic features into the proposed data center. Ms. Kotting noted that incorporating localized historic design elements into this type of building is difficult and seldom successful but stated that any effort, such as a commissioned exterior mural or small garden/sitting area, would be valuable. Because the main facilities will be behind security fencing, any interpretive or aesthetic features will need to be visible from a distance to have meaningful public benefit.

It was clarified that a proposed trail is planned around the parcel boundary, connecting to existing trails and running through the wooded buffer area outside the secured data center footprint. This trail corridor could accommodate interpretive elements discussed earlier (historical signage, gardens, native plantings), with environmental interpretation handled by other reviewers but cultural/historical content falling within the Historical Commission's interest.

In response to a question about additional architectural detail beyond overall massing, Ms. Kotting explained that detailed building design review lies with another reviewer. However, she confirmed that the Commission's request to tie building façades and design to local history can still be forwarded as an official Historic Commission comment, even if it overlaps other review domains.

Ms. Conner provided background on the Blaisdell family's longstanding association with the property, including systematic searches for Indigenous artifacts, and expressed concern that the development might proceed without adequately recognizing both that family history and reported pre-contact cultural resources. She supported a comprehensive cultural resource survey of the site. Ms. Dietrich recommended that the applicant be encouraged to conduct oral history interviews to inform future interpretive materials. When Ms. Conner asked who might interview a nearby-resident Blaisdell daughter, Ms. Kotting suggested coordinating such efforts through the Freedom Forge Foundation, and Ms. Conner noted that two Fredericksburg Advance articles offer additional context.

3. Magistrates Building: Potential Grant to Fund Historic Structure Report

Ms. Kotting reported that the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) grant cycle has opened and noted that, as a Certified Local Government (CLG), Stafford County is eligible for this funding. She stated she will again submit a cost-share application for the countywide survey and proposed also applying

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for a CLG grant to fund current structural conditions report for the county-owned magistrate's building, one of only three such buildings in Virginia and presently without an active use. She emphasized the need to document its existing condition to identify required work, and potential future uses and requested the Commission's support.

Ms. Dodd indicated that, when the County previously funded roof repairs and HVAC, the preservation contractor produced a report, and she also participated as site manager in an archaeological study of the property. She noted that these studies provide existing architectural and archaeological information. There were some architectural elements from other buildings added to the building in the 1960s. The building was constructed around 1830 as a magistrate's office and likely never served as a customs house. In response to Ms. Kotting's question, Ms. Dodd confirmed the earlier work was done by a preservation-oriented contractor and offered to provide his credentials and related documentation.

Ms. Kotting asked whether, given the 1998 work, the Commission supports submitting a new grant application for a structural conditions report; Ms. Dodd affirmed, clarifying that she only wished to ensure prior materials are used to inform the new study and agree the building should be re-examined. Ms. Dietrich inquired whether the grant could also fund preparation of an architectural plan documenting the building's features. Ms. Dodd noted she has already completed a floor plan, but no elevations exist, and she described 1960s work in which concrete was poured at the base of the foundation, now compromising the brick and contributing to structural failure. She requested that the new study specifically address how to remove the concrete and stabilize the building. Ms. Kotting agreed to include recommended treatments and remedies in the scope of the proposed structural conditions report.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Review and Approve Update to By-Laws

Ms. Kotting stated that two changes are required to the bylaws that need members' action. These are Attendance Policy at the request of Administration and Agenda Procedure to codify the existing practice of including additions, deletions, and approval of the regular agenda on each agenda as a required directive in the bylaws. Ms. Kotting solicited comments or concerns from the members. There were no questions or concerns. Ms. Dietrich made a motion to approve the bylaws amendments as presented. She was seconded by Ms. Newton. The motion passed unanimously.

ADDITIONAL PRESENTATIONS BY THE PUBLIC

Ms. Kristen Maxson asked for clarification regarding an item in the report, noting that one of the titles referred to the Counting House and inquired if that was correct. Ms. Kotting clarified that the building in question was not the Counting House but the Magistrate's Office and explained that this item had been added late to the agenda because the related grant opportunity had only opened the previous day. She stated that the agenda would be updated to include this item with the proper title and that the revised agenda would be published on the county website.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman had nothing to report on.

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CEMETERY COMMITTEE REPORT

Ms. Dodd reported that The Cemetery Committee is continuing work on completion of the cemetery book. Although changing weather has affected some of the Chair's field plans, the project is still moving forward.

REPORTS BY COMMISSION MEMBERS

There were no reports from members.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Newton motioned to approve minutes of the January 8, 2026, meeting. She was seconded by Ms. Conner. A vote to approve the minutes passed by a unanimous consent.

BLOOMINGTON INTERPRETIVE PLAN WORK SESSION

Ms. Dodd outlined the need to develop an interpretive plan for the Bloomington site, including signage and pathways. Ms. Kotting emphasized that the plan should facilitate public access and benefit. Members discussed the need for a structural report and the potential to pursue grant funding. It was suggested that the Commission begin by identifying a rough estimate of the number of interpretive signs and their proposed themes.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Dietrich motioned for the adjournment of the meeting. She was seconded by Ms. Newton. The meeting was adjourned at 4: 37pm.