

STAFFORD COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

February 25, 2026

The meeting of the Stafford County Planning Commission of Wednesday, February 25, 2026, was called to order at 6:00 PM by the Chairman Kristen Barnes in the Board of Supervisors Chambers of the George L. Gordon, Jr., Government Center.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Kristen Barnes, Carlos Bratton, Kelsey Caudill, Marcus Oats, Willie Shelton, Jr., Maureen Siegmund

MEMBERS ABSENT: Gregory Goldstein

STAFF PRESENT: Mike Zuraf, Lauren Lucian, Stacie Stinnette, Ginny Adams, Emilie Wolfson, Amy Taylor

DECLARATIONS OF DISQUALIFICATION

Ms. Barnes asked if there were any declarations of disqualification. Hearing none, she asked if there were any changes to the agenda.

Mr. Zuraf addressed the Commission to provide updates related to the agenda. He explained that revised application materials for Items 5 and 6, the Austin Ridge project, were received late on Monday. Those updated materials were posted to the online agenda on Tuesday. He also noted that the revisions removed the data center component from the proposal and changed the zoning request from M-2 to M-1. Additional details regarding these updates would be presented during the staff presentation later in the meeting.

Mr. Zuraf also commented on misinformation circulating on social media suggesting that the Buc-ee's project would be discussed during this meeting. He clarified that Buc-ee's was not scheduled for discussion this evening. Although it appeared on the agenda, it served only as a placeholder for a future meeting. This clarification was provided for the benefit of both the Commission and members of the public in attendance.

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Ms. Barnes acknowledged the earlier clarification provided by staff, noting that neither the data center proposal nor the Buc-ee's project would be discussed at the meeting. She stated that this information was helpful. She then opened the public presentation portion of the meeting. Observing that there was a large number of attendees, she invited anyone wishing to make general public comments to line up in the center aisle and stated that she would begin the timer once the first speaker was ready.

Tom Sablon expressed concerns about the long-term implications of data center development in the county. He stated his belief that although certain projects may begin under M-1 zoning, they could later seek M-2 zoning to expand their operations. Mr. Sablon asserted that the existing power grid in Virginia was not adequate to support large-scale data centers and suggested that such facilities may ultimately require on-site nuclear power to operate. He referenced differences in federal and local permitting requirements for various types of nuclear technologies and stated his view that local approval could be sufficient for certain small-scale nuclear systems. He also raised concerns about potential impacts on local groundwater resources. Mr. Sablon emphasized that the proposed data center locations were situated above what he described as a significant aquifer in Stafford County. He referenced previous permit language from other projects in the Austin Ridge area, noting statements indicating that applicants would cover costs if nearby residential wells were affected.

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Mr. Sablon asserted that the county government's primary responsibility is to protect the health, safety, and welfare of Stafford County residents. He stated that if a resident were required to connect to public water service due to impacts from nearby development, the applicant should be responsible for all associated connection fees, monthly water charges, and any other related costs. He concluded by reiterating his concern that both water supply needs and power demands associated with data centers pose risks to the community and thanked the Commission for the opportunity to speak.

Caroline Bass identified herself as a Stafford County resident and a senior at Colonial Forge High School. Ms. Bass stated that she grew up next to the proposed data center site and recalled early childhood memories of spending time in the surrounding woods with her family, including hiking to Aquia Creek and observing local wildlife. She expressed that the forest near the site had been an important and meaningful place throughout her life.

Ms. Bass voiced strong concerns about the environmental impact of clearing the existing forest for development. She stated that, in her experience, many wooded areas in Stafford County have already been removed over the past 17 years. Citing information from Global Forest Watch, she noted that tree cover in Stafford County had declined from an estimated 76 percent in 2000 to approximately 47 percent by 2020, and she expressed the view that the percentage had continued to decline by 2026. She emphasized that clearing the forest would eliminate habitat for numerous species, including deer, foxes, bears, coyotes, native birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Ms. Bass expressed concern that wildlife displaced by habitat loss would appear more frequently in residential areas, leading to increased road mortality and other negative impacts.

Ms. Bass also described potential ecological disruptions caused by noise and lighting from data center operations, including impacts on animal circadian rhythms, navigation, foraging, reproduction, and migration. She highlighted the potential risk to pollinators—such as bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, and moths—stating that these species play a critical role in supporting both natural ecosystems and local agricultural operations. She noted that disruptions to pollinator populations could affect crop production, wild fruits and seeds, and broader species health in the region. She concluded by expressing her personal connection to the area's natural environment and her desire to return home from college to a landscape that remains intact. She urged the Commission to consider the environmental effects of development and to protect local ecosystems, stating that animals cannot advocate for themselves and that their habitat is also part of her home. She thanked the Commission for the opportunity to speak.

Samuel Chenkin identified himself as a resident of the City of Fredericksburg and noted that, although he does not reside in Stafford County, he wished to speak regarding the proposed data center project. Mr. Chenkin stated that he had recently moved to the area and was still learning about local waterways, but expressed concern that a data center located in Stafford County would draw water from the Rappahannock River. He noted that the river also served the City of Fredericksburg and potentially Spotsylvania County, and therefore believed the issue extended beyond Stafford's borders.

Mr. Chenkin referenced news reports circulating on social media about a community—possibly in Florida, though he was uncertain—where residents were forced to rely on bottled water due to water supply impacts allegedly caused by a nearby data center. He stated that, according to those reports, local residents experienced low water pressure and were unable to access sufficient tap water for basic household needs. He also raised concerns regarding the electrical power supply. Mr. Chenkin stated his understanding that Virginia supplements its power needs by drawing electricity from West Virginia, and suggested that this reliance contributed to increased power bills for residents. He expressed apprehension that a data center

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would further strain the regional electrical grid, potentially increasing costs and decreasing reliability for local communities.

Mr. Chenkin emphasized that he does not want to see increased utility costs or disruptions to water and power service for himself or other residents. He concluded by stating that he has a strong interest in the long-term well-being of the community he recently joined and thanked the Commission for the opportunity to speak.

Ms. Barnes clarified the procedure regarding public comments. It was noted that the Market at Austin Ridge data center project, listed as Items 5 and 6 on the agenda, would have its own separate public hearing later in the meeting. She explained that the current portion of the meeting was reserved exclusively for general public comments. The clarification emphasized that individuals wishing to speak specifically about the data center applications should wait until those items are formally brought forward during the designated public hearing. Ms. Barnes reiterated that this segment was intended only for general remarks unrelated to items scheduled for public hearing.

Lauren Stark of the Rock Hill District, addressed the Commission. Mr. Stark stated that he shared the concerns previously raised by other speakers regarding data centers and expressed strong opposition to additional data center development in the county. He acknowledged the environmental concerns discussed by earlier speakers but focused his remarks on the potential impacts on public utilities and community well-being. Mr. Stark stated that he had friends living in Michigan who had experienced rising water bills in areas where data centers had been built. He noted that Michigan, despite having significant water resources, had reportedly seen higher utility costs related to water usage. He also referenced friends in Nevada and Utah, stating that those regions had experienced brownouts during summer months, and asserted that residential customers—not data centers—were the ones affected by these outages.

Mr. Stark emphasized that the Stafford region experienced extremely hot and humid summers, and he expressed concern about the prospect of losing air conditioning during peak heat due to electrical grid strain. He stated that he did not want his family, particularly his children, subjected to such conditions. He further expressed frustration that data centers, in his view, offered limited community benefit, including few jobs, while potentially increasing water and power costs for residents. Mr. Stark stated that if local households were to experience higher utility costs, brownouts, or decreased water quality similar to reports from other states, he would become significantly more politically engaged. He noted that he would closely monitor elected officials' decision-making on this issue and hold them accountable during elections.

Mr. Stark concluded by urging Commissioners to consider how data center development affected the daily lives and well-being of residents in their districts. He encouraged them to look at the experiences of other communities with data centers and to evaluate whether the potential impacts outweighed the benefits.

Julia Lewis, a resident of the Falmouth District, addressed the subcommittee responsible for the Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) review, along with the Commissioners present. She began by expressing appreciation for the significant time and effort the members devote to this work, and noted that since there is no opportunity for public comment during subcommittee meetings, she wished to share her thoughts here.

Ms. Lewis emphasized that although the Comp Plan functions as a guideline, it remains one of the strongest tools available to protect Stafford County's neighborhoods and rural character. She stressed that the plan is important for all residents—"from babies to the oldest"—as a safeguard against development pressures that could transform community spaces into industrial profit centers. Her primary request was that the County

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clearly delineate Targeted Development Areas (TDAs) intended for heavy industrial uses and prevent industrial zoning categories, such as M-1 or M-2, from expanding into mixed-use areas.

Ms. Lewis cited the Comp Plan, specifically Chapter 6, page 6-8, noting that the B-2 Urban Commercial District is defined as an area for high-density retail sales and service establishments serving regional or countywide markets. She identified Garrisonville Road, Courthouse Road, and Warrenton Road—particularly near the I-95 interchanges—as examples of where B-2 uses are intended. She also referenced Chapter 28 of the zoning ordinance, which outlines permitted uses and those requiring conditional use permits or special exceptions within the B-2 Urban Commercial District. Ms. Lewis distributed copies of the B-2 allowed-use list that she had obtained from the Planning and Zoning Department, thanking staff for providing additional copies. To illustrate her point, she discussed the Courthouse Road corridor, including the area near I-95, Austin Ridge, Buc-ee's, Wawa, and Courthouse West. She explained that Buc-ee's is located in a B-2 Urban Commercial District and noted a pending proposal to downzone from B-1 on land already designated B-2. She highlighted that while certain uses such as vehicle fuel sales require a conditional use permit, other uses—like warehouse mini-storage—are also listed but unlikely to be pursued by a business like Buc-ee's. Her central concern was maintaining the integrity of commercial corridors by preventing M-1 or M-2 industrial zoning from entering areas intended for B-2 commercial uses. She urged Commissioners to preserve B-2 zoning where appropriate and to confine heavier industrial zoning to areas designated for those purposes. Ms. Lewis concluded by thanking the committee and Commissioners for their attention and for considering her concerns.

Karen Fox of the Hartwood District addressed the Planning Commission during its regular meeting to offer comments on the five-year review of the Comprehensive Plan. She opened by expressing appreciation for the extensive work required for the update and emphasized the long-term significance of this review. Ms. Fox noted that the revisions made now will shape Stafford County's land-use policy framework through 2036 and influence decisions for the next decade and beyond. She explained that the Comprehensive Plan guides all rezoning applications and major land-use decisions. When the plan is written clearly, she stated, decisions remain consistent. When it is vague, decisions can become flexible, and "flexibility today becomes precedent tomorrow." To maintain the integrity of the plan, Ms. Fox asked the Commission to focus on three key areas during the update process. First, she stressed the importance of clear definitions, specifically regarding data centers. She observed that data centers vary widely in form and scale—large, small, edge, micro, modular, and pod-style—but that size does not change their impact. Instead, the infrastructure that supports them defines their intensity. She urged that the plan explicitly state that all forms of data centers constitute industrial-intensity uses and should be permitted only in land-use categories suited to industrial development. Clear language, she said, prevents future reinterpretation. Second, she asked the Commission to keep industrial uses in designated industrial areas. She explained that the County's Business and Industry areas were intentionally established to accommodate industrial development, while Mixed Use areas were planned for homes, retail, offices, and community spaces. Those areas, she emphasized, were never intended to host industrial infrastructure. The updated plan, in her view, should reinforce that separation and avoid language that blurs category boundaries. When land-use designations lose definition, she cautioned, the structure of the plan weakens. Third, she urged the Commission to ensure that utility expansion follows land-use policy, not the other way around. Infrastructure should support the Comprehensive Plan and not override it. She stressed that utility policies must align with established land-use designations, and should not create exceptions that undermine the County's Growth Management Framework. The Urban Services Area exists with purpose, she said, and growth should follow adopted policy rather than dictate it.

Ms. Fox emphasized that the Comprehensive Plan review occurs only once every five years, making this an important opportunity to strengthen clarity, reinforce intent, and preserve the plan's structure. She

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concluded by stating that proposals inconsistent with the plan's purpose should not advance. Maintaining consistency, she said, protects the community, future Boards, and the integrity of the Planning Commission.

Brenda Turrell, a Stafford resident and professional operational risk manager, addressed the Planning Commission to share concerns related to the proposed concentration of data centers in the county. She clarified that her background is in operational risk rather than insurance and stated that while many speakers have discussed environmental, ecological, and financial risks, she wished to highlight an additional dimension she had not yet heard mentioned: military and national-security risk.

Ms. Turrell noted that Stafford County is situated between major military installations, with bases located on both sides of the region. From a risk-management perspective, she explained that a responsible assessment considers not only internal impacts but also threats from outside actors, including hostile entities that may seek to attack the United States. In such scenarios, she stated, adversaries typically target military bases and critical infrastructure. She argued that data centers—due to their scale, utility-like nature, and heavy reliance on resources such as water—could function as part of that critical infrastructure. She also referenced comments made earlier in the meeting about the potential integration of nuclear-related energy technology at some facilities. If accurate, she said, this would intensify her concern, describing the possibility as akin to “sitting on a nuclear bomb.” Because the region contains major military assets and would already be a strategic target, she suggested that clustering numerous data centers in close proximity could amplify the risk and increase potential damage in the event of an attack.

Ms. Turrell stated that placing approximately fourteen data centers within just a few miles of each other creates a concentration that could become an attractive target. She suggested that dispersing such facilities more evenly—across the state, region, or nation—would reduce vulnerability. To illustrate her point, she drew an analogy to the attack on Pearl Harbor. At that time, she explained, eight battleships were lined up in a single location, making them easy to strike. Those ships were essentially “in preferred parking,” and their placement made the target extremely efficient for attackers. Unlike battleships, she said, data centers cannot be moved once built, meaning that a clustered configuration remains permanently exposed. She concluded by reiterating her concerns about national-security implications and thanking the Commission.

Alexander Henge spoke in opposition to data centers, expressing strong concerns about their local, statewide, and global impacts. He began by noting that Virginia is currently considered the data center capital of the world—an achievement he argued should be viewed with concern rather than pride. Mr. Henge stated that, based on records he reviewed, approximately one-third of all proposed data centers—whether in Virginia or possibly nationwide—are slated for Stafford County. He acknowledged that supporters often cite economic benefits and increased revenue as justification for allowing these facilities. However, he argued that such financial gains cannot compensate for the widespread, long-term harm that data centers cause to residents, natural resources, and the environment. He emphasized that money cannot replace clean air, clean water, or a livable climate, and that the environmental and health impacts of data centers are irreversible. Mr. Henge referenced the broader climate crisis, explaining that data center energy demands are contributing to the reopening of previously closed coal plants and the construction of new fossil-fuel infrastructure. According to him, these actions exacerbate climate-related natural disasters and their associated societal consequences. Beyond global environmental issues, he highlighted potential direct public-health impacts. He stated that particulate emissions from data centers can harm individuals living more than half a mile away, and that many proposed facilities in Stafford are located within 35 feet of existing homes. He referenced estimates suggesting that 100,000 to 200,000 deaths occur annually due to the types of fine particles emitted by these facilities, and warned that these numbers will increase as more data centers are built.

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Mr. Henge acknowledged the argument that if Stafford rejects data centers, they may simply be built elsewhere. However, he urged the Commission not to adopt this mindset. Given Stafford's position at what he described as the "epicenter" of data center development, he argued that local leaders have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to take a principled stand. He concluded by urging the Commission to govern with long-term environmental and human health impacts in mind, and to reject all data center proposals in order to safeguard the future for current and future generations.

Mike Castaneda of the Rock Hill District addressed the Commission to share his perspective on data center development, explaining that he is a realist who has worked on both sides of the issue. He emphasized the importance of understanding what must be required of data center developers before projects move forward.

Mr. Castaneda explained that every data center operates with a proprietary capacity plan outlining its impact on local infrastructure, including electricity, water, and other utilities. While companies may claim they will use closed-loop cooling systems, hydro-cooling, or alternative power sources such as co-located facilities or natural gas, he stressed that power demands ultimately drive the most significant impacts on surrounding communities. He urged the Commission to require developers to provide load-balancing plans to ensure that, if local infrastructure is strained, facilities can switch to backup systems for at least 48 hours. Mandating this, he argued, is necessary to protect citizens. He warned that data center development is accelerating rapidly and described it as "a train that is not stopping." Mr. Castaneda commended the Commission for managing the burden of leadership but cautioned that data center companies will use policy, legislation, and every tool available to push their projects forward. Drawing from experience observing a previous data center project, he described how construction brought a temporary economic boost: approximately 4,000 workers reported to the site daily for four years, bringing business activity and revenue into the community. However, once construction ended, only around 100 employees remained, leaving the community to deal with lasting infrastructure impacts without the earlier benefits.

Mr. Castaneda cautioned the Commission not to be overly reassured by promises of noise barriers, infrastructure upgrades, or other mitigation measures, describing those offers as part of a "honeymoon period." When construction ends and operations begin, he warned, the long-term strain on infrastructure and quality of life will remain. He concluded by urging the Commission to prepare for the long-term consequences and to ensure that protections are in place for residents before approving any projects.

Nabeel Al-Takree of the George Washington District addressed the Commission to offer general comments on artificial intelligence and the regulation of data centers. He described the growth of AI and data-center development as a nationwide and global trend—"a train" that cannot be stopped. He noted that while broader aspects of the AI revolution fall outside local control, the County does have authority over how data centers are regulated within Stafford.

Mr. Al-Takree urged the Commission to make all standards included in data-center development documents binding, replacing any "should" language with "must." This, he argued, would discourage problematic proposals and help limit the overall number of centers. He stated that Stafford does not need eighteen data centers and that four already appear to be moving forward; if four is the unavoidable number, he said, that should be considered sufficient. He commented on the County's historical challenges with regulating development over the past 25 years, describing past performance as "pathetic." While acknowledging that the Commission is a new group, he emphasized the need for far stricter and more careful oversight moving forward.

Mr. Al-Takree also called for greater transparency, particularly the elimination of nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) with developers. He stated that the County should refuse NDAs entirely and insist on full public

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disclosure of project details. In addition, he urged the County to charge top-tier rates for data-center development, noting that Stafford's location makes it highly desirable to the industry and that the County should not fear that stricter standards will drive developers elsewhere. He shared an observation from a high school friend who is now a senior engineer at Nvidia: within the industry, there is ongoing debate about whether to push for higher or lower regulatory standards. According to Mr. Al-Takree, some companies favor stronger standards and could be considered allies. This, he said, means the County should apply maximum pressure to secure the best available technologies and practices. He encouraged the Commission to demand the highest possible requirements in power usage, cooling systems, sound mitigation, environmental remediation, and every other relevant category. He cautioned against accepting any proposal simply because developers claim it is "good enough for Stafford County." He emphasized that the Commission's core responsibility is to protect residents and expressed confidence that they would strive to do so. Mr. Al-Takree concluded by thanking the Commission.

April McCarthy of the Aquia District addressed the Commission, introducing herself as a teacher, parent, veteran, and long-time Stafford resident. She spoke generally about data centers and urged the Commission to uphold the guidelines and protections that community members worked hard to establish. She cautioned the Commission not to allow corporations or developers to override those standards. To underscore her concerns, Ms. McCarthy offered a vivid, satirical description of what she believes Stafford should "advertise" if the County fails to enforce its rules. She suggested that if data centers are allowed to encroach on neighborhoods, residents should be prepared for diesel generators placed directly along property lines—loud enough to disrupt outdoor activities like backyard barbecues. She noted that these generators do not operate only during power outages but also whenever data centers lack sufficient energy, impacting both noise levels and air quality.

Ms. McCarthy warned that residents may face water-use restrictions due to the heavy demands of data centers, and that families wanting to enjoy walks in mixed-use areas could instead find themselves surrounded by the glow and hum of 24-hour industrial facilities. She also raised concerns about increased electric costs, explaining that local ratepayers could end up funding infrastructure expansions—such as new high-voltage transmission lines—to serve data-center power needs. She stated that in her own neighborhood, new transmission-line construction has already resulted in residents losing property, fences, sheds, and community garden space through eminent domain. She connected this to broader concerns about environmental impacts, including increased flooding from clear-cutting and reduced tree cover.

Ms. McCarthy described additional public-health risks, suggesting that worsening air quality could lead to more asthma-related issues, especially for children. She also predicted negative effects on home values, noting that Stafford has seen rapid appreciation in recent years but warning that proximity to data centers could cause property values to decline. Referring to the many data-center applications under consideration—16, 18, or more—she argued that the number is excessive and poses unacceptable risks to residents. She closed with a pointed remark that declining home values might ultimately benefit developers, who could receive tax incentives while acquiring cheaper land at the community's expense.

Chris Denning of the Garrisonville District addressed the Commission, first expressing appreciation for the work the Planning Commission has done, particularly in developing the data-center standards adopted in the Comprehensive Plan and zoning ordinance. He acknowledged that not all Commissioners oppose data centers, but he credited them for establishing strong standards that the community depends on. Mr. Denning also welcomed the presence of local Boy Scouts at the meeting, stating that he values seeing youth engaged in civic processes and developing into future leaders. While he initially attended to comment on Austin Ridge Park, he shifted to address data centers after seeing the number of related concerns raised during the meeting. Mr. Denning urged the Commission to adhere strictly to the Comprehensive Plan and zoning

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ordinance, stating that data-center standards were created after significant analysis and should not be weakened or bypassed. He recognized that more data centers are likely inevitable but emphasized that developers must be held fully accountable to the existing requirements. He encouraged the Commission to consider establishing a cap on the total number of data centers allowed in Stafford County. He recommended that such a cap be directly tied to the County's water and power capacity, using drought-year water availability as the baseline for determining limits. Planning ahead in this way, he said, is far more responsible than reacting once infrastructure is already strained.

Mr. Denning also echoed earlier speakers' comments regarding security risks. Citing his professional experience protecting critical infrastructure, he noted that while modern data centers have extremely robust physical and digital protections, their presence draws attention from both state and criminal actors. Physical destruction of a center is statistically rare, he said, but cyber vulnerabilities—particularly at substations—are a legitimate concern. Concentrating too many facilities in Stafford could create a larger target and increase risk. He concluded by urging the Commission to avoid clustering excessive data centers in the county and to approach future applications with caution, keeping both infrastructure limitations and security considerations in mind.

Lauren Stark addressed the Commission to raise concerns unrelated to data centers, focusing instead on significant issues affecting commuters who use the region's HOV lanes. Ms. Stark explained that she has been part of the slugging community for many years and has observed ongoing and worsening problems with HOV lane tolling. She reported that faulty or malfunctioning cameras are frequently misidentifying vehicles, resulting in drivers being incorrectly charged tolls despite meeting the requirement of three passengers. These errors, she said, place financial strain on commuters who rely on the HOV system. Many are forced to file disputes repeatedly and wait weeks for reimbursement, during which time some accounts have even gone into negative balances. Ms. Stark added that during recent icy weather, camera visibility issues caused even vanpools—vehicles that unmistakably meet occupancy requirements—to be charged. In addition to tolling concerns, Ms. Stark spoke on behalf of members of the slugging community about reinstating slug lines at the Courthouse commuter lot. While the lot contains a designated pickup and drop-off area, it lacks formal signage or infrastructure that would allow slugging to operate safely and effectively. She noted extensive community interest in using the Courthouse lot again, especially as many commuters continue traveling from Route 3, Garrisonville, and Staffordboro, with the Staffordboro lot currently functioning as the only consistently successful slug location.

Ms. Stark recommended that the County consider installing signs or other safety measures to help rebuild slugging activity at the Courthouse lot, particularly since it is a relatively new facility created during the COVID-19 period and lacks clear direction for how the public should use it beyond buses and vanpools. She concluded by thanking the Commission for hearing her concerns.

Julius Jackson of the Hartwood District addressed the Commission, returning the discussion to data centers while also urging a broader perspective on growth and economic development in Stafford County. He acknowledged the challenge facing the Board and Commission as they balance growth, revenue generation, and long-term community wellbeing.

Mr. Jackson argued that the County should expand its focus beyond data centers and consider alternative strategies for economic growth, especially tourism. He noted that Stafford is the boyhood home of George Washington, yet invests very little in promoting or leveraging its historical significance. He added that the County's location along the I-95 corridor and its proximity to established equestrian and agricultural regions offer opportunities for tourism-based development similar to events such as the Gold Cup near Warrenton. Shifting to environmental concerns, Mr. Jackson explained that Stafford sits atop two aquifers—one in the

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Piedmont region and another near the Potomac. He expressed concern that expanding data-center development and increasing residential construction in agricultural areas are placing unsustainable strain on these groundwater sources. As more land is converted to rooftops, roads, and parking lots, he warned that stormwater infiltration decreases, runoff increases, and aquifer recharge slows dramatically. He also emphasized the County's limited efforts toward carbon sequestration and regenerative farming, which could help restore soil health and improve groundwater replenishment. Mr. Jackson cautioned that rapid development is pushing Stafford toward functioning primarily as a bedroom community for Washington, D.C., with residents commuting north but doing little local shopping due to the County's limited business base. He noted that the County does not even have a movie theater and joked that while neighboring Spotsylvania gets a water park, Stafford gets a Buc-ee's.

Mr. Jackson shared that he purchased his farm with the intention of remaining long-term, but if development continues to intensify around him, he may reconsider staying after his child graduates. He urged the Board to rethink how and where growth occurs to better serve residents and preserve quality of life. He asked the County to revisit and update several key studies, including the 2018 water study, and to conduct stronger environmental analyses on both residential expansion and data-center development. Current research on long-term impacts is still emerging, he noted, making it even more important for Stafford to thoroughly understand the environmental consequences before proceeding with major land-use changes.

Mr. Jackson concluded by encouraging the Board and Commission to strengthen and refine the Comprehensive Plan in ways that prioritize residents, protect natural resources, and support sustainable, balanced economic development.

Kristen Maxson of the Falmouth District addressed the Planning and Zoning Commission with several procedural and administrative concerns, followed by comments on a specific Technical Review Committee (TRC) submission included in the meeting agenda.

Ms. Maxson began by referencing the special committee meeting held on February 19, 2026, noting that while the session appeared well organized, no public presentations were allowed. She expressed concern that public-hearing minutes have recently been bypassed, citing two examples: the February 11, 2026 hearing, which she said was expedited directly to the Board of Supervisors, and the February 17, 2026 hearing, which she believes was similarly accelerated without the typical 30-day review cycle. As a result, she warned that the minutes prepared at the present meeting may not be entered into the public record before Board consideration. She asserted that bypassing the required timeline violates governing bylaws and deprives both citizens and the Board of access to timely public comments. Turning to a second topic, Ms. Maxson noted that the project previously referred to as the "Kraken Loop" has been renamed "Brister Loop." She highlighted public confusion surrounding the new name and offered a cautionary comment about the scale of the infrastructure involved.

Ms. Maxson then addressed issues related to the size and content of the day's agenda, which totaled 2,386 pages. She stated that the volume of materials caused slowdowns on the County's website and hindered the public's ability to access relevant documents needed to prepare informed remarks. She directed specific attention to a new TRC submission within the agenda—Lot 436 on Alabaster Lane—designated as a major site plan. According to Ms. Maxson, the submission contained outdated or inaccurate information. For example, the plan identifies the location as being in the Aquia District when it is actually in Falmouth, and refers to Route 1 using the obsolete name "Jefferson Davis Highway." She also noted that the latest submission date listed is February 17, 2026, yet it still includes these errors. In her view, such inaccuracies undermine confidence in the application, and she urged Commissioners to treat the applicant's materials with caution. Additionally, she pointed out that the project site is adjacent to Potomac Creek and cited

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concerns about stormwater management documentation. She stated that the example Stormwater Management Facility Agreement submitted with the plats was dated December 19, 2025, and that the accompanying engineering certification expired on December 31, 2025—before the review process had even begun. She warned that reviewing plats with expired certifications raises legitimate concerns for the public and violates expectations for current, accurate documentation. Ms. Maxson concluded by thanking the Commission.

Ms. Barnes closed the Public Presentations portion of the meeting and proceeded to the first item under Public Hearings. Mr. Zuraf recognized Ginny Adams for the staff presentation.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. WAI25156652; Departure from Design Standards – Vulcan Materials – Heritage Commerce Center
– A request for a departure from the Design and Construction Standards for Landscaping, Buffering and Screening (DCSL) Manual Section 120.4, “Street Trees,” on Tax Map Parcel No. 44N-1-10, zoned M-2, Heavy Industrial. The Property consists of approximately 3.443 acres, located west of Commerce Parkway, near the intersection of Capital Avenue, within the George Washington Election District. **(Time Limit: April 26, 2026)**

Ginny Adams addressed the Planning Commission to discuss a requested departure from design standards for the Vulcan Materials site. The request concerns Tax Map Parcel 44N-1-10, a 3.43-acre property located in the George Washington District. The parcel lies off Route 17 on Commerce Parkway, across from Capitol Avenue within the Heritage Commons Center. It is zoned M-2, Heavy Industrial, and is situated just outside the Highway Corridor Overlay District (HCOD). She reviewed the site layout, which included two one-story buildings of 560 square feet each—one serving as an office and the other as a break room. Access to the property will be via Commerce Parkway. A key constraint on the site was the presence of an existing sewer easement running parallel to the road along the front property line. Under Section 120.0(b) of the Design and Construction Standards for Landscaping, Screening and Buffering (DCSL), required street trees must be located within 25 feet of the street or property line. However, because the sewer easement runs parallel to Commerce Parkway, plantings cannot be installed within it. The easement affects approximately 124 feet of the frontage, making compliance with the 25-foot planting requirement impossible for a portion of the proposed landscape bed.

Ms. Adams explained that Section 120.4(3)(c) of the DCSL prohibited plantings in easements that run parallel—not perpendicular—to a road, reinforcing the need for relief from the standard. As a result, the applicant must request a departure from design standards under Section 143.0 of the DCSL, specifically seeking permission to plant trees beyond the 25-foot limit required by Section 120.0(b). In support of the request, she noted that the applicant had demonstrated a hardship caused by the fixed location of the sewer easement, which cannot be moved and directly affects the feasibility of the project. Despite the setback limitation, the applicant was providing the required number of plant units—and in fact exceeding them—while also adding a double row of staggered evergreen trees to screen the outdoor storage area located at the rear of the site. Ms. Adams concluded that the applicant’s request met the criteria for granting a departure from design standards under Section 143.0(b) and recommended approval of the request, identified as WAI25156652.

Ms. Barnes asked if there were any questions for staff, then asked if the applicant would like to come forward.

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Bill Pyle with Bowman Consulting came forward. He stated he was representing the applicant and asked if there were any questions.

Ms. Barnes asked if there were questions for the applicant. With no questions, she opened the public hearing.

Tom Sablon of the Hartwood District expressed support for the Vulcan Materials request, noting that the applicant has adequately addressed screening concerns despite limitations caused by the sewer line. He also emphasized that, unlike some proposed data centers, the applicant will pay full tax assessment rates, which he views as a positive factor. He encouraged the Commission to approve the request.

Kristen Maxson of the Falmouth District raised concerns about a ready-mix concrete batch plant application, questioning whether vegetation can survive in a dust-heavy environment and noting that plantings placed close to sewer lines may harm utilities. She recommended relocating vegetation to areas that would better contain concrete dust and protect a nearby stream. She also stated that parts of the application appear incomplete or outdated in the public materials, making it difficult for residents to fully review the proposal. She urged Commissioners to ensure they receive and evaluate a complete and accurate application.

Ms. Barnes closed the public hearing and asked the applicant if he would like to respond. With no response, she asked Ms. Caudill since this was in her district how she would like to proceed.

Ms. Caudill made a motion to approve WAI25156652; Departure from Design Standards – Vulcan Materials – Heritage Commerce Center. Ms. Siegmund seconded. The motion passed 6-0 (*Mr. Goldstein absent*).

Ms. Barnes proceeded to the next agenda item. Mr. Zuraf recognized Emilie Wolfson for the staff presentation, stating items 2, 3, and 4 would be combined.

2. RC24155869; Rezoning Reclassification – Stafford Free-Standing ER Proffer Amendment – A proposal to amend proffered conditions on a portion of Tax Map Parcel No. 44-101A (Property), consisting of 2.04 acres zoned B-2, Urban Commercial Zoning District. The existing proffers applicable to the Property pursuant to Ordinance O08-66, would be amended by replacing such with new proffers that would permit a hospital use and related accessory uses permitted in the B-2 Zoning District, add new site design and development requirements, add new use restrictions, add new building design and architectural requirements, and add new signage and safety requirements. The Property is bounded by Warrenton Road to the north, Banks Ford Parkway to the west, and McWhirt Loop to the south, and located within the George Washington Election District. The Property is subject to a concurrent request for a conditional use permit for a hospital use. **(Time Limit: June 5, 2026)**
3. RC24155863; Zoning Reclassification – Stafford Free-Standing ER – A proposed zoning reclassification, with proffers, from the M-1, Light Industrial Zoning District, to the B-2, Urban Commercial Zoning District on a portion of Tax Map Parcel No. 44-101A (Property), to allow for development of a hospital use. In general, the proposed proffers include, but are not limited to proffers that would: add new site design and development requirements, add new use restrictions, add new building design and architectural requirements, and add new signage and safety requirements. The Property consists of 1.16 acres, and is bounded by Warrenton Road to the north, Banks Ford Parkway to the west, and McWhirt Loop to the south, within the George Washington

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Election District. The Property is subject to a concurrent request for a conditional use permit for a hospital use. **(Time Limit: June 5, 2026)**

4. CUP24155862; Conditional Use Permit – Stafford Free-Standing ER – A request for a conditional use permit (CUP) to allow a hospital use, specifically a free-standing emergency room in the B-2, Urban Commercial and HC, Highway Corridor Overlay Zoning Districts on a portion of Tax Map Parcel No. 44-101A (Property). The Property consists of 3.20 acres, and is bounded by Warrenton Road to the north, Banks Ford Parkway to the west, and McWhirt Loop to the south, and located within the George Washington Election District. The Property is subject to a concurrent request for a zoning reclassification. **(Time Limit: June 5, 2026)**

Emilie Wolfson presented items 2, 3, and 4 together: a Rezoning with Proffers from the M-1, Light Industrial District, to the B-2, Urban Commercial Zoning District; the second was a Proffer Amendment that would amend proffered conditions to permit a hospital use and related accessory uses permitted in the B-2 zoning district; and the third was a conditional use permit which would allow a hospital use, specifically a free-standing emergency room in the B-2 zoning district. She stated as far as existing conditions go, Cornerstone Baptist Church occupied the western portion of this image. The rest of the site was mostly open, grassy area with limited vegetation. Ms. Wolfson went on to say that the applicant was proposing use of the property through the development of a free-standing emergency room with related accessory uses, which included a 1-story, approximately 30 feet, 11,000 square-foot free-standing emergency room with accessory features. It was compliant with the B-2 and Highway Corridor Overlay requirements. She stated they were providing 52% open space, which exceeded the 25% minimum, and 44 parking spaces, which included four ADA spaces. She stated the access would be provided from Warrenton Road and McWhirt Loop with ambulance routing. There were no impacts to wetlands, streams, RPAs, or floodplains, and that public water and sewer was served on the site, and as required by the Zoning Ordinance. Ms. Wolfson also discussed landscaping and the elevations. She discussed the property was designated Suburban within a commercial corridor, and that the proposed use aligned with design expectations for commercial development, including shared access, consistent setbacks, buffering and coordinated signage. She stated staff found that use compatible with surrounding development patterns along Warrenton Road. Ms. Wolfson stated the County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan recommended a 10-foot wide shared-use path along the southern end of McWhirt Loop, which was south of Banks Ford Parkway. The applicant had included a proffer to dedicate 16 feet of public right-of-way along the property's McWhirt Loop frontage. Staff had suggested and preferred that the applicant provide the recommended shared-use path along McWhirt Loop, or sidewalk to complete the connection to the existing sidewalk on parcels to the east in lieu of the dedication. But staff recognized, as the applicant had indicated, there was large grading restrictions that had made it difficult to commit to proffering the construction of the sidewalk. Ms. Wolfson spoke of trip generation estimates for a hospital use would generate approximately 400 average daily trips per day. She stated the proposal was consistent with the Land Use recommendations and the Comprehensive Plan, and the use was compatible with the established and proposed development patterns in the vicinity, and that the proffers would help mitigate impacts to Warrenton Road and surrounding properties. She stated staff recommended approval of the rezoning with proffers subject to Ordinance O26-09, proffer amendment subject to proffers pursuant to O26-08, and the conditional use permit with conditions pursuant to Resolution R26-82.

Chairwoman Barnes asked if there were any questions, and Commissioner Shelton asked if this was a 24/7 operation, in which Ms. Wolfson replied it was. Commissioner Siegmund asked if there was going to be a helipad facility, which Ms. Wolfson answered no. Then Commissioner Caudill asked if this amendment, in Ms. Wolfson's opinion, was equivalent, better or less productive than what the board had originally

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approved. Ms. Wolfson stated she was in support of making something work on the site, whereas she did not think it was used to the best of its ability prior to this amendment.

Commissioner Caudill asked if any of the previous proffers were done at all, and Ms. Wolfson answered that this proffer amendment essentially replaced all of those proffers as far as whether they were done or not. Commissioner Caudill asked about the sidewalk and Ms. Wolfson stated it was her understanding that there were large slopes in this site, and so the viability of providing that sidewalk was a challenge given the grading. So that was their reasoning for providing the dedication versus constructing the sidewalk. Chairwoman Barnes then invited the applicant to come forward.

Charlie Payne stated he represented the applicant and would be happy to answer some of the questions asked. He introduced Ryan DeWeese, CEO at Spotsylvania Regional, who gave some background on the hospital. Mr. DeWeese stated they currently had a free-standing emergency room located along Route 3, Fredericksburg ER. He stated the one being presented was very similar, if not identical, in stature, to what they currently had located on Route 3, a very busy center for them. He stated what made that different than an urgent care center and in addition to the equipment capabilities, it was also the staff that were inside of it. So typically, urgent care centers had a physician assistant or a nurse practitioner running that clinic. This was board certified emergency room physicians, staff, 24/7, 365. Mr. DeWeese stated they were part of the HCA Healthcare family and they were the largest provider of healthcare in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Mr. Payne then gave a quick overview of the application. He stated this was a free-standing emergency room and it sat on about roughly 3.2 acres right off Warrenton Road at McWhirt Loop. He stated the proffers from the prior B-2 rezoning were not done; that project was not developed. He stated they thought this was a much better opportunity, a much more viable opportunity. Mr. Payne stated it was a self-sufficient, free-standing emergency room supported by physicians, RNs, paramedics, respiratory therapists, imaging technicians, and other professionals. He stated it was not a big traffic generator. He stated this was a positive economic development project, an investment of roughly \$20 million. It would create 40 full time jobs, including professional, a lot of physicians, nurses and support staff, and generate about four to \$500,000 annually in tax revenue to the County. Mr. Payne then asked Mr. Avery Steed to come forward to answer questions, specifically one from Commissioner Oats regarding the shared-use path.

Mr. Steed explained that they would have substantial impacts and grading back into their site, into property that they did not own and did not control in order to complete those; so they were proposing dedicating that right-of-way, so that in the future, when those improvements would happen, that the County would be prepared and able to construct that shared-use path. He thought there was a plan noted by staff that the plan would be to eventually expand that roadway there and to provide with larger travel lanes as well as an ample shoulder and a sidewalk. Mr. Steed stated they worked with the County to determine exactly how much right-of-way needed to be dedicated in order for the future plan to be improved once that would come into fruition.

Chairwoman Barnes asked the applicant to explain the meaning of dedicated right-of-way and its implications for the County. Mr. Avery Steed, Engineer for the project, responded that it meant converting a portion of their property into public right-of-way by shifting the right-of-way line 16 feet into their site along the southern boundary and essentially conveying that strip of land to the County. This would allow the County to construct future road improvements without needing to obtain easements or purchase additional property.

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Chairwoman Barnes then asked whether, in the future, if a sidewalk were to be constructed along that loop road, it would be the County's responsibility to build it. Mr. Steed stated that it would most likely be constructed by whoever developed the adjoining property and added that the applicant would retain only a very narrow sliver of land in that area, and any attempt to grade for a sidewalk now would create steep cliffs on either side and would require grading substantially onto neighboring properties, which the applicant did not control. She further noted, referencing Google Maps, that there was already a continuous sidewalk along the north side of the area on Warrenton Road, providing pedestrian access to the parcel from Warrenton Road but not from McWhirt Loop. Mr. Steed confirmed this, stating that there was an accessible sidewalk connection from the site to Warrenton Road, and that the project would include an accessible path from the building to that existing sidewalk along Warrenton Road.

Commissioner Shelton, noting his experience as a retired EMT and as a Warrenton Road resident, commended the proposed hospital location on Warrenton Road. He stated that this siting, given nearby subdivisions and retirement communities and the anticipated partial closure of the Route 1 bridge, would improve safety for residents in south Stafford by avoiding the need to travel past I-95 into downtown Falmouth for emergency care. He then asked about the facility's rerouting protocol if a patient required a higher level of care, specifically whether there was an automatic process to transfer patients to Mary Washington, Spotsylvania Regional, or Stafford Hospital.

Mr. Steed responded that the freestanding ER does not go on diversion and accepts all patients. If a patient is too acute or needed a higher level of care, most transfers would go to Spotsylvania Regional. The ER used four private transport agencies, not local EMS, for these transfers and, in rare cases where care is needed beyond that facility, coordinated transport to another appropriate hospital. In follow-up, Commissioner Shelton asked if a STEMI patient would be transferred to a dedicated cardiac unit, since that capability would not exist on site. Mr. Steed confirmed this, explaining that once an EKG showed a STEMI, the cardiologist at the main campus was immediately notified, and the team was prepared to receive the patient.

Chairwoman Barnes sought clarification regarding patient routing that individuals would be transported to Spotsylvania rather than to Mary Washington. Mr. Steed confirmed this. A member then raised an additional question, noting that the proposed facility was described as nearly identical to the one located on Route 3. He asked whether any lessons had been learned from that existing site and whether any improvements were planned. In response, Mr. DeWeese explained that one notable improvement concerned the location of the laboratory. At the Route 3 facility, the lab was situated at the back of the building. For the new facility, the lab had been moved to the front and placed closer to the nurses' station. He emphasized that while this adjustment may seem minor to those in the room, it represented a meaningful operational improvement.

Commissioner Siegmund added a brief comment to the discussion, noting that she agreed fully with the points previously raised by Commissioner Shelton. Building on that, she asked for more specific information regarding the expected patient volume for the proposed facility. Her inquiry included projected monthly and yearly numbers, as well as comparative data from the existing Route 3 location. She emphasized that many of her friends and neighbors in Stafford County would likely be the primary recipients of care at the new site. Understanding the facility's service capacity, she explained, would help clarify how many local residents could potentially benefit. In response, it was reported that the Route 3 location served approximately 16,000 patients in the previous year and that the facility had capacity to serve more patients beyond that number. Commissioner Siegmund expressed her appreciation for the information.

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Chairwoman Barnes made a final call for any remaining comments from the Commission. After confirming that there were no further remarks, she thanked everyone and proceeded to transition the meeting into the public hearing portion of the agenda. The public hearing for the current agenda item was officially opened. Chairwoman Barnes welcomed any individuals wishing to provide comments or share thoughts with the Commission regarding the agenda item and encouraged them to approach the podium to begin their remarks.

Mr. Loren Stark, a resident of the Rock Hill District, expressed strong support for the proposed medical facility. He stated that this was exactly the type of project he hoped to see approved as both a taxpayer and a community member. He explained that where he lived, access to emergency medical care was a significant concern for his family, particularly for his mother-in-law, who was in her mid-70s and lived with them. She had diabetes and liver cirrhosis, and in the event of a medical emergency, reaching Mary Washington Hospital would take considerable time—either by driving at unsafe speeds or by waiting for ambulance transport, which could take 20 to 25 minutes due to current routing and traffic patterns. He noted that the proposed facility would effectively give emergency responders an additional destination option that was roughly equidistant but significantly improved the likelihood of timely lifesaving care. For families like his, this represented a meaningful improvement in access and outcomes. Mr. Stark also highlighted the broader benefits of the project, including the estimated 40 new jobs created at the facility. He suggested that such a site would generate additional economic activity, such as food services or other small support businesses, without placing a substantial burden on existing infrastructure. He added that he would frequently drive past the proposed location and could easily envision himself or his family needing the facility in the future—whether for his children, his mother-in-law, or even his own minor injuries. He emphasized the value of having multiple nearby options for urgent care, both for his household and the wider community. Mr. Stark concluded by reiterating his full support for the project, noting that it presented clear benefits and no significant drawbacks that he could identify.

Kristen Maxson, a resident of the Falmouth District, raised several concerns regarding the proposed facility and its relationship to an existing elementary school located on the same parcel. She noted that Cornerstone Life Academy, situated at 56 McWhirt Loop, occupied parcel 44-101A, which was listed as a religious-use parcel of 12.154 acres in the Stafford County GIS system. She emphasized that the proposed project—including a pickup pharmacy and drug-related operations with a drive-through—would be situated immediately adjacent to, and within the same parcel as, the elementary school. Referencing previous community discussions about drugs near school properties, she urged Commissioners to carefully consider this issue. Ms. Maxson also pointed out inconsistencies across the project documentation. She stated that proffers list the roofline height and cemetery considerations as “not applicable,” despite historical discussion by prior Stafford Commissions about a cemetery once located on the site, though its exact historical placement is unclear. She referenced multiple pages of the agenda packet showing conflicting acreage figures for parcel 44-101A—ranging from 2.04 acres to 9.888 acres—despite parcel numbers being intended as unique identifiers. This inconsistency, she noted, had caused confusion among the public. She further stated that the freestanding emergency room appeared to occupy an estimated 3.199 acres but also seemed to be tied to the same parcel number described in earlier sections. She questioned the cumulative impacts of the various components of the project, referencing three related studies (two rezonings and one conditional use permit) and asking how findings from all three would ultimately shape the final outcome. She also asked whether neighboring residents had been contacted. Regarding traffic impacts, Ms. Maxson reiterated that the facility includes a drive-through component. She pointed out that the transportation impact analysis had not yet been formally submitted, as indicated on the application included in the day’s agenda. She cited figures showing an estimated 200 vehicles per day for the facility but contrasted this with traffic counts from other drugstore-type businesses, which could range from 38,000 to 59,000 vehicles per day. The accuracy of the projected traffic, she suggested, would depend heavily on the maximum square-

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footage permitted, referencing page 160 of the agenda. Ms. Maxson concluded by thanking the Commission for its time and attention to these issues.

Mr. John Pray, a resident of the Hartwood District and a member of Cornerstone Baptist Church—the congregation that previously sold the property involved in the proposal—addressed the Commission to express a specific safety concern related to the roadway conditions near the site. Mr. Pray requested that the Commission reconsider earlier comments made by Commissioner Oats regarding sidewalks and pedestrian safety. He explained that McWhirt Loop was an extremely narrow road with no shoulder. While performing routine groundskeeping work for the church, he frequently experienced vehicles passing uncomfortably close, underscoring the lack of space and potential hazards along the roadway. He noted that the entrance to Cornerstone Baptist Church—and therefore the access point for the proposed HCA facility—sat along this same constrained stretch of road. Because of this, he suggested that the Commission consider improvements such as turning lanes, sidewalks, or other protective barriers to enhance safety for both pedestrians and drivers. Mr. Pray further observed that the nearby Celebrate Virginia community was large, and residents would likely use McWhirt Loop as their primary route to reach the proposed facility rather than accessing it from Route 17. The current road design, he emphasized, was not equipped to manage substantial increases in traffic volume. He concluded by urging the Commission to explore measures that could improve safety and support the anticipated flow of vehicles to the site.

Commissioner Barnes thanked the public for their comments and made a final call for any additional speakers wishing to address the Commission. After confirming that no one else wished to speak, she proceeded to the next step in the hearing process and invited the applicant to respond to the comments and concerns raised during the public hearing.

Mr. Payne, representing the applicant, thanked the Commission for the opportunity to speak, expressed appreciation for community feedback, and welcomed the new Planning Commission members. Chairwoman Barnes asked whether the applicant could elaborate on possible safety measures for the area, noting that the earlier public comments had raised concerns. Mr. Payne invited Mr. Steed to address operational and traffic details. Mr. Steed stated that the proposed facility is a low-traffic generator compared to similar uses and that installing the access point and completing site grading and stormwater improvements would likely improve sight lines and distances along McWhirt Loop. He explained that emergency facilities of this nature nearly never warrant turn lanes because of their low daily traffic volumes and typical internal circulation. He added that the applicant's planned improvements would likely benefit adjacent property users as well. Mr. Payne reiterated that the project alone could not fully resolve the existing roadway conditions but would contribute positively to safety. He emphasized that most traffic associated with the facility would use Warrenton Road rather than McWhirt Loop, and the expected traffic would be significantly lower than what a by-right development could generate.

Chairwoman Barnes thanked the applicant and, hearing no further questions, returned the discussion to the Commission for action. She invited Commissioner Caudill, in whose district the project is located, to begin motions. Commissioner Caudill moved for approval of the first rezoning request, RC24155863, Proposed Ordinance O26-09. After a brief clarification regarding agenda item numbering, the motion received a second from Commissioner Oats. The vote passed unanimously, 6 in favor with 1 absent (*Commissioner Goldstein absent*).

Commissioner Caudill then moved approval of the second rezoning, RC24155869, Proposed Ordinance O26-08 Proffer Amendment, with the motion seconded by Commissioner Shelton. A brief confirmation established that this item involved a proffer amendment. The vote again passed unanimously, 6 in favor with 1 absent (*Commissioner Goldstein absent*).

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Finally, Commissioner Caudill moved approval of the conditional use permit CUP24155862. Commissioner Siegmund provided the second. Before voting, Chair Barnes thanked the applicant for presenting a project that the Commission was pleased to consider and appreciated the applicant's clarity and engagement. The motion passed unanimously, 6 in favor with 1 absent (*Commissioner Goldstein absent*).

Following the votes, Commissioner Caudill expressed her appreciation to the applicant for choosing Stafford and for providing a clear and responsive presentation. Chairwoman Barnes then transitioned the meeting to the next agenda item.

The meeting recessed at 7:42 PM.

The meeting reconvened at 7:58 PM.

Mr. Zuraf recognized Amy Taylor for the staff presentation, combining items 5 and 6.

5. RC24155568; Zoning Reclassification – Market at Austin Ridge – A proposed zoning reclassification from the A-1, Agricultural Zoning District to the B-2, Urban Commercial and M-2, Heavy Industrial Zoning Districts on Tax Map Parcel Nos. 29-75, 29-75A, 29-76, 29-76B, and 29-78, consisting of approximately 25.04 acres (Property). In general, the proposed proffers include, but are not limited to proffers that would: require the Property to be developed in general conformance with the generalized development plan, which includes three (3) development layout options with varying uses; prohibit specified uses; restrict the number of access points; require specify transportation and pedestrian improvements; provide requirements as to trip generation; establish general architectural design standards; permit reduced building setbacks for data center buildings; permit reduced landscaped buffers for data center and mini-storage warehouse buildings; permit less than required open space for specified uses; limit data center building development to specified square footage; limit amount of potable water usage for data center cooling purposes; establish architectural design and other standards applicable to data center; require monetary contributions for Fire and Rescue if a data center is developed; and establish requirements for the provision of water and sewer facilities to adjacent properties in certain situations. The Property is located along the south side of Courthouse Road, west of the intersection with future Austin Ridge Drive, within the Hartwood Election District. The Property is also subject to a concurrent request for a conditional use permit. **(Time Limit: June 5, 2026)**
6. CUP24155565; Conditional Use Permit – Market at Austin Ridge – A request for a conditional use permit (CUP) to allow multiple drive-through facilities and vehicle fuel sales in the B-2, Urban Commercial Zoning District, and multiple drive-through facilities, low intensity commercial retail uses, and medium intensity commercial retail uses in the M-2, Heavy Industrial Zoning District on Tax Map Parcel Nos. 29-75, 29-75A, 29-76, 29-76B, and 29-78 (Property). The Property consists of approximately 25.04 acres, located along the south side of Courthouse Road, west of the intersection with future Austin Ridge Drive, within the Hartwood Election District. The Property is also subject to a concurrent request for a zoning reclassification. **(Time Limit: June 5, 2026)**

Amy Taylor presented Agenda Items 5 and 6, which involved a zoning reclassification and conditional use permit for the proposed Market at Austin Ridge development. The applicant, Courthouse West LLC, represented by Jeff Harvey of Legacy Engineering, requested to rezone approximately 25 acres from A-1 Agricultural to B-2 Urban Commercial and, per recently amended materials, to M-1 Light Industrial. The amendments submitted the previous morning removed an earlier proposal for an M-2 Heavy Industrial district and eliminated the data center option. The conditional use permit request remained focused on

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authorizing multiple drive-through facilities, vehicle fuel sales, and low- and medium-intensity commercial retail uses within the appropriate zoning districts.

Ms. Taylor explained that the site is located on the south side of Courthouse Road, west of Austin Ridge Drive, and is positioned immediately north of a parcel under development as a warehouse distribution facility. The area surrounding the property includes residential neighborhoods, ongoing industrial development, planned commercial areas, and the nearby Embrey Mill Town Center. The parcel itself previously contained five single-family homes and several outbuildings, all of which have been removed. The land now consists of open fields, wooded sections, rolling terrain sloping to the south, and a pond situated near the center of the property. No RPA or other environmentally sensitive features are present. The General Development Plan identifies two potential development scenarios. Both include a similar layout of commercial buildings, internal travelways, sidewalks, parking, and loading areas. The revised zoning designations divide the land into 13.4 acres of M-1 and 11.64 acres of B-2. Under the retail-focused option, the project features a range of commercial uses including retail buildings, restaurants, a convenience store with 12 fueling positions and underground tanks, a car wash, a grocery store, a child care center, and a mini-storage warehouse located within the M-1 portion. Most buildings are one story, except for a five-story mixed-use structure with office space over first-floor commercial uses. The hotel option mirrors the retail layout but substitutes one retail building for a four-story hotel with up to 100 rooms, and it reduces the mixed-use building to three stories.

Ms. Taylor stated drive-through facilities were planned throughout the site in both the B-2 and M-1 districts. All lanes met or exceeded stacking requirements and included recommended bypass lanes. The development proposed five entrances: right-in/right-out access along Courthouse Road and multiple full-access entrances along Austin Ridge Drive, except for a single right-in-only entrance. Architectural renderings and design guidelines provided by the applicant reflect materials and styles consistent with the Neighborhood Design Standards Plan, and proffers obligate the project to follow the general architectural themes presented. The Comprehensive Plan identified this location as part of the Courthouse Targeted Development Area, intended for mixed-use, higher-density development. Ms. Taylor noted that the proposed uses align with the existing and emerging commercial character along Courthouse Road and support broader goals related to concentrating development within designated growth areas. Staff's review found no significant impacts on public facilities, including transportation, utilities, parks, schools, or emergency services. Commercial uses are not expected to generate new students or diminish level of service.

The applicant's amended proffers removed all commitments related to the former data center proposal. The remaining proffers require conformity with the GDP, prohibit specific uses otherwise permitted in the zoning districts, limit site access to five entrances, require interparcel connections, mandate sidewalk construction along Courthouse Road and Austin Ridge Drive, and commit to transportation improvements identified in the Traffic Impact Analysis. They also cap daily vehicular trips at approximately 11,000, require adherence to architectural themes and materials, provide open space beyond minimum requirements, waive internal landscape buffers between the mini-storage facility and adjacent uses, and establish provisions for water and sewer service coordination with nearby properties.

The conditional use permit authorizes up to eight drive-through facilities and up to 12 fueling positions within the B-2 district, and it allows low- and medium-intensity commercial uses within the M-1 area. Conditions place additional requirements on drive-through distribution, access management, stacking lane design, pedestrian movement, signage coordination, glare screening, and the precise placement of fuel sales. Illuminated signs facing residential properties would be prohibited.

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Ms. Taylor stated that staff found several aspects of the proposal consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, including adherence to transportation policies, alignment with nearby development patterns, compatible architectural concepts, and commitments to open space. The primary concern was that the proposed buildings' floor area ratio does not meet the minimum recommendation for commercial areas within Targeted Development Areas. Nevertheless, aside from the FAR issue, the removal of the data center option improved overall consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.

Because the revised materials were submitted only the previous morning and require re-advertisement, staff recommended deferral of the zoning reclassification application to allow adequate review. Staff recommended approval of the conditional use permit with conditions, contingent on the eventual approval of the rezoning. Ms. Taylor concluded by offering to answer questions from the Commission.

During the question period for staff, Ms. Caudill sought clarification regarding the revised application materials. She first confirmed that the applicant's newest amendment fully removed the data center component. Ms. Taylor affirmed that the data center option had been eliminated. Ms. Caudill then noted that the revised impact statement still referenced waivers related to the county's newly adopted data center regulations. Ms. Taylor explained that this appeared to be a typographical error in the applicant's newly submitted materials, which staff had only received the previous day. She stated that a deferral would allow adequate time for staff to work with the applicant to correct all remaining inaccuracies before the next public hearing.

Ms. Caudill next asked what uses were permitted within the M-1 zoning district. Ms. Taylor responded that M-1 allows a range of light industrial uses, including commercial retail, hotels by right, printing and engraving operations, mini-storage warehouses, and general storage warehousing, though she did not have the complete list with her. Ms. Caudill indicated she already knew the answer but wanted the information provided for the benefit of the public. She then asked what distinguished B-2 from M-1, and whether the proposed development could be accommodated entirely within the B-2 district. Ms. Taylor explained that the mini-storage warehouse was a significant component of the proposal. While such a use could be permitted in B-2, it would require a conditional use permit in that district. By rezoning to M-1, the applicant could establish the mini-storage facility by right. General storage warehousing, she added, is not permitted in B-2 at all and would require M-1 zoning.

Ms. Siegmund commented that she recalled the Board of Supervisors had previously removed mini-storage as a by-right use in commercial districts following public input, and she raised the same question about why the entire site could not remain B-2. She expressed concern about which uses the M-1 designation might enable. Ms. Taylor reviewed the progression of the application, explaining that the earliest version had proposed B-2 zoning across the site and sought a CUP for the mini-storage use. The applicant later amended the request to M-2 in pursuit of a data center option. Following concerns raised over that proposal, the applicant informed staff late in the prior week that they would revise the request again, reducing the industrial zoning to M-1 and removing the data center. She noted that the M-1 district is more limited in intensity than M-2.

Ms. Barnes asked which uses the applicant proposed to proffer out of the M-1 district. Ms. Taylor first indicated she did not have the amended proffers with her but then corrected herself and referred to the updated list. Ms. Barnes explained for the audience that "proffering out" means the applicant voluntarily agrees not to use certain by-right uses that would otherwise be allowed under the zoning classification. Ms. Taylor then read the list of uses the applicant proposed to prohibit in M-1, which included aquaculture; auto assembly, repair, painting, upholstering, and body work; building material yards; commercial kennels; contractor equipment and storage yards; convenience centers and convenience stores within the M-1 area;

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modular unit repair and rental; tractor-trailer parking and storage; rail sidings; adult businesses; private airports; boat sales; energy storage facilities; motor vehicle sales; solar facilities; truck stops; and vehicle fuel sales. She clarified that although the project includes a convenience store and fuel sales, those uses would be limited solely to the B-2 portion of the property.

Mr. Oats asked staff to summarize what uses remained permitted after the proffered exclusions, noting that a simpler explanation might be helpful. Ms. Taylor said she was not fully prepared to provide a complete remaining list. Mr. Zuraf added that staff would need time to compare the entire list of M-1 uses against the proffered exclusions. Mr. Oats suggested that the applicant might be able to answer the question directly. Mr. Zuraf agreed.

Ms. Barnes then asked for confirmation that with the zoning reduced to M-1, the applicant would be unable to construct a data center unless they returned with a new application. Ms. Taylor confirmed that a data center could not be built under M-1.

Commissioner Barnes reopened the discussion and with no further questions from commissioners, she raised concerns regarding the applicant's request for M-1 zoning and noted the broad range of industrial uses permitted in M-1. She stated that the applicant's described intentions, including mini-storage and a hotel, appear compatible with existing B-2 zoning. Ms. Barnes expressed concern about incremental industrialization within an area designated for mixed use in the Comprehensive Plan and asked whether staff had discussed retaining B-2 zoning with the applicant.

Ms. Taylor stated that staff had not met with the applicant since receiving the amended materials. She noted that the revised impact statement still referenced brewery and distillery uses, which are permitted only in M-1 or M-2 and require a conditional use permit. It was unclear whether these references were errors or intended future uses. In response to Ms. Barnes' questions regarding required buffers along the western portion of the site adjacent to residential uses, Ms. Taylor reported that a 50-foot transitional buffer is required, though this may be reduced to 25 feet if the applicant installs a 6-foot opaque fence as proposed. A full 50-foot buffer requires 162 plant units per 100 linear feet, while the reduced buffer allows a 50% reduction in the required plantings. The required plant composition consists of 50% large canopy trees, 30% understory trees, 10% large shrubs, and 10% small shrubs, with at least 20% of all plant materials being evergreen species.

Ms. Barnes stated a preference for increasing evergreen plantings to maintain year-round screening. In response to additional questions from Ms. Barnes, Ms. Taylor explained that Floor Area Ratio (FAR) represents the maximum allowable square footage of buildings on a site. She noted that the M-1 district permits up to 100% FAR, although open-space requirements still apply. Chairman Barnes confirmed that achieving higher FAR typically requires multi-story construction.

Commissioner Siegmund expressed concern regarding the county's limited method of evaluating school impacts, noting that current analysis focuses mainly on student-generation factors. She stated that the projected 11,000 daily vehicle trips associated with the proposed development would likely affect school bus travel times, instructional minutes, staffing costs, driver overtime, and services for special-education students. She emphasized that these operational and fiscal impacts should be considered when evaluating cumulative community impacts. Commissioner Siegmund also expressed concern about the removal of fire and rescue proffers following the withdrawal of the data center component. She noted that the projected traffic volumes and the corridor's importance for hospital access justify reconsideration of those proffers. She reiterated her support for retail development but emphasized the need to assess realistic impacts on schools, emergency services, and taxpayers.

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On behalf of Courthouse West LLC, Mr. Jeff Harvey of Legacy Engineering introduced the applicant team and provided an overview of the project. He explained that the application was originally submitted nearly two years ago as a fully commercial B-2 rezoning with a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for mini-storage. After the initial submission, the applicant explored adding a data center component. However, new county regulations adopted in October established setback requirements that the site could not meet. Although the applicant had secured preliminary power commitments from Dominion Energy for a phased data center concept, the data center component was ultimately withdrawn prior to the public hearing.

Mr. Harvey stated that the application was revised to request M-1 light industrial zoning for the rear portion of the property so the overall project could continue moving forward, particularly in light of contractual deadlines approaching in March. He noted that M-1 was selected as a less intense industrial district than M-2. While B-2 zoning could also accommodate the proposed commercial uses, the applicant was concerned that B-2 might be interpreted as potentially generating higher traffic volumes, even with the trip-generation limits proffered as part of the application.

Mr. Harvey outlined the proposed development program, which includes approximately 65,000 square feet of retail space in the B-2 portion, along with two design options for the M-1 area. One option features a retail/office/warehouse configuration with a one-story retail building and a five-story office building. The alternative option includes a three-story office building and a four-story hotel. He noted that multi-story buildings are typically necessary to achieve the floor area ratio (FAR) targets recommended in the Comprehensive Plan for this area.

On economic and community benefits, Mr. Harvey indicated that the project is estimated to generate approximately 367 permanent jobs and nearly \$3 million in annual tax revenues, including sales, meals, utilities, and real estate taxes. Transportation improvements proffered with the project include construction of a third through-lane on Courthouse Road, right-turn lanes into Austin Ridge Drive, and signal optimization at the Courthouse Road/Austin Ridge Drive intersection. According to the traffic impact analysis, with these mitigation measures in place, the project is not expected to cause significant adverse impacts to the surrounding transportation network.

Mr. Harvey described the site context, noting that it is located one block from Interstate 95 at Exit 140. He pointed out that the immediate area includes a large industrial warehouse facility to the south, recently approved sit-down restaurants across Courthouse Road, and nearby residential neighborhoods such as Austin Ridge and Embrey Mill. He explained that any future mini-storage facility on the rear portion of the site would be constructed at a lower elevation than Courthouse Road, limiting visibility from the roadway, and that a stormwater management facility separating the industrial and commercial components supports the applicant's request for an internal buffer waiver between those internal uses.

Regarding open space and design, Mr. Harvey stated that the zoning ordinance requires a minimum of 25 percent open space, and the applicant has proffered to provide at least 30 percent across the site. He noted that the architectural elevations submitted with the application correspond to several committed tenants, including Aldi, Flagship Car Wash, Sheetz, and Texas Roadhouse. The architectural design commitments, he explained, are intended to be consistent with elements of the County's Neighborhood Design Standards, including restrictions on certain materials and requirements for enhanced façades.

Addressing project readiness, Mr. Harvey reported that the existing homes on the property have already been removed. A grading plan has been approved by the County, and a Wetlands Permit has been issued. He indicated that the applicant is prepared to submit the site plan as soon as the zoning action is approved.

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Representatives of several major tenants were present at the hearing, underscoring the applicant's commitment to moving forward promptly once entitlements are in place.

Mr. Harvey concluded his presentation by reiterating the applicant's readiness to proceed and stated that he and the rest of the applicant team were available to answer any questions from the Planning Commission.

During the discussion, Ms. Barnes began by inviting questions from the members. Commissioner Siegmund asked for clarification regarding sidewalk requirements, noting her understanding that a five-foot sidewalk was preferred. Staff confirmed that sidewalks would be installed along both Courthouse Road and Austin Ridge Drive across the project's entire frontage. Commissioner Siegmund also observed that 8-foot multi-use paths existed across the street on the Garrisonville side and suggested the possibility of considering a similar approach for consistency and to encourage pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Commissioner Oats requested clarification regarding the contracts due in March, asking whether the agreements included Sheetz, Texas Roadhouse, and Flagship Car Wash. Staff deferred to the applicant, and the project representative, Mark Bowman, confirmed that several contracts were approaching deadlines. He stated that some leases dated back to March 2024 and were nearing expiration, including Sheetz and Aldi. Other tenants had site plan deadlines coming up over the summer, which would require extensions. He emphasized that the applicant's goal was to move the project forward to the Board of Supervisors.

Commissioner Caudill asked whether the applicant was willing to limit certain uses within the M-1 zoning category, given the broad range of uses listed in staff's presentation. Mr. Bowman responded that they were open to discussing such limitations with the Board. Commissioner Caudill then asked how receptive the applicant would be to rezoning the entire project to B-2. Mr. Bowman explained that the current request for M-1 was intended to minimize changes to the existing application and avoid revising conditional use permits. While the applicant would consider reverting to B-2, he expressed a preference for addressing that possibility at the Board level to prevent additional delays.

Chairman Barnes then raised a concern about earlier comments from staff regarding the potential for a data center. She noted that the term "premature" gave her pause, as it implied the possibility of such a use at a later time. Staff clarified that any future proposal for a data center would require a full rezoning process with public notice and hearings and explained that the area was transitioning from rural and agricultural uses toward business and industry, and that if the surrounding development changed significantly in the future, the property owner might choose to pursue a data center rezoning at that time; however, no such plan was currently before the County. It was emphasized that residents do not envision this area as industrial, and that even existing development, such as Austin Ridge Logistics, already pushes the limits of what many consider acceptable. Ms. Barnes stated that M-1 zoning raises concerns that it could serve as a placeholder for potential industrial uses and encouraged the applicant to explore whether the entirety of the parcel could instead be rezoned to B-2. She also expressed support for the proposed hotel, noting that it could offer a higher-quality option than others currently in the Route 17 corridor.

Chairman Barnes then raised a question about the presence of another Sheetz at the site, acknowledging public concern about duplication. She asked the applicant to explain the business rationale for locating a new Sheetz so close to an existing one. A representative from Sheetz, Brandon Krist, stated that the synergistic mix of tenants within the center made the location attractive. He explained that the company evaluates potential cannibalization impacts and determined that the proposed store would not significantly draw business away from the nearby existing location. Chairman Barnes noted that this aligned with typical travel patterns near the interstate. She also confirmed with staff that a crosswalk would be planned at the intersection of Austin Ridge and Courthouse Road, contingent upon VDOT approval. She stressed the

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importance of safe pedestrian access between the two commercial areas. Commissioner Oats followed up with additional questions for Sheetz regarding market analysis and pricing, asking whether the proximity of two locations would impact consumer costs or competition. Krist responded that the interstate interchange created substantial demand, and that nearby facilities such as Wawa or the existing Sheetz had limited or more difficult access. He added that Sheetz approached the developer early in the project, making it a natural fit as one of the initial tenants. Commissioner Oats also expressed strong support for the overall development, noting that it would bring needed revenue to the county. He acknowledged initial reservations about the proposed storage facility but was reassured by its placement and reduced visibility.

Mr. Krist explained that the storage component was only an option, intended to provide flexibility on a parcel that would have limited visibility once Austin Ridge Road is closed as part of the previously approved North Point project. He stated that keeping this option within the M-1 zoning avoided requiring new conditional use permits and additional re-advertising.

Commissioner Siegmund commented on the Sheetz discussion, noting that as someone who regularly uses the intersection, she sees a strong need for a gas station on the eastbound side of Courthouse Road. She stated that drivers coming from the west toward I-95 currently lack convenient access to fuel. She reiterated her preference for including proffers related to fire and rescue, schools, road improvements, and a multi-use path rather than a sidewalk. She also posed a general procedural question, separate from the specifics of this case, regarding whether an applicant rezoning to B-2 could still later seek approval for a data center. The Chairman responded that her main concern was the gradual industrialization of the area and emphasized that maintaining B-2 zoning for the front portion of the property was a priority to prevent incremental shifts toward industrial uses.

Commissioner Siegmund noted that regardless of whether the property were zoned M-1 or B-2, any applicant could always return in the future to request a change in zoning. She emphasized that no zoning category could fully eliminate that possibility, and therefore the public should not assume that any decision made would permanently prevent or guarantee a future use. She stressed that all future changes would still require a formal process. Staff clarified for the public that data centers are allowed by right only in the M-2 zoning district. M-1 does not permit data centers by right, and therefore any attempt to establish a data center on the property—regardless of whether it is zoned M-1 or B-2—would require a rezoning application and approval by the Board of Supervisors. Chairman Barnes reiterated this point, stating that the only zoning district where a data center is allowed by right is M-2.

Commissioner Caudill then asked why the applicant shifted from M-2 to M-1 only a few days before the public hearing. Staff explained that the applicant had been made aware of significant concerns in the staff report and recognized that the community had expressed clear opposition to data centers at multiple recent public meetings. Given that feedback, the applicant determined that this was not the right time or place to pursue a data center. Ms. Caudill asked whether the applicant had invested substantial resources into exploring the data center option. The applicant confirmed that they had spent considerable funds and had a potential user under contract for the site. The applicant explained that when the project was originally submitted two years earlier, the proposal met all county requirements, including setback standards in place at that time. As retail prospects appeared less viable for the rear portion of the site, the data center alternative was considered. However, following changes to data center regulations in October and signals that support was unlikely, a decision was made to remove the data center and revise the application to M-1. Ms. Caudill also asked why the process had taken approximately 18 months. The applicant stated that materials were promptly submitted throughout the review cycle but experienced delays due to staff shortages within the Planning Department. Staff acknowledged that the large volume of data center applications also contributed to extended review timelines.

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Commissioner Barnes concluded the Commission's questions and transitioned to the public hearing. She reminded attendees that the data center had been removed from the application and reviewed the public hearing procedures, including time limits and decorum expectations. During the public hearing, several residents offered comments.

Mr. Tom Sablon, of the Hartwood District, expressed concern that satellite imagery used in the application misrepresented his nearby properties by digitally adding trees that do not exist, thereby obscuring the visibility of homes along Cedar Lane. He also raised concerns about road conditions along Route 630, inadequate space for widening, and ongoing unsafe U-turns resulting from the diverging diamond interchange.

Ms. Abby Carter, Falmouth District, stated that while she was relieved the data center had been removed, she remained concerned that the applicant continued seeking industrial zoning. She questioned the purpose of maintaining M-1 zoning and noted that the application lacked adequate buffering and setbacks adjacent to future planned residential areas, contrary to county design standards. She urged adherence to the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Jackie Arthur, Falmouth District, expressed concern about the timing and stated that the application had been substantially changed less than 24 hours before the hearing. She noted that the staff report had not been updated to reflect the revisions, leaving both the public and commissioners without sufficient analysis. She requested more time for proper review.

Ms. Jenny Smith, Hartwood District, commented on recent positive developments in the area, including nearby restaurants and community-oriented spaces, and contrasted these with uses such as self-storage or industrial facilities. She questioned whether M-1 zoning was appropriate near family-oriented amenities and urged the Commission not to rush approval.

Ms. Alane Callander, Falmouth District, stated that she generally supported the development, particularly after the removal of the data center, but preferred a B-2 zoning. She requested strong landscaping, preservation of trees, and consideration of a quality hotel with event space. She also agreed with the need for proffers, including fire and rescue. She acknowledged planning staff shortages but applauded the applicant for withdrawing the data center, and she suggested that the Commission carefully consider whether a vote should occur that evening.

Ms. Marie Gazzi of the Garrisonville District expressed her appreciation for the Commission's thorough work and thanked the developers for responding to community concerns regarding data centers. She encouraged the applicant to remain committed to keeping the data center use out of the project. Ms. Ghazi stated her support for the proposed development, particularly the hotel component, noting the need for lodging to support regional events held at the nearby sports complex. She emphasized that M-2 heavy industrial zoning would be incompatible with the area and urged protection of buffers, objecting to any reduction from 50 feet to 25 feet. She also supported the use of conifer screening.

Ms. Alyson Azzara of the George Washington District spoke next, addressing noise impacts associated with development. She explained that HVAC and cooling systems are major sources of noise across many types of projects and that the scale of industrial uses creates heightened risks for nearby residents. Without a proper sound study and post-construction monitoring, she argued, the adequacy of mitigation measures cannot be assessed. She urged that sound protections be included in proffers. Ms. Azara noted that environmental noise poses significantly documented public health risks, especially for children. She questioned the need for M-1 zoning, stating that the proposed uses appeared achievable under B-2 through

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either by-right provisions or conditional use permits. She expressed concern about the last-minute changes to the application and recommended deferral and re-advertisement to allow proper review by staff, the Commission, and the public.

Ms. Lauren Stark of the Rock Hill District offered additional remarks, supporting earlier comments regarding noise impacts. Drawing from her experience living near generators while deployed overseas, she emphasized the serious effects of continuous industrial noise on families. She thanked the Commission for its thoughtful questioning during the meeting. Ms. Stark stated that gas station placement did not concern her, as the market would dictate viability. However, she stressed that zoning handcuffs existed for a reason and argued that business considerations or sunk costs for the applicant should not outweigh community protections. She criticized the timing of the significant revisions being submitted shortly before the hearing and urged the Commission not to reward poor planning by the applicant, recommending that the matter be sent back for further work.

Ms. Nancy Rueter of the Garrisonville District and an Austin Ridge resident stated that the last-minute changes felt like a “bait and switch” and left the public and the Commission with insufficient time to fully understand the implications. She requested denial of the M-1 rezoning because it did not align with the Comprehensive Plan, which she said reflects current community needs. She warned that M-1 zoning opens the door to incompatible industrial uses—such as fleet parking, welding, wholesale operations, and recycling—that had not been proffered out. Ms. Rueter noted the lack of noise mitigation, visual screening, and vegetation commitments in the application, particularly regarding HVAC equipment. She urged the Commission to either deny or defer the application.

Ms. Ashley Nata Vongso Moseley of the Hartwood District, a public health professional, also spoke in opposition to M-1 zoning. She emphasized the health impacts associated with industrial noise and other environmental factors and stated that placing industrial zoning next to homes requires careful, evidence-based evaluation. She reiterated concerns about last-minute revisions and noted that staff’s existing 21-page report focused primarily on the now-removed data center. She stated that the uses shown in the GDPs could be achieved under B-2 zoning and argued that M-1 introduces numerous industrial by-right uses with incompatible public health implications. She recommended against allowing M-1 zoning in the mixed-use area and encouraged the Commission to limit approval to uses consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Connie Barrow of Rock Hill District addressed the Commission. She agreed with the staff recommendation for deferral and re-advertisement, noting the need for full review of the updated materials. She emphasized that rezonings must align with the Comprehensive Plan, and she expressed concern that the application still contained unclear language referencing M-2 uses. Ms. Barrow questioned whether approving M-1 now would bring the site one step closer to M-2 in the future, especially given earlier remarks suggesting the timing for a data center might simply not be “right” at this moment. She also noted the lack of proffers addressing fire and rescue needs and raised concerns about inconsistencies in the GDPs regarding building sizes and parking counts. She concluded by recommending deferral.

Carrie Sobolik, Hartwood District, expressed concern with the request to rezone a portion of the project to M-1. She stated that all proposed uses are already permitted under B-2, even if they require a conditional use permit, and therefore she believes the industrial zoning is unnecessary. She noted repeated uncertainty in the application’s impact statement regarding whether the hotel or mini-warehouse would actually be built, raising concern that the M-1 designation could open the door to broader industrial uses not aligned with the Comprehensive Plan. She suggested this could position the property for a future data center request if adjacent property is rezoned to M-2. She emphasized that the Courthouse Targeted Development Area is intended for mixed-use, urban commercial, and residential development, not industrial uses on the west side

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of I-95. She asked the Commission to preserve the plan's vision for a walkable urban commercial area and to defer or deny the application.

Carrie Ullman, George Washington District, agreed with prior speakers opposing the M-1 rezoning. She stated that the rationale for industrial zoning was weak and unnecessary because B-2 zoning with conditional use permits could accommodate the applicant's stated uses. She emphasized the need to maintain buffers for nearby residential areas and supported keeping the area walkable and consistent with existing development patterns. She encouraged the Commission to defer the request to ensure it returns as a complete and appropriate B-2 application.

Julia Lewis, Falmouth District, stressed the importance of ensuring that new development is compatible with existing and planned commercial projects. She referenced the Board of Supervisors' recent approval of meals tax relief to attract two Darden restaurants to the Courthouse Road corridor, noting that these restaurants are intended to serve as anchors for further commercial growth. She expressed concern that a future M-2 rezoning or industrial activity adjacent to the proposed restaurant locations could jeopardize that investment. She stated that all desired uses could be accommodated under B-2 zoning and requested a deferral to clarify the proposal and ensure the County knows precisely what is being approved.

Colleen Wainwright, Aquia District, stated that she opposed the M-1 rezoning and expressed concern about the quality and accuracy of the submitted application materials, noting numerous typos and incomplete information. She felt the application was inconsistent with the character of the community and stated that additional storage facilities are unnecessary. She expressed concerns about the likelihood of a future data center proposal and urged the Commission to reject the request if it must be considered as an all-or-nothing action.

Yamini Singh, George Washington District, voiced concern for environmental and livability impacts raised earlier by a high school student speaker. She emphasized the importance of protecting natural resources, community well-being, and affordable living conditions rather than prioritizing additional corporate or industrial uses. She cautioned that industrialization, additional heat-generating development, and increased impervious surfaces could negatively affect the community. She urged the Commission to consider these broader impacts when evaluating the proposal.

Lillian Swain, George Washington District, stated that the short time available for review of the revised application raised concerns about the effectiveness of the public hearing. She questioned the necessity of the M-1 rezoning since the proposed uses can be accommodated in B-2. She further noted that neither the former M-2 proposal nor the current M-1 request aligns with the Comprehensive Plan, which does not recommend industrial zoning for this location. She stated that failing to uphold the Comprehensive Plan could create long-term planning issues. She requested deferral or disapproval due to unnecessary and unsupported M-1 zoning.

Elena Prokos, Rock Hill District, expressed deep concern about introducing industrial zoning into the Courthouse Road corridor, noting that the Comprehensive Plan designates the area for mixed-use development and not industrial uses. She acknowledged the withdrawal of the M-2 data center request but stated that M-1 zoning remains inconsistent with the Plan. She emphasized that industrial uses belong in the County's Business and Industry land-use category, not in mixed-use areas. She warned that approving M-1 could set a precedent for further incompatible industrial growth. She urged the Commission to keep the site B-2 and maintain the Plan's vision for a livable, walkable corridor.

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Karen Fox, Hartwood District, spoke about maintaining the identity and integrity of the Courthouse Targeted Development Area. She acknowledged the removal of the M-2 and data center components but stated that M-1 zoning remains inconsistent with the intended civic and mixed-use character of the area. She noted that M-1 still permits industrial activities such as expanded warehousing, pipe yards, and light manufacturing, which conflict with the Comprehensive Plan. She emphasized that zoning decisions create long-term development patterns and that introducing industrial zoning would shift the character of the corridor over time. She urged the Commission to uphold the Comprehensive Plan and keep industrial uses in appropriate locations.

Ms. Lauren Scott, Hartwood District, thanked the Commission for stating that the application should not be considered prematurely and expressed concern that residents were given less than 24 hours to review the materials. She noted that although moving to Stafford in 2018 was not part of her long-term plan, it has become her home, and she has observed how much time and diligence typically go into creating and updating the Comprehensive Plan. She referenced earlier versions of the plan that had included a Centerport Parkway extension through her living room, which has since been shifted east. She emphasized the importance of adhering to the Comprehensive Plan, particularly given the 18 pending M-1 or M-2 rezoning applications. She stated that deviating from the plan now could lead to compounded deviations in the future. She acknowledged that development is inevitable but stressed the importance of maintaining buffers to prevent overly dense, “concrete jungle” conditions.

Mr. Lou Sigmund, Hartwood District expressed appreciation for the Commission’s attentiveness. He stated that he attended to support his neighbors regarding concerns about data centers. He voiced agreement with comments about setbacks, buffers, and evergreen screening for properties adjacent to residential areas, and expressed concern that the developer appeared unwilling to meet the 35% green space expectation. He supported the inclusion of an eight-foot path, noting his family’s frequent use of the similar path on Courthouse Road. His primary concern was the impact on emergency services. He questioned how emergency response capabilities could accommodate transitioning from five former residences to large commercial buildings, noting that commercial fire responses are more complex despite sprinkler systems. He also raised concerns about increased demands on the Sheriff’s Office due to more traffic, pedestrians, and potential theft. He stated that expiring leases are not the public’s responsibility and that the property’s value is not likely to decrease. He requested additional time for review and recommended deferral of the project.

Ms. April McCarthy of Aquia District reiterated concerns that the process felt rushed and voiced support for keeping the zoning at B-2. She noted that the area comprises more than 2,500 acres and referenced her own preliminary research into potential profits over five years from commercial or light industrial uses on a site of that size, estimating figures between \$26 million and \$400 million depending on conditions. She questioned the applicant’s claim of losing “hundreds of thousands” of dollars, pointing out that this is where residents live, not just an investment area. She encouraged the Commission to take adequate time to review the application and recommended a deferral.

Ms. Sylvia Melendez of George Washington District observed that several comments referenced the possibility of future data center applications. She suggested that the County consider establishing rules or limits on the number of data centers permitted, which could prevent recurring applications.

Ms. Susan Sigmund of Hartwood District questioned whether the applicant’s referenced letters of intent represented guaranteed commitments from businesses or if planned uses could change. She also noted the absence of information about hours of operation, lighting, and noise, and expressed concern about emergency service impacts, referencing existing challenges with crime and rapid access to I-95 near

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Stafford Marketplace. She emphasized that many residents speaking at the meeting were those most directly affected and that they were participating without professional representatives. She stated that residents have had past negative experiences with developers and asked the Commission not to allow M-1 zoning because of these broader concerns.

Ms. Kristen Maxson of Falmouth District stated that development should be balanced, using the metaphor of walking on legs of equal length. She questioned how a 2024 impact analysis relates to the revised 2026 materials and raised concerns about repeated amendments to the Comprehensive Plan for individual applications. She referenced the removal of five homes on the site and commented on issues raised about tree placement, noise, and the County's financial pressures. She expressed appreciation that data center uses and fire-rescue proffers had been removed from the proposal.

Mr. Chris Denning, Garrisonville District stated that he is generally supportive of the project but shares concerns raised by other speakers, particularly about M-1 zoning and the impact on residents on Cedar Lane. He thanked the Commission for their thoughtful questions and stated that he felt well represented.

Mr. Patrick Sobolik, Hartwood District questioned the request for 13.4 acres of M-1 zoning when the proposed uses could be accommodated under B-2 with a conditional use permit. He expressed concern that adjacent M-1 property might be elevated to M-2 for data center use in the future and described this as a slippery slope. He criticized the application's impact statement, which suggested that nearby agricultural residential properties would increase in value because of potential redevelopment. He disputed that characterization, stating that such redevelopment would only benefit a developer. He also referenced remarks suggesting the application would be a "slam dunk" now that the data center use was removed and asked the Commission not to assume approval. He requested that the proposal be deferred or modified to remove the M-1 request.

Mr. Cade Hildreth, Hartwood District, discussed the importance of accurate view-shed depictions when placing incompatible uses near residential properties. He presented image comparisons showing discrepancies between the applicant's renderings and current observable conditions, noting that some tree cover depicted in renderings does not exist, and in some cases appears to have been recently removed. He expressed concern that this misrepresentation calls into question the accuracy of all view-shed materials and stated he would further address this issue at a future meeting. He asked the Commission to consider whether the applicant has accurately represented current site conditions.

Mr. Harvey thanked the speakers and addressed several concerns. He stated that the view-shed materials represent future, not current, conditions and noted that the project engineer could provide additional detail if needed. He stated that all required buffers and code standards are met or exceeded, including green space, where the applicant is proposing 30% instead of the 25% minimum. He explained differences between M-1 and M-2 zoning, and stated the applicant is willing to rezone the area entirely to B-2 if the Commission prefers. He reiterated that outdoor industrial activities are not permitted under M-1, which helps limit noise, and that screening of rooftop equipment is required by county code.

Commissioner Barnes asked whether there were any additional questions for the applicant or for staff. Commissioner Caudill requested clarification regarding concerns about Cedar Lane, noting that this issue was raised early in the meeting. Mr. Mark Bowman, representing Courthouse West, responded by explaining that the colored rendering shown was created using an AI application, which tends to omit surrounding context and only displays the immediate site features. He emphasized that there was no intent to hide or obscure nearby properties and that the rendering was simply meant to highlight the green space on the project site.

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Commissioner Oats then asked whether the applicant would be willing to proffer additional future tree growth. The applicant explained that the project includes required buffer areas with new plantings, as the site will be fully cleared and replanted due to the scale of development. The renderings are intended to reflect that replanting.

Commissioner Barnes then raised concerns about several references to M-2 zoning and data centers that were still appearing in the documents received the previous day. She stressed that these errors must be corrected before the project advances. She also revisited the issue of Cedar Lane, noting that while the applicant previously suggested the area may eventually transition to commercial use, the existing residents do not appear to be preparing to relocate. She asked for clarification on this point. The applicant stated that they had spoken directly with adjacent property owners, including one present at the meeting, and that there is interest among several owners in selling in the future. He explained that long-term development is expected to expand from Austin Ridge toward the Mine Road extension, ultimately forming a commercial corridor.

Commissioner Siegmund identified additional instances where “M-2” and “data centers” continued to appear in the impact statement and proffer documents. Staff suggested that older versions may have been mixed with newer ones. The applicant agreed to correct any remaining errors in the proffers and impact statement.

Commissioner Barnes also noted that noise studies are standard for data centers but not typically required for commercial developments. She clarified for the public that this project would be subject only to the county’s general noise ordinance, not the enhanced data center noise requirements.

After public comment concluded, Commissioner Barnes praised the public’s engagement and turned the matter back to Commissioner Shelton, in whose district the project is located. Commissioner Shelton commended the developer for making compromises but stated that both staff and the applicant needed more time to resolve concerns raised during the hearing. He recommended deferring the case to allow sufficient time for corrections and further review. A motion to defer was made by Mr. Shelton and seconded by Mr. Bratton.

Staff advised that the deferral would require re-advertisement and therefore a delay of approximately one month. Commissioner Shelton asked the applicant to work with its prospective tenants to accommodate this timeline. The commission agreed not to delay the matter any further than necessary. Commissioner Caudill expressed support for the deferral, citing the need for transparency and adequate review time. She noted that last-minute document changes had caused confusion for both commissioners and the public. Commissioner Barnes added several recommendations for the applicant to consider before the next hearing: strengthening the buffer along Cedar Lane with additional coniferous plantings, significantly reducing or eliminating the M-1 component, evaluating a multi-use pathway, and exploring possible proffers related to fire and school services.

The motion to defer passed unanimously, with six Commissioners voting in favor and one absent (*Commissioner Goldstein absent*).

A subsequent motion was made to also defer the related conditional use permit for the Market at Austin Ridge. Staff clarified that the CUP is dependent on the zoning action and therefore must be deferred concurrently. This motion also passed unanimously.

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7. RC25156318; Zoning Reclassification – Buc-ee’s of Stafford – A proposed zoning reclassification with proffers, from the B-2, Urban Commercial Zoning District to the B-1, Convenience Commercial Zoning District on Tax Map Parcel Nos. 29-60C, 29-60D, 29-60E, 29-60F, 29-60G (portion), and 29-ROW, consisting of approximately 38.68 acres (Property), to allow a travel center with vehicle fuel sales and high-intensity commercial retail. In general, the proposed proffers include, but are not limited to, provisions that would: make the reclassification contingent upon approval of the concurrent request for a conditional use permit; require the Property to be developed in general accordance with the generalized development plan (GDP); require signage be in general conformance with the site signage package; require architectural elements and design in conformance with illustrative building elevations; specify how access to the Property is provided; require specified transportation improvements; and address vacation or abandonment of right-of-way located at Tax Map Parcel No. 29-ROW. The Property is located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Courthouse Road and Austin Ridge Drive, within the Garrisonville Election District. **(Time Limit: February 6, 2026 – Waived by Applicant) (History – Deferred at the October 29, 2025 meeting to the January 14, 2026 meeting -- Deferred by Applicant, future date to be determined)**
8. CUP24155520; Conditional Use Permit – Buc-ee’s of Stafford - A request for a conditional use permit (CUP) to permit vehicle fuel sales, high-intensity commercial retail, and a comprehensive sign plan in the B-1, Convenience Commercial Zoning District on Tax Map Parcel Nos. 29-60C, 29-60D, 29-60E, 29-60F, 29-60G (portion), and 29-ROW (Property). The Property consists of approximately 38.68 acres and is located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Courthouse Road and Austin Ridge Drive, within the Garrisonville Election District. The Property is subject to a concurrent request for a zoning reclassification to the B-1, Convenience Commercial Zoning District. **(Time Limit: February 6, 2026 – Waived by Applicant) (History – Deferred at the October 29, 2025 meeting to the January 14, 2026 meeting -- Deferred by Applicant, future date to be determined)**
9. RC24155845; Zoning Reclassification – Potomac Church Tech Center Proffer Amendment – A proposal to amend proffered conditions on Tax Map Parcel No. 39-71A, consisting of approximately 49.85 acres zoned B-2, Urban Commercial to modify proffers related to transportation, to incorporate language and requirements relating to the existing Water Infrastructure Agreement, to modify development phasing in relation to utility infrastructure requirements, and to adjust proffers related to water use. Other existing proffers applicable to the Property pursuant to Ordinance O23-27, dated November 14, 2023, would remain unchanged. The Property is located along the east side of Old Potomac Church Road, across from the intersection with South Campus Boulevard, within the Falmouth Election District. **(Time Limit: September 19, 2025) (History – Deferred at the June 11, 2025 meeting to the July 23, 2025 meeting; Deferred at the July 23, 2025 meeting to the August 27, 2025 meeting) (Deferred by Applicant, future date to be determined)**

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

NONE

NEW BUSINESS

NONE

PLANNING DIRECTOR’S REPORT

***Planning Commission Meeting Minutes
February 25, 2026***

10. Project Pipeline Report (For Information Only)

The meeting then proceeded to remaining agenda items. Staff provided the pipeline report and noted upcoming planning cases.

COUNTY ATTORNEY’S REPORT

COMMITTEE REPORTS

11. Comprehensive Plan 5-Year Update Subcommittee
Next Meeting – March 4, 2026 @ 5:30 PM, ABC Conference Room

Commissioner Caudill delivered the Comprehensive Plan Five-Year Update Subcommittee report, outlining recent discussions, public engagement plans, and upcoming chapter reviews.

CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

During the Chairman’s Report, Commissioner Barnes thanked staff for their extensive behind-the-scenes work on long-running projects, noting that commissioners often see cases only at the final stages while staff have been working on them for years.

OTHER BUSINESS

12. New TRC Submissions

- [26156964](#) - SHIMCO CENTER LOT 4
 - A major site plan for the construction of an industrial flex office located east of Richmond Highway and south of Alabaster Lane on TM #38-23D, zoned M-1, consisting of 3.13 acres, within the Falmouth Election District.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

NONE

ADJOURNMENT

At 10:36 PM, Chairman Barnes adjourned the February 25, 2026, Stafford County Planning Commission meeting.