

STAFFORD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION SPECIAL BOARD MINUTES.

July 15, 2026

The meeting of the Stafford County Historical Commission Board of Wednesday July 15, 2026, was called to order at 3:00 PM by Ms. Anita Dodd, in the Activity Room of the George L. Gordon, Jr., Government Center.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 3pm by Anita Dodd.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Members Present: Anita Dodd, Emma Dietrich, Robert Orrison, Jane Conner, Aaron Mastin, Callie Knight

Members Absent: Martha Newton.

Staff Present: Nancy Kotting, Brian Geouge, Harriet Donkoh.

ADDITIONS, DELETIONS AND APPROVAL OF THE REGULAR AGENDA

None

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Ms. Alison Azzara of George Washington District stated that she has attended three recent meetings related to the Potomac Creek Data Center proposal, including two Planning Commission meetings and the Board of Supervisors meeting. She expressed her shock and concern that Ms. Kotting was not present at the Board meeting and noted that she was not given a clear reason for the absence. She commended Ms. Kotting's detailed and informative presentations at the Planning Commission meetings, citing her thorough explanation of policies, legal requirements, historical context, and preservation expectations. She stated that the developer appeared not to have completed required actions between the first and second Planning Commission meetings. Ms. Azzara said that she expected Ms. Kotting to make a presentation at the Board meeting regarding the applicant's response to issues raised by the Planning Commission and the reasoning behind the recommendation for denial. No such presentation occurred, and there were no additional materials provided by staff. She said that the developer's attorney instead provided the historical context, and after listening for several hours, she observed multiple factual inaccuracies, misrepresentations, and omissions in that presentation. She stated that this resulted in the Board being asked to make an informed decision based on incomplete and incorrect information, which she believed to be detrimental to the county and the community. She asked the Commission to acknowledge and address this issue.

Mr. Eastland of the Rock Hill District referenced a quote from David Brower, former Executive Director of the Sierra Club: ***"Our opponents' victories are forever; ours are merely a stay of execution."*** He stated that the outcome of the previous Tuesday's Board meeting represented a "stay of execution" rather than a win, noting that the motion to deny the data center application failed 4-3. He added that the county has a

hard time doing the right thing even when it stares them right in the face. Mr. Eastland commended Chair Dodd for calling out the county's refusal to have the Cultural Resource Specialist present at the Board meeting and also commended Kim Taylor Wilson for her remarks on African American graves and their importance to the Black community. Mr. Eastland expressed strong opposition to placing a data center on the property, citing reasons mentioned in prior meetings. He stated his commitment to "fight this thing tooth and nail."

Ms. Prokos, Rock Hill District said she was impressed by the Commission's expertise and advocacy for preserving historic resources, stating that Stafford County loses part of its character when these resources are minimized. She expressed concern about the Potomac Creek application and confidence that the Commission and the Architectural Review Board would thoroughly review all relevant issues. She stated that the developer does not appear willing to preserve the cemetery on the property and shared her personal hope, acknowledging it as a fantasy, that the landowners might donate the property to the county for use as a historical park in exchange for tax benefits, although she recognized this was unlikely. Ms. Prokos urged diligence by all members and constituents in protecting the county's historic resources.

Ms. Julia Lewis, Falmouth District, thanked Chair Dodd for staying late and speaking out on behalf of the Commission and the residents of Stafford County at the last Board Meeting. She stated her appreciation that staff, including Brian Geouge, were present at the meeting, noting that she believed staff members' hands are tied. She stated that she has attended multiple Board of Supervisors meetings where Ms. Kotting has been chastised for "advocating," and said that someone must speak up for preservation. She expressed disappointment that more Commission members were not present at the recent Board meeting. She stated that the county had placed the Commission in a difficult-to-access meeting room requiring special passes, suggesting this reflected poorly on the county's commitment to its citizens. Ms. Lewis highlighted resident turnout and stated that it should be recorded. She said she had spoken with two Supervisors who told her they were informed that Ms. Kotting's absence was a personnel matter, and therefore they could not intervene. She expressed concern that fear of litigation from developers might be limiting staff participation. She concluded by emphasizing that failure to speak up now could result in permanent loss of historical resources.

Ms. Jessica Rush, Hartwood District, thanked Commission members, Supervisors, and the public for speaking on behalf of those who don't have a name nor a voice. She stated that she began researching the issue in December, when the application noted there may be a cemetery on the property. She expressed appreciation for increased attention on the property's historical value.

Ms. Connie Barrow from Rock Hill District stated her strong support for following proper governmental processes, especially regarding burial sites. She emphasized that handling human remains is a sacred process, distinct from political or financial considerations, and should not be treated as a hurdle to development. She stated that the Commission's mission is not advocacy but fulfilling responsibilities related to historic and cultural resources. She said any perception that proper processes are being hindered is a major issue requiring transparency. Ms. Barrow acknowledged potential concerns about staff job security and confidentiality obligations but stressed the need for clarity in these processes. She concluded by asking that the process remain transparent and that qualified staff be allowed to perform their responsibilities fully.

Mr. Bill Shelton, Falmouth District, stated that he lives a quarter mile from the cemetery and that his ancestors are buried there. He said he and his family have visited and monitored the cemetery for roughly 40 years. He stated that contrary to claims that no one had visited the site, he has gone annually for 30 years, often accessing the site using a right described in the will of his great-great-great-great-great-grandfather. Mr. Shelton described the old county road historically connecting Eskimo Hill Road to Cliff Farm Road and noted that he used this path to reach the cemetery. He recalled hunting and playing in the woods as a child and stated that he knows every inch of the property. Mr. Shelton stated that in 2006 he accompanied county representatives to the site, where graves were identified, marked, drawn, and recorded. He said these records later disappeared. He referenced similar past issues involving missing records related to Civil War sites in Brook. He stated that he hoped the cemetery would be saved.

Roxie Joyce, George Washington District expressed appreciation for the Commission's work. She said that she lives near Highway 3, where future data centers and developments have been proposed, including one near her home. She voiced concern that if the current matter is not handled properly, future proposals could more easily disregard cemeteries, Indigenous villages, and other historic sites. She noted Stafford County's significant historical heritage, including sites related to George Washington, and stated that these resources must be protected.

Mr. Lenny Craig, Griffis Village, stated that he has conducted more than 15 years of research on people of color and discovered a 1929 Federal Law prohibiting the disturbance of Indian burial grounds. He stated that the term "Indian" would apply to all people of color under that law. He said this may prevent development on such land. Mr. Craig also raised concerns about safety and technology, referencing a film featuring Arnold Schwarzenegger concerning machines harming humans. He suggested that allowing certain developments could risk setting the foundation for similar dangers and urged consideration of historical lessons.

Ms. Susan Lind, Hartwood District, introduced herself as a new resident and explained that she frequently visited Aquia Landing, where she observed rapid environmental degradation due to nearby development. She expressed concern for wildlife, the environment, and the expansion of data centers. Ms. Lind stated that she is historically inclined and was active in local government in her former town. She expressed interest in becoming involved and supporting preservation efforts, thanking the group for welcoming her.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Potomac Creek Data Center Application: Discussion of July 7, 2026, Board of Supervisors Meeting

Chair Dodd stated she called the meeting because important information was not presented at the recent Board of Supervisors meeting and misinformation had circulated. She explained she prepared a letter summarizing cultural resource processes discussed at the last Commission meeting, intended to supplement material provided to Cultural Resource Specialist Nancy Kotting. She emphasized the importance of ensuring Commission recommendations reach the Board and distributed the letter for member review, inviting comments, corrections, and additions.

Emma Dietrich thanked Chair Dodd and commented extensively on the letter. She noted that Board members appear unfamiliar with cultural resource surveys and suggested creating a presentation explaining Phase I surveys, investigations, and cemetery delineations. She recommended using the term Phase I cultural resources survey, which includes both above- and below-ground resources, and stated she would provide written notes. She advised specifying that Phase II scope of work must be approved by the County Cultural Resource Specialist to ensure compliance with VDHR standards. She recommended attaching the cemetery-related Zoning Ordinance due to misquoting at the Board meeting and clarified that Virginia law does not require descendant consent for relocation, only due diligence in contacting descendants, with final decisions made by the circuit court.

Ms. Dietrich explained that a newly referenced law effective July 2026 concerns maintenance—not relocation—and was misquoted by the applicant. She clarified it allows parties to petition the circuit court to maintain cemeteries with no identifiable owner. Robert Orrison confirmed the applicable relocation statute: Virginia Code § 57-38.1. Ms. Dietrich described its limitations, including minimal notice requirements, optional notification to historical or genealogical groups, and absence of required reporting on final burial locations. She noted the Commission previously developed detailed relocation recommendations to compensate for gaps in the law. She explained differences between funeral-home exhumation and archaeological exhumation and emphasized the benefits of the latter, though not legally required.

Chair Dodd noted she had been told archaeological removal required the cemetery to be classified as an archaeological site; Ms. Dietrich responded that archaeological work could still occur under anticipatory burial permits. She reiterated including the statute and Commission recommendations in the letter and suggested revising *archaeological investigations to cultural resources surveys*.

Nancy Kotting asked whether archaeological site designation would require an anticipatory removal permit; Ms. Dietrich said the law predates modern regulations and could not be interpreted definitively. Callie Knight referenced federal African American Burial Preservation Act grants. Ms. Dietrich acknowledged both federal and state funds, noting the state program largely supports maintenance.

Chair Dodd shared a lidar image annotated by Mr. Shelton showing the cemetery, house, and outbuildings. Discussion clarified that the next Board hearing would be August 17. Ms. Kotting added the applicant received 60 days to complete its “investigation.” Ms. Dietrich expressed concern that the Board expected a full investigation when only cemetery delineation—not a Phase I survey—was being conducted. She stressed the importance of clear scopes of work and noted that delineation does not identify other cultural resources. Chair Dodd emphasized that without proper information, the Board cannot make an informed decision.

Regarding reinterment, Ms. Knight asked about guidelines; Ms. Dietrich stated Virginia Department of Health requirements apply, and burial location is generally chosen by the applicant unless descendants are consulted. She said the law requires perpetual care and noted most relocations in Stafford occur at church cemeteries. Ms. Kotting stated the applicant currently intends to relocate remains on the same parcel. Ms. Dietrich urged confirmation and discussion of implications if rezoning proceeds, but the court denies relocation. Chair Dodd noted the developer’s lawyer suggested homes could be built instead of a data center.

Discussion continued on descendant rights: descendant approval is not required under state law, though good-faith contact is. Ms. Dietrich noted many descendant lines may be untraceable. Chair Dodd asked whether the letter should recommend headstone restoration; Ms. Dietrich agreed, saying repairs must meet VDHR conservation standards and involve VDHR conservators due to the age and marble material of markers (oldest dated 1808). Ms. Dodd noted availability of a qualified local stonemason. Ms. Knight asked about grant funding; Ms. Dietrich stated federal program eligibility is unclear and may apply only to large projects.

Robert Orrison asked whether Chair Dodd should be authorized to finalize and send the letter. Chair Dodd asked whether members wished to review changes beforehand; Orrison and Dietrich said they were comfortable with her proceeding. Ms. Kotting reminded members that group email communication would violate the Open Meetings Act and recommended voting to grant final editorial authority. Ms. Dietrich moved to allow Chair Dodd to make all discussed edits and submit the letter; Mr. Orrison seconded. All members voted aye. Mr. Orrison encouraged members to contact their respective Supervisors. Chair Dodd agreed and noted public outreach is essential.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

ADDITIONAL PRESENTATIONS BY THE PUBLIC

Mr. Eastland commented that earlier he had attempted to compare the current issue with the destruction of the Buzzard's Roost site five years ago and stated many residents were unaware that an iconic Civil War site had been bulldozed for the benefit of an outside corporation. He said the county now faces a no-win situation regarding the Potomac Creek cemetery: allowing the cemetery to remain with construction around it would cause significant outrage, while relocating the remains would cause even more. He stated this situation illustrates the consequences of allowing outside corporations to exploit county land, people, and historic resources, noting such exploitation borders on criminal enterprise.

Ms. Prokos referenced a very enlightening Planning Commission meeting featuring comments by Mrs. Jackson, an African American woman with deep knowledge of descendant history; she recommended Commission members watch it. She shared an image showing three buildings proposed in the application and indicating the cemetery's location. She stated that relocation options on the property are extremely limited due to proximity to Potomac Creek and required 100-foot resource protection buffers, as well as lack of access. She asked whether descendants must be provided access to the cemetery and urged consideration of the constraints.

Ms. Rush asked when the application would next go before the Board of Supervisors. She noted agendas are often posted only three days in advance, which complicates travel planning for descendants. She requested advance notice of the date.

Mr. Shelton stated that this project is only the first step. He discussed adjacent properties: Frank's Farm (100 acres) now sold and likely to become a data center; a former prison camp exceeding 100 acres also

likely to be sold for development; and areas extending to Potomac Run and Southern View Drive. He predicted data centers would eventually extend to existing neighborhoods. He described several historic features at Frank's Farm including a Union camp, a waterfall now damaged by construction, natural rock formations, and Indigenous artifacts found near the cemetery. He urged the Commission not to allow destruction of these historic areas.

Ms. Azzara provided two clarifications. First, she noted the Board had stated only that an "investigation" must be completed and resubmitted, and that it was unclear what the investigation entailed. She recommended the Commission determine exactly what is required, as neither the developer nor the Supervisors appeared to have clarity. She stated she hoped the investigation would advance to Phase II to assess additional cultural resources but said this does not appear to be the case. Second, she offered access to an interactive lidar map prepared by her husband, a GW professor specializing in geodatabases. The map overlays 1937 aerial surveys and the Shield map, includes Potomac Creek and Eskimo Hill properties, and shows potential historic resources across Forest Lane, Sims Farm, and Sisson North/South. She offered to send the link to Ms. Kotting for distribution.

Ms. Lewis added that the Board of Supervisors extended the application until October to allow time for study completion. She confirmed the Board will need to re-advertise the public hearing, ensuring proper notice to families and the public. She noted that hearings are typically held the third week of each month, giving a general timeframe for when the matter will be reconsidered.

Ms. Barrow thanked the Commission for its transparency and expressed heightened concern after hearing the detailed discussion. She said the process gives the impression that experts are being ignored and that the Board is treating the matter as a procedural formality rather than a substantive decision. She criticized the applicant's minimization of the cemetery issue and expressed concern about the difficulty community members faced accessing the meeting location. Ms. Barrow emphasized the importance of accountability and encouraged Commission members to ensure the Board understands the consequences of failing to follow proper process.

Mr. Craig shared a personal experience researching an individual buried in Fredericksburg. He visited the local archaeological department, discovered that an African American burial ground had been built over by a school later converted to apartments, and found that the graves had been relocated with no traceable record. He warned that if the Potomac Creek cemetery is displaced and a data center constructed, descendants will never find their relatives' graves. He expressed concern that data centers serve no benefit to local residents and instead function to track personal activity.

Ms. Lind asked whether the Comprehensive Plan appendix she printed was current. Nancy Kotting reminded attendees that the meeting was not interactive but stated she is available to answer cultural resource questions during business hours (8:00 AM–4:30 PM). She provided her desk phone number: 540-658-5187, and confirmed messages would be returned within 24 hours. Chair Dodd thanked all attendees for their participation and support.

Jane Conner addressed attendees, stating she spent 29 years helping save Government Island and was also part of efforts to save Ferry Farm from commercial development. She emphasized that community advocacy

can yield results and encouraged attendees to continue raising awareness among neighbors, especially given the reduced role of local press.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

None

CEMETERY COMMITTEE REPORT

None

REPORTS BY COMMISSION MEMBERS

None

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to conduct, Chair Dodd requested a motion to adjourn. Emma Dietrich moved to adjourn, and Robert Orrison seconded. All members present voted yes to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 4:14pm.