

**Albemarle County Planning Commission
Work Session and Regular Meeting
Final Minutes May 12, 2026**

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public meeting on Tuesday, May 12, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.

Members attending were Karen Firehock, Vice-Chair; Corey Clayborne; Nathan Moore; Lonnie Murray; Mary Katherine King; Catherine Brown.

Members absent: Luis Carrazana, Chair.

Other officials present were Michael Barnes, Director of Planning; James Van Vranken, Conservation Program Manager; Francis MacCall, Deputy Zoning Administrator; Lea Brumfield, Senior Planner II; Bill Fritz, Development Process Manager; Jenny Tevendale, Deputy County Attorney; and Carolyn Shaffer, Clerk to the Planning Commissions.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Ms. Shaffer called the roll.

Ms. Firehock established a quorum.

absent)

Public Hearing

AFD-2026-00002 Green Mountain AFD Addition

Mr. Van Vranken said that this application was a request to join the Green Mountain District. He said that the Green Mountain District was located just north of Esmont, along Green Mountain Road, and Secretary Sand Road. He said that currently, it consisted of six parcels totaling 1,200 acres, which was formed in 2015. He said that the parcels proposed to join were those shown in pink, which included two parcels totaling 750 acres under the same ownership.

Mr. Van Vranken said that these parcels were currently in active agriculture and forestry and were under conservation easement held by the County. He said that parcels under conservation easement were eligible to join the district, and the easements provided a higher level of protection. He said that this meant that there was no benefit to the County in adding these parcels to the district, but there was no cost associated with it.

Mr. Van Vranken said that the districts could not impact the tax rate of the parcels, and some landowners felt a sense of kinship and collective strength by expanding the districts and partnering with their neighbors in this way. He said that staff had recommended approval of the application, and the AFD Committee had concurred.

Mr. Moore said that he was curious about the current uses of the two parcels. He said that the parcel to the south, parcel 128, was reported to have been used for forestry. He said that he was interested in learning more about the specific forestry uses and the nature of the forestry operation on that parcel.

Mr. Van Vranken said that he had provided a satellite view of the properties. He said that as it could be seen, the parcel to the south was mostly wooded. He said that the cleared areas, which were primarily pine and some hardwood, were cleared approximately four or five years ago. He said that to his knowledge, they were still under active forestry, and had been replanted, thus starting the cycle over again. He said that there was a small area of pasture in the north, but most of that was also under forestry.

Mr. Moore asked if the parcel to the north, 120-20, had been used for either agricultural or forestry purposes, as indicated by the presence of trees. He said that he was unsure whether it was an active forestry operation or simply woodland.

Mr. Van Vranken said that he was not aware of the landowner's plans for that property. He said that the County viewed any large patch of hardwood forest as potentially suitable for forestry, as it was not an annual crop that required immediate harvesting or not. He said that it could sustain forestry operations over time.

Mr. Moore said that he also noticed that these parcels were already under a conservation easement. He said that he was wondering about the additional implications of adding them to the AFD. He said that he was inquiring about whether there were any additional land use valuations associated with joining the AFD.

Mr. Moore said that he was curious whether the conservation easement already accounted for this, or if there was a separate consideration for joining the AFD. He said that he was inquiring about the motivation behind joining the AFD, given that there was already a conservation easement in place.

Mr. Van Vranken said that there were a couple of restrictions that were part of the AFD program but not part of the conservation easement program. He said that one that came to mind was that if a parcel were to join the district, it would not be allowed to participate in short-term rentals, such as Airbnb's. He said that in contrast, the conservation easement program currently allowed this.

Mr. Van Vranken said that if a parcel were to apply for a special use permit, there would be additional requirements as part of the SP review process. He said that furthermore, if parcels adjacent to those that applied for an SP were also in the district, the SP review would need to go to the AFD committee. He said that he was not aware of any other additional protections.

Mr. Moore said that he appreciated the explanation. He said that this was not a particularly important question, but one that he had been wondering about while reviewing the two maps. He said that the maps showed the respective boundaries of Green Mountain AFD and Chalk Mountain AFD, as well as other AFDs that bordered more parcels. He said that he was curious about the calculus behind deciding to join Chalk Mountain AFD or choosing Green Mountain AFD.

Mr. Van Vranken said that to join a district, parcels must be within a mile of the district boundary. He said that in both cases, these parcels could have joined either district. He said that he believed the landowners had established relationships with neighboring landowners in one district, but not the other. He said that they seemed to feel a stronger connection to the Green Mountain region, and as a result, they considered their land to be part of that region, even though it also bordered another district.

Ms. Firehock opened the public hearing. Seeing no speakers, she closed the public hearing and the matter rested with the Commission.

Mr. Murray motioned that the Planning Commission recommend approval of AFD-2026-00002 Green Mountain AFD Addition. Mr. Clayborne seconded the motion.

Mr. Moore said that he had some general questions regarding the Agricultural and Forestal Districts. He said that he was wondering if they might be able to have information sessions in the future to discuss them. He said that the County's Code Chapter 3 stated there were four reasons why these AFDs were established.

Mr. Moore said that conservation was one of the well-known reasons, but the other two were less discussed. He said that one reason was the production of food and other agricultural and forestal products, as well as a strong agricultural and forestal economy. He said that when they received proposals related to renewing or adding AFDs, he was wondering whether they could include information about the specific products being produced, the impact on the agricultural economy, and the success of individual farms in contributing to this economy.

Mr. Moore said that the investment in AFDs, including land valuation and land use valuation, was substantial, amounting to millions of dollars annually. He said that he would like to request information from staff regarding the production of food and products from AFDs, as well as statistics on how AFDs contributed to the County's economy. He said that he would also like to know about the goals the County had for these districts and whether they were meeting them.

Ms. Firehock said that she made a note of that to bring up with the Chair. She said that she thought it would be beneficial to have a longer discussion, as the Commission had discussed AFDs many times but never with much depth. She said that scheduling a separate session to learn about the history would be worthwhile.

Mr. Moore said that he would like to see more information on the numbers, particularly in terms of whether this was an economic benefit and what that benefit was. He said that he would also like to know how much investment was required and how they could tweak the project to prioritize other goals, such as supporting younger or more equitable producers.

Ms. Firehock said that it was worth noting that they had the AFD Committee, whose role was to thoroughly review and consider these matters. She said that as they had heard tonight, there may be instances where there was disagreement among the AFD Committee, and it could be difficult for the Commission to determine the specifics of that disagreement.

Mr. Murray said that he would also like to have a conversation about the County's conservation programs in totality, looking at the costs and benefits of each program and comparing and contrasting the different conservation programs.

Ms. Firehock said that she thought that was a great idea. She said that she had strong opinions regarding certain programs that may be working well, while others may not be meeting the intended goals.

Ms. Firehock called the vote on the recommendation of approval for AFD-2026-00002.

The motion carried unanimously (6-0). (Mr. Carrazana was absent)

Adjournment

At 8:45 p.m., the Commission adjourned to May 26, 2026, Albemarle County Planning Commission meeting, 6:00 p.m.



Michael Barnes, Director of Planning

(Recorded by Carolyn S. Shaffer, Clerk to Planning Commission & Planning Boards; transcribed by Golden Transcription Services)

Approved by Planning Commission
Date: 05/26/2026
Initials: CSS