

**Albemarle County Planning Commission  
Work Session and Regular Meeting  
Final Minutes March 11, 2025**

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public meeting on Tuesday, March 11, 2025, at 4:00 p.m.

Members attending were Fred Missel, Chair; Luis Carrazana, Vice-Chair; Julian Bivins; Corey Clayborne; Karen Firehock; Nathan Moore; Lonnie Murray.

Other officials present were Michael Barnes, Director of Planning; Ben Holt; David Benish; Emily Kilroy; Rebecca Ragsdale; Scott Clark; Andy Herrick, County Attorney; and Carolyn Shaffer, Clerk to the Planning Commission.

**Call to Order and Establish Quorum**

Ms. Shaffer called the roll.

Mr. Missel established a quorum.

Mr. Missel said that Ms. Firehock was joining in remotely. He asked Ms. Firehock to state her location and reason for remote participation.

Ms. Firehock said that she was joining them remotely from Providence, Rhode Island, where she was currently on a business trip, collaborating with cities to restore tree cover.

(Ms. Firehock did not participate in the vote.)

Mr. Clayborne motioned that the Planning Commission allow Ms. Firehock to participate remotely in the meeting. Mr. Murray seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (5-0).

Mr. Missel said that before they began the work session, he would like to mention a strategy for approaching this. He said that there would be two staff presentations. He said that the first presentation would be followed by a brief opportunity for the Commission to ask questions.

Mr. Missel said that if they had specific questions regarding the presentation, rather than comments on the document itself, he encouraged them to ask questions during this time. He said that he believed Mr. Holt would be presenting first, then Ms. Kilroy would present the next portion.

**Public Hearings**

**SP202400001 Crozet Independence Day Celebration**

Rebecca Ragsdale, Planning Manager, said that she would be providing staff's presentation and covering the details of this request. She said that this was a request for a temporary event in the County's Rural Areas zoning district, specifically a category event that requires extra planning and attention, and they wanted to ensure that the site could accommodate it.

Ms. Ragsdale said that this was the traditional Crozet Community Fourth of July celebration, organized by the Crozet Community Association and other nonprofits. She said that the request was for the event to be held at King Family Vineyard, as the site had outgrown its capacity at Crozet Park and could no longer accommodate the fireworks display. She said that the planned event would take place in the evening after the parade, featuring a community celebration, music, food, beverages, and culminating in the fireworks.

Ms. Ragsdale said that the property, which they may be familiar with, was adjacent to the Crozet development area, located at King Family Vineyard, which was also home to the polo activities off Half Mile Branch Road. She said that the site had a history of agricultural uses, with the vineyard being the primary use, and had had multiple special use permits. She said that the property owners, the King family, were experienced in the special use permit process and had hosted larger nonprofit events, including the Pink Ribbon Polo Match, which was a one-time event approved as a temporary nonprofit event.

Ms. Ragsdale said that more recently, they had held weekend polo activities, which had accommodated up to 1,000 people. She said that additionally, the property had been under conservation easement with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation since 2000. She said that she had previously mentioned that the community's previous location at Crozet Park would no longer be suitable for fireworks. She said that as a result, the Celebration had been moved to the King family property in 2004, which had been held but with fewer attendees. She said that for the event to continue and grow, a special use permit was necessary.

Ms. Ragsdale said that provided was an aerial overview of the site, where the red rectangle indicates the primary event setup area. She said that the food trucks, music, and parking areas would be located in these areas, and some of the existing parking spaces were in the surrounding area. She said that she had also shown locations where traffic control would be set up. She said that this event had been extensively coordinated with public safety agencies for both on-site events and traffic management to and from the site. She said that this was one of the primary factors in this review.

Ms. Ragsdale said that the event was taking place in a rural area, where it may not be suitable for continued use due to easement conflicts with the comprehensive plan. She said that the substantial detriment category was primarily addressed through the supplemental regulations, which had undergone an extensive review by public safety agencies. She said that as a one-time event, staff did not have concerns about the character and harmony of the area changing.

Ms. Ragsdale said that staff had included this information in the packet and wanted to note that they wanted to ensure that the roads could handle the traffic. She said that they wanted to ensure they had the opportunity to review the parameters of the hours and frequency of the event through the special use permit process and also had a preliminary plan in place with the public safety agencies, which had met several times. She said that a condition of the special use permit approval was that the final plan be approved and then annually reviewed and approved prior to the 4th of July event, involving VDOT, the Police, Fire Rescue, the Fire Marshal's office, and local non-local volunteer organizations such as Western Albemarle Rescue Squad and the Crozet Volunteer Fire Department.

Ms. Ragsdale said that staff had ensured that adequate arrangements were made through this process, covering on-site activities, parking, access for emergency vehicles, maneuverability, and access on site, as well as establishing command and control, having crowd managers, and implementing and inspecting for the fireworks permit by the fire marshal. She said that these measures were similar to those seen at larger events, where certified crowd manager staff and a fire marshal were present. She said that staff had recommended approval with these conditions.

Ms. Ragsdale said that she would review the staff report to note the staff's demonstrated ability to meet the criteria outlined in the ordinance and their development of a preliminary event plan. She said that although the event was expected to generate more traffic than usual, it would be managed and was limited to a one-day event. She said that staff had recommended approval with conditions that specified this was for the 4th of July ceremony, allowing for flexibility in case of weather events to be held on or around the 4th of July, no later than 10:30 p.m.

Ms. Ragsdale said that this included provisions for activities and shutdowns, which may result in people leaving and cars departing after 10:30 p.m. She said that they would conduct a yearly review prior to each year to ensure the submission of zoning clearance and the annual review of the safety plan.

Mr. Clayborne said that he had a clarifying question regarding the condition ending at 10:30 p.m. He said that in other words, the program was scheduled to end at 10:30 p.m. He said that it was likely that another hour would pass before the site was clear, so he estimated it to be around 11:30 or 12:00 a.m.

Ms. Ragsdale said that that was correct.

Ms. Firehock said that this was a question for staff, and it was acceptable if they did not have the answer. She said that she knew that King Family Vineyards had done a great job with traffic management at their polo events, as they had demonstrated a strong ability to handle large crowds. She said that given this, she was not overly concerned about the potential impact of this application on event logistics.

Ms. Firehock said that her question was regarding fire safety, particularly in situations where high winds and dry conditions were present. She said that currently, Virginia was under fire watches, and she was curious to know how this might affect the fireworks event. She asked if the Fire Department would communicate with the event holders regarding this risk. She said that considering this was in a rural area with surrounding dry forest land, she was particularly interested in how they mitigated this fire risk and handled such conditions.

Ms. Ragsdale said that a fireworks permit was required through the Fire Marshal's Office. She said that one of the intended purposes of this permit was to ensure that the fireworks could be launched safely, and the Fire Marshal was on site to inspect the conditions and determine whether it posed a fire hazard. She said that it was not just a permit; it was a process that involves monitoring and authorization through the fire code regulations.

Ms. Firehock asked if, in a high fire risk scenario, they might delay the event for a few days. She said that she was wondering how much the event cost, as she typically thought of Fire Departments being on the ground, surrounding the immediate event. She said that given the increased concern of extended dry periods due to climate change, she was concerned about this aspect.

Mr. Bivins said that he had a couple of clarifying points to address. He said that when they referred to this as an annual event, it was essential to note that the special permit would allow them to hold this annual event. He said that this meant that the event was not limited to 2025; rather, it was intended to be a recurring event for perpetuity, giving them the ability to grant a permit for this piece of property to host a fireworks event within a 10-day window of the 4th of July.

Ms. Ragsdale said that to address the first part of the question, this annual event was intended to be a recurring occurrence, and they had not recommended any conditions that would require the permit to expire or have a renewal period. She said that this permit specifically covered the event itself, so they were not regulating the vineyard's use of fireworks as a separate activity, but rather as part of the overall event. She said that, however, the permit did address the large number of attendees, and the activities associated with the event.

Mr. Bivins said that the gathering was a key point of the evaluation. He said that moving forward, he had another clarifying question regarding the upward limit of 2,000 vehicles. He asked if they were envisioning individual vehicles making their way to the vineyard, or were they planning for

staging and shuttle services to transport a segment of those visitors to the vineyard or the polo grounds?

Ms. Ragsdale said that the facility had been reviewed without the use of a shuttle and managing it without a shuttle was something that had been mentioned earlier as a potential implementation. She said that, however, it had been reviewed with the capacity to handle the cars, which suggested that planning was in place to accommodate this need.

Mr. Bivins said that on page five, the property owner boasted of having 148 different species of birds. He said that when discussing biodiversity, he wondered whether the presence of fireworks would be incompatible with such a high number of species. He said that there were also cows and sheep, and the horses pastured on the property. He said that it seemed odd that the individual would highlight the number of bird species without considering the potential negative impact of fireworks on that wildlife.

Ms. Ragsdale said that she believed that in their narrative, they had aimed to emphasize their stewardship and highlight their contributions to the property's history, particularly in terms of projects, easements, and initiatives that had positively impacted the rural areas and biodiversity. She said that she was not the expert to provide a detailed assessment of the potential disruption to local wildlife, such as the species of birds that may be present on the Fourth of July weekend or the surrounding days. She said that that aspect of their narrative had been mentioned by them.

Mr. Missel said that he had a clarifying question to follow up on Mr. Bivins' mention. He said that they had mentioned that the special use permit would be in perpetuity, but he wanted to confirm that they would need to apply for a zoning clearance every year prior to the event.

Ms. Ragsdale said that that yes, it was a staff-level review. She said that it was a very common practice for events that did not require special use permits, as it ensured that all necessary approvals were in place for each event. She said that this had been a standard condition for zoning clearances, particularly for larger, temporary events.

Mr. Clayborne said that he had some questions regarding the duration of the fireworks portion of the program. He said that he was wondering if the duration was governed by the fireworks permit that was applied for, or if it was specific to this particular special use permit.

Ms. Ragsdale said that they were not intending to govern the duration of the fireworks. She said that they had an end time, but he believed that was adequately covered by other code.

Mr. Missel opened the public hearing. He asked if the applicant had a presentation.

James King said that he was a co-owner of King Vineyards in Crozet. said that he was grateful for the opportunity to be there tonight, and thanked Ms. Ragsdale for all her hard work in helping them with the application process. He said that his family and he were seeking this special use permit, not by choice, but out of service to their community. He said that Mr. Tolson, behind him to the left, had run this event for the past 10 years at the park, and it had been ongoing since 1947.

Mr. King said that Mr. Marshall, behind him to his right, had written in the Crozet Gazette that due to housing encroachment, the event would no longer be able to take place at the park. He said that having the land and acreage they did, he read that and thought he might be of service. He said that it was indeed a large undertaking, and they were taking on a significant amount of liability and handled it with horses, wine, and other activities.

Mr. King said that having watched his father go through this process for the Pink Ribbon Polo Tournament, which was a community event benefiting breast cancer research, he knew that the money stayed in the area. He said that like his father, he wanted to help the community with what he had. He said that when he saw Mr. Tolson trying to help people, he wanted to help people too. He said that this was simply an ask that they host the event Mr. Tolson had run so well for many years. He said that he was happy to answer any questions.

Mr. King said that when he applied for this process, the mention of the 100 bird species was because he wanted to highlight how they were stewards of the environment and how they were helping it. He said that they had worked with Ducks Unlimited and the Army Corps of Engineers to build a waterfowl impoundment, which transformed a dry stream bed into a birdwatching hotspot.

Mr. King said that it was previously just a dry pasture. He said that birders from across the state and country visited their location to observe the migratory bird species that passed through during the day. He said that he hoped this answered their question. He said that their goal was to support the community and host this event annually, and he would be happy to reapply through the zoning process every year, ensuring checks and balances.

Mr. King said that they believed that their collaboration with local organizations, such as EMS, Fire Rescue, and Planning, had helped them understand what worked well last year and what they needed to improve. He said that as a result, they expected the event to continue improving each year. He said that he hoped that they would be allowed to continue this tradition, which was unique to Crozet.

Mr. King said that the event brought the community together, and they called it "Old Crozet and New Crozet." He said that it was a time for people to come together, regardless of how long they had lived in the area, to share a meal, socialize, and enjoy each other's company. He said that the event was family-friendly and community-oriented, and he would love to keep it going.

Mr. Murray said that the question was asked about the potential for public transportation to carry some people.

Mr. King said that they initially reached out to a gentleman who runs the Crozet Trolley, Mr. Byrd, who had three or four trolleys parked in downtown Crozet. He said that they asked him, due to his logistical capabilities, if he could shuttle people in. He said that initially, he gave a thumbs up, but when it came down to business, he kind of backed out.

Mr. King said that they would greatly appreciate the opportunity to do it, but they required the asset to achieve it. He said that the farm had the capability to handle the number of cars they were discussing, but if people faced transportation issues or preferred public transportation or shuttle services, they would love to help make that happen. He said that they were simply trying to utilize a local asset that was available, and he had backed out last year. He said that perhaps they would re-approach this year and ask again, and he may be more willing to collaborate.

Mr. Clayborne said that he appreciated the insights that Mr. King had provided. He said that to confirm, the Vineyard building was open throughout its entire operating hours and allowed access to the restroom facilities, specifically for those with disabilities.

Mr. King said that the winery facility, tasting room, and carriage house, as well as the event space next door, would remain open throughout the entire operation. He said that the plan included an emergency shelter for guests in the event of severe weather or other emergencies. He said that although they were not legally required to be ADA compliant as a farm winery, they had chosen

to make their facility accessible for this reason, as a family and business commitment. He said that as a result, their facility would remain open to accommodate guests with disabilities.

Mr. Clayborne said that he wanted to respectfully mention that not everyone enjoyed fireworks. He said that he thought of veterans who had served in combat, and he believed that the 10:30 p.m. time frame should be respected for that reason, possibly even earlier. He said that he was not sure, but he thought it was worth considering.

Mr. King said that to respond to his earlier comment about the fireworks, he believed the duration was primarily driven by budgetary restrictions. He said that typically, fireworks cost around \$1,000 per minute, so the budget they brought to the table each year was equivalent to approximately 15 minutes of fireworks. He said that given the nautical sunset time, he estimated that fireworks would likely start around 9:30 and run for 15 minutes.

Mr. King said that the last hour of the event would be used for cars to exit. He said that he was aware that not everyone appreciated fireworks, and he had no problem with that. He said that they would focus on educating and communicating with the community about the fireworks schedule, so that they could take necessary precautions such as wearing ear protection, shutting and locking their doors, and keeping their dogs indoors.

Mr. Carrazana asked, during the summer months when the polo tournament was taking place, how many cars they typically saw on a typical Sunday.

Mr. King said that he was unsure of the typical count for numbers, but he could ask their parking manager, Brandon Black. He said that the parking lot around the tasting room could become full, and there was also tailgating taking place in the field. He said that they had an overflow lot adjacent to the property, which was essentially in his front yard. He said that they had never reached capacity for pull-up events, in terms of the limit being around 1,000 vehicles. He said that the two busiest days of the year were Memorial Day and Labor Day, when people were traveling. He said that he could provide a more accurate answer if he spoke with Mr. Black. He said that to throw a number out, he would estimate 400 cars total.

Mr. Bivins said that he appreciated the clarification regarding their work with Ducks Unlimited, which was a reputable organization. He said that to clarify, they had an exercise rink located below the polo rink, which was an outdoor polo arena. He said that there was also a large arena behind the gray fencing.

Mr. Ling said that the gray fencing was actually the outdoor polo arena. He said that the upper field was simply a grass field, albeit a smaller one. He said that the reason for the construction was to address a specific issue. He said that if the grass field was wet, it posed a safety risk for both the ponies and the players, as it could be slippery. He said that if the field was not saturated, the ponies and players could safely play in the arena, which featured a unique footing made of a rock-dust-sand mixture, providing a safer surface. He said that they also offered lessons for children and adults in the arena, as it was specifically designed for that purpose.

Mr. Bivins said that to clarify, there was no parking in the arena.

Mr. King said that was correct.

Mr. Missel said that he wanted to thank the applicants for everything they did for the community. He said that he would now like to briefly address the event management aspect of this event. He said that specifically, regarding Half Mile Branch Road, it was mentioned as sufficient to handle the cars. He said that in terms of the vision for event management, he would like the applicant to

discuss how they can effectively manage the flow of traffic and ensure a smooth experience for attendees.

Mr. King said that last year, the exit plan was initially to have cars exit two different exits. He said that one would turn right and go south down Half Mile Branch Road towards Route 250 and Interstate 64. He said that the other would exit left out of the main entrance and go towards Jarman's Gap, Crozet proper. He said that at the last minute, the decision was made to keep cars away from 250, resulting in all cars exiting to the left, which was not conducive to efficiency. He said that after discussing the plan with all parties involved, including Mr. Black and Officer Rhodes, they had devised a new plan for the coming year.

Mr. King said that two officers would be stationed at the intersection of Jarmans Gap and Half Mile Branch Road and Lanetown Road, illuminated as required. He said that two officers would be stationed at 250 where Hillsboro exits onto 250, also illuminated. He said that three officers would be positioned on Greenwood Road and Jarmans Gap Road to limit traffic heading towards the intersection of Jarmans Gap and Lanetown Road, ensuring the safety of the officers and reducing congestion.

He said that based on last years' experience and recommendations from Officer Rhodes, Mr. Black, and VDOT, they believed this plan would be more efficient, safer, and faster for everyone. He said that they were hopeful that this plan would improve with each passing year, as is often the case.

Mike Marshall said that he was the publisher and editor of the Crozet Gazette. He said that he was representing the Crozet Board of Trade, the nonprofit organization responsible for fundraising for the event. He said that they were all volunteers, and they did not charge for this event. He said that this year, the estimated cost to host the event was approximately \$50,000. He said that he was a bit concerned that the increased requirements may also lead to higher costs.

Mr. Marshall said that he and Tim had been organizing this event for 15 years, and it had been a volunteer-driven effort from the start. He said that their goal was to create an attraction that would draw newcomers to the town, encourage them to become invested in the community, and make the town their home. He said that he wanted to emphasize that this event had been free to attend for many years, with no admission fee. He said that they wanted everyone to feel welcome and included.

Mr. Missel asked if any members of the public wished to speak on this item. Seeing none, he closed the public hearing, and the matter rested with the Commission.

Mr. Bivins said that he was glad that the King family had been able to secure a location for this community building project, as it aligned with their discussions on the importance of community spaces. He said that however, the County had a responsibility to ensure the community's safety, particularly during large events like this one.

Mr. Bivins said that the King family had shouldered a significant expense, and he appreciated their willingness to do so. He said that he wanted to acknowledge the volunteers who had contributed to this effort. He said that it was essential to recognize that regulations were in place not to burden volunteers financially, but to guarantee the community's safety during these events.

Mr. Bivins said that with 2,000 people attending, the lawn would easily fill, and he was confident that the King family and their organization had a proven track record of hosting successful events. He said that his intention was to clarify that this project was not about placing an undue burden on volunteers, but rather about ensuring the long-term success of these community events.

Andy Herrick, County Attorney said that before a motion was made, he would like to suggest a phrase to be added to the motion. He suggested that if recommending approval, a Commissioner "move to recommend approval with the conditions and for the reasons stated in the staff report." He said that if the Commission was inclined to recommend approval, he would like to add the recommended conditions to the motion.

Mr. Murray said that he would like to commend the King family for offering this service to the community.

Mr. Murray motioned that the Planning Commission recommend approval of SP20240001 Crozet Independence Day Celebration with the conditions and for the reasons stated in the staff report. Mr. Clayborne seconded the motion, which carried unanimously (6-0).

### **Adjournment**

At 8:00 p.m., the Commission adjourned to March 25, 2025, at 4:00 p.m., Albemarle County Planning Commission meeting, Lane Auditorium.



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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: 03/25/2025
Initials: CSS