

**Albemarle County Planning Commission
Final Minutes May 28, 2024**

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public hearing on Tuesday, May 28, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

Members attending were: Fred Missel; Luis Carrazana; Corey Clayborne; Julian Bivins; Karen Firehock (arrived at 6:04 p.m.); Nathan Moore; Lonnie Murray

Other officials present were: Michael Barnes, Director of Planning; Khris Taggart; Syd Shoaf; Margaret Maliszewski Frances MacCall; Kevin McDermott; Rebecca Ragsdale; Andy Herrick, County Attorney's Office; and Carolyn Shaffer, Clerk to the Planning Commission.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Ms. Shaffer called the roll.

Mr. Missel established a quorum.

Other Matters Not Listed on the Agenda from the Public

There were none.

Consent Agenda

Mr. Moore motioned the Planning Commission adopt the consent agenda, which was seconded by Mr. Carrazana. The motion passed unanimously (7-0).

Public Hearings

SP202400005 Tandem Friends School Enrollment Increase

Syd Shoaf, Senior Planner, said that he would be giving staff's presentation for Special Use Permit SP202400005, Tandem Friends School increased enrollment. He said that this was a special use permit request to amend an existing special use permit to increase student enrollment from 250 students to 400 students. He said that the subject property was approximately 24.51 acres and located south of the City of Charlottesville at 279 Tandem Lane. He said that it was zoned R1 Residential and had been home to the Tandem Friends School since 1972. He said that the Comprehensive Plan designated it as Neighborhood Density Residential.

Mr. Shoaf said that, as mentioned on the last slide, this site has been home to the school since 1972. He said that the site contained multiple buildings and athletic fields associated with the school. He said that there had been nine improvements to the school approved by the County since 1972, four of which had been related to increasing capacity or enrollment at the school.

Mr. Shoaf said that the last student enrollment increase was approved in 2014 for a maximum enrollment of 250 students. He said that the last special use permit that was approved was in 2020 for an outdoor pavilion. He said that additionally, a two-story middle school building with a 15,000-square-foot footprint was approved in 2016 but had not been constructed yet.

Mr. Shoaf said that the surrounding properties were mostly institutional areas. He said that Monticello High School was located to the north across Mill Creek Drive, to the west was the Monticello Fire Rescue Station, and to the south were County School Board-owned properties zoned R1. He said that these parcels were largely wooded with a single-family home located on one of the properties. He said that in the greater surrounding area, there were two Albemarle County Schools which included Monticello High School, Mountain View Elementary School, and a future elementary school to be located off of Founders Place.

Mr. Shoaf said that the applicant's proposal was a request to amend a previously approved special use permit, SP201900007, to permit an increase in student enrollment from 250 to 400 students. He said that according to the applicant, the current facilities on the site had a capacity for up to 350 students. He said that once that capacity was met, the applicant would need to construct the approved two-story, 15,000-square-foot footprint middle school building to accommodate additional students. He said that this was shown as yellow on the screen.

Mr. Shoaf said that there were two factors favorable, one consistent with review criteria for special use permits contained in the zoning ordinance and another consistent with the Southern and Western Neighborhoods Master Plan. He said that there was one factor unfavorable, which was that the proposed increase in enrollment would generate additional traffic on Avon Street, Mill Creek Drive, and Scottsville Road.

Mr. Shoaf said that although there would be an increase in the number of trips, it was a minimal addition to the existing trip volumes. He said that the amount of trips generated did not pass a threshold that would warrant additional transportation conditions to offset the impact. He said that there were five total conditions. He said that three carried over from the previously approved SP, and condition number three had been revised to reflect overall transportation options for students, including the change in maximum school enrollment.

Mr. Shoaf said that the fifth condition addressed traffic impacts to the area, requiring student pickup and drop-off times to be staggered by 15 minutes or more with pickup and drop-off times at Monticello High School, which was across the street. He said that staff recommended approval with the conditions as recommended in the staff report.

Mr. Missel asked how the addition of 200 students equated to traffic generation and trip generation in comparison to a single-family home or two townhouses. He said that four people living in an average house meant that the provided count would be equivalent to 50 houses, but he questioned whether this was accurate or not.

Kevin McDermott, Deputy Director of Planning, said that they utilized the ITE trip generation manual to estimate future trips. He said that typically, single-family residences generated around eight daily trips per home. He said that for apartments and townhomes, this number decreased slightly, approximately six daily trips for a single-family apartment. He said that considering these numbers, 200 additional trips would equate to roughly 15 homes.

Mr. Carrazana said that the intersection of Mill Creek and Tandem also served as the entrance to Monticello off of Mill Creek. He asked what the condition of that intersection currently was.

Mr. McDermott said that in order to provide some background, the southern feeder pattern elementary school recently provided a traffic impact analysis. He said that it was not necessary for Tandem to conduct a traffic impact analysis because their impacts were minimal. He said that the analysis assessed the current conditions at the school and found that everything was operating smoothly during peak hours at the start and end of the school day. He said that both Monticello High School and Tandem Elementary had a police officer directing traffic at the intersection, which had helped to alleviate any issues.

Mr. Carrazana asked if there was a rating associated with that intersection.

Mr. McDermott said that according to the southern feeder pattern elementary school report, it appeared that with the addition of the southern feeder pattern school and background growth, the 2026 future conditions at that intersection were predominantly A's and B's in terms of level of service. He said that at that intersection, everything seemed fine. He said that this did not include the additional trips for Tandem, but the numbers were not significant. He said that he did not think it would bring it down below a C at worst.

Mr. Bivins asked if the traffic study accounted for the exit closer to Route 20.

Mr. McDermott said that the exit was not analyzed for the southern feeder pattern. He said that his understanding was that it functioned solely as an exit.

Mr. Shoaf said that per the applicant, they used the southern exit during afternoon hours for drop-offs and pickups, specifically during pickup times.

Mr. Bivins asked if this assisted in alleviating congestion at the intersection adjacent to Monticello.

Mr. Shoaf said yes.

Mr. Bivins said that he had a comment. He said that he was concerned about the decision to place the phantom middle school at its current location with the potential outcome that having the school there would block the circle leading to the exit on the other side, potentially causing traffic congestion. He said that he suggested exploring alternative options around the site since the property owner owns all the land in that quadrant. He said that according to his understanding of staff's report, he believed the area was an exit, and during his visits over the years, it felt like one. He said that if the only way in and out of the property after the middle school was built was through the entrance across from Monticello High, he believed there would be significant traffic congestion. He said that he recommended preserving the circle to allow for an alternative exit route rather than going out across from Monticello. He said that without this option, he had difficulty supporting the additional students because it would create extra traffic that would need to exit in a one-way system.

Mr. Missel asked if Mr. Bivins was referring to the southeast entrance mentioned in the staff report.

Mr. Bivins said that the road leading through the campus to Mill Creek Road could be used for the exit from the campus, but the proposed placement for the middle school would eliminate that travelway. He said that he could not support that option.

Mr. Missel asked if the cost of hiring a police officer to direct traffic was a self-imposed traffic safety measure on the part of Tandem and Monticello schools.

Mr. Shoaf said that was correct.

Mr. Missel said that when discussing increasing enrollment to 400 students, two key factors came into play at the 350-student mark. He said that first, Tandem had to construct a phantom building, and secondly, they needed to conduct another site plan review and traffic analysis. He asked how they would monitor their enrollment progress. He said he wanted to know if it was self-reported, meaning that once they reached 350 students, they would notify the County.

Mr. Shoaf said that he believed that it would be taken care of with zoning and the appropriate zoning clearances. He said that it was correct that once they reached 350 students, they would be at capacity with the current buildings on the site. He said that as mentioned with the phantom middle school, it was approved with a special use permit beforehand.

Mr. Shoaf said that they needed to submit another site plan to construct that middle school. He said that there was a possibility that if they did submit another site plan for this middle school, there could be reconfiguration of that road potentially. He said that staff would need to examine the conditions and how that would look more closely, but there could be a potential scenario there.

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

Kendra Moon said that she was representing Tandem Friends School. She said that she was accompanied by three school administrators who were available for questions as needed. She said that she would briefly

review some background information that Mr. Shoaf had already covered and focus more on the traffic aspect since it appeared to be a primary concern that afternoon.

Ms. Moon said that Tandem Friends School was established in 1970 and was an independent day school serving grades 5 through 12. She said that currently, the enrollment stood at exactly 250 students, with a strict policy of not exceeding that limit. She said that they had turned away students, including siblings, to maintain this cap. She said that the school had requested to amend its special use permit.

Ms. Moon said that as mentioned earlier, there had been four previous amendments for increased enrollment and preschool expansion. She said that this new request aimed to set an aspirational 400-student limit to avoid frequent returns for minor adjustments. She said that currently, there were 30 students on the waiting list, which represented the initial growth expected. She said that the 400-student cap allowed for future expansion without needing additional permits.

Ms. Moon said that the school had already secured approval for its middle school building location through a previous special use permit. She said that while not currently needed, this amendment provided room to grow. She said that the Tandem Friends School's current facilities could accommodate approximately 100 more students, with empty classrooms and the need for additional staff and the SUP being the only constraints.

Ms. Moon said that there was a public need for increased capacity in Albemarle County schools, particularly high schools. She said that on the next slide, she would zoom in on some statistics to illustrate this point. She said that approximately half of Tandem Friends School's current student body resided within Albemarle County and would presumably attend Albemarle County Public Schools otherwise.

Ms. Moon said that about 90 students lived within Charlottesville. She said that as of the 2023-2024 school year data, at least 55 students were zoned for the southern feeder pattern school district and ultimately Monticello High School, which would generate traffic on this road regardless. She said that Albemarle County was particularly overcapacity, with the red area on the slide indicating the number of students currently exceeding capacity and projected to continue for the next ten years. She said that Monticello High School was right on the border.

Ms. Moon said that the site surrounding the school has institutional uses and already possessed a special use permit, making it compatible with neighboring properties. She said that Mr. Shoaf had mentioned there being two existing schools in the vicinity, with plans for a third. She said that the future elementary school location would be just a few properties down. She said that the current site featured two entrances off of Mill Creek, and she would refer to the northern entrance. She said that there was an administrative building, classroom buildings spread throughout, athletic facilities, parking, and a future middle school in this vicinity.

Ms. Moon said that regarding the concept plan approved in 2015, she understood concerns had been raised about access, and while the plan was approved with the road's closure, Tandem would like to retain it if possible due to its benefits. She said that if the school reached its 350-student limit, they would be required to undergo the site plan process, including erosion and sediment control and stormwater management.

Ms. Moon said that regarding the anticipated impacts assessment, since no expansion was currently proposed, any future growth would need to adhere to normal stormwater management practices. She said that the biggest impact was traffic. She said that their current circulation patterns had a police officer present during morning and afternoon pickup and drop-off times to help control this intersection.

Ms. Moon said that all of the traffic entered through the northern entrance, and most of it left through that same entrance. She said that there may be some confusion; they did allow cars to exit in the morning and afternoon, but during the day, this entrance was closed off with cones to ensure pedestrians could safely walk through the site without worrying about cars. She said that there was flexibility in their internal circulation patterns.

Ms. Moon said that related to traffic, the pick-up and drop-off window was approximately 30 minutes. She said that the schools' start, and end times were already staggered from those of nearby schools, but they will maintain this schedule with a special use permit. She said that school started at around 8:30 a.m., except for Fridays; she would elaborate on that later. She said that Monticello High School across the road had a 25-minute staggered start time in the morning, while Mountain View Elementary School off Avon was significantly staggered.

Ms. Moon said that in the afternoon, they were only 10 minutes apart from Monticello High School, but many students stayed after school for activities, so traffic to the site was not as concentrated at that time. She said that the future elementary school was expected to have the same hours as Mountain View. She said that a traffic impact analysis was prepared for the new elementary school and found that all intersections in the area were operating at acceptable levels of service and were projected to remain so in the future.

Ms. Moon said that regarding trip generation, she provided a table of projected trips from ITE. She said that she wanted to point out that this was based off of two data points and projected, so it should be noted that there may be inaccuracies due to there only being two data points. She said that they did have actual trip counts from Tandem.

Ms. Moon said that staff members were present on site every morning and afternoon, and one present administrator was familiar with the daily count of people coming and going. She said that currently, there were approximately 385 trips per day, which was significantly less than the projected 620 trips. She said that in the future, it was anticipated that there will be 616 trips per day, still below the ITE projection. She said that the traffic impact analysis corroborated this, as it found 160 peak morning trips compared to the estimated 214.

Ms. Moon said that regarding intersection safety, a review of crashes over the past eight years showed none directly correlated with pickup and drop-off times. She said that one potential association existed at 9:10 a.m., which was slightly after the school's 8:30 a.m. start time. She said that the last slide displayed a snapshot of the intersection during peak morning drop-off at 8:27 a.m., showing a policeman directing traffic. She said that this visual was helpful in understanding the actual traffic flow.

Ms. Moon said that she also had a brief video, which was a sped-up version of five minutes into 15 seconds to demonstrate the flow of traffic. She said that there was a one-minute period where some cars were backed up, but overall, the traffic flowed well. She said that it was useful for visualizing the actual traffic patterns.

Mr. Bivins said that he understood from Albemarle GIS that the road leading from the southern exit did not actually lie on the applicant's property; it was owned by an entity known as the Nameless One.

Michelle Schlesinger said that she was the Associate Head of Operations at Tandem Friends School, accompanied by Whitney Thompson, their Head of School. She said that it was a good question. She said that the property owned by the Nameless Corporation, which bordered the area, and was being held for Tandem. She said that if one had the map with parcels displayed, it was also noted that they possessed an adjacent parcel on the corner; however, there were no roads present on that specific parcel.

Mr. Carrazana asked if the trip count numbers represented only student transportation for drop-offs and pickups, or if they also included trips involving staff members.

Ms. Schlesinger said that the trip counts included both staff and students in the total.

Mr. Bivins said that he wanted to ensure the applicant understood his concern that it differed from what they initially thought. He said that when he voted yes for the project, he believed there would be approximately 200 people on the property. He said that now it was being said that an additional 150 individuals would be present. He said that one issue that had recently become a significant concern for him

was having only one entrance and exit in schools. He said that accidents happen, and it was crucial to have a secondary route for evacuation purposes.

Mr. Bivins said that during his visits to the property for events or other occasions, he appreciated that the school was among the few with an alternative exit option. He said that while he wasn't concerned when the number of attendees was 150, he did have concerns now in today's environment. He said that with the increased population and restricted access, it seemed unnecessary since they owned land adjacent to the site, which could accommodate a road leading to the building that had yet to be constructed. He said that this was where his concern lay regarding how things had changed since the project was first presented to them in 2016.

Ms. Schlesinger said that she believed they shared the same concern. She said that knowing that they would need to return to the County and go through the site plan process again, it was likely that the shape and appearance of the building would not resemble its initial proposal. She said that this was a concern they also held, and they did not feel compelled to abandon the idea of having multiple exits.

Ms. Firehock asked if they could require the second entrance since it was germane to the impact of additional students and traffic. She said that it did not have to involve the specific layout of the campus but could be a general requirement.

Mr. Herrick said that a second access could be a condition of approval, but noted that the current conditions required that development be in general accord with the submitted site plan, so that would need to be altered. He said that as previously mentioned, the proposed layout was already approved with a prior SP; however, there could be a condition of approval for this SP that restricted its approval until an alternate exit were implemented, either at the location of the existing exit or elsewhere.

Ms. Moon said that to clarify, there would still be general fire access available. She asked if the Commission was discussing general access.

Ms. Firehock said yes.

Whitney Thompson said that they were attempting to honor the idea of not revisiting minor issues repeatedly. She said that since the matter had already been approved, she believed that the concern just raised would be incorporated into the process when and if they reached 350 students, a milestone that was not imminent. She said that assuming the concern remained consistent, it could be addressed during that time. She said that if they decided not to include something now, she imagined it would still surface in that process, regardless of whether it was stipulated at this point.

Mr. Bivins said that he was raising the issue because if approved, this matter would not be seen by the Commission again at any point unless staff brought it to them.

Mr. Shoaf said that he wanted to add some information. He said that the first condition, as Mr. Herrick had referenced, was a carryover from the previously approved special use permit. He said that according to this condition, development should be in general accord with the concept plan. He said that elements A through E were major elements that could not be changed.

Mr. Shoaf said that the building size, including height, could not be altered, nor could the location of buildings. He said that if they were to move forward with redesigning the building, they would need to amend this SP. He said that whether or not that was appropriate now or later down the line once they reached 350 students was uncertain, but they would require amending this SP to change the building location.

Mr. Missel said that there was some flexibility in the phrase "general accord" if it was determined that the building's location might have posed a transportation issue.

Francis McCall, Deputy Zoning Administrator, said that Mr. Missel was correct. He said that they would need to take the proposed change into account. He said that if the proposal was minor, they would evaluate whether it indeed qualified as such. He said that even with the orientation shown on the plan, the change could still be considered minor. He said that therefore, when making their proposal, they must make that evaluation. He said that if the shift opened up the possibility of keeping that entrance there, they could certainly consider it; however, if they determined it did not meet their requirements, it would need to come in for an amendment.

Mr. Missel said that he was attempting to simplify the process for everyone in the future, ensuring the applicant did not need to return to the County to move the building 20 feet. He said that his suggestion was to craft a condition or recommendation accompanying the site plan and serving as a reminder to staff of their previous agreement to consider relocating the building if it would be beneficial. He said that this would provide flexibility within the language of general accord, allowing for more adaptability in future decisions.

Mr. Herrick suggested adding a condition to require secondary egress onto Mill Creek Drive. He said that the applicant, the site review committee, and other relevant parties would determine where this secondary access should be located. He said that the applicant owned property that abuts Route 20, Scottsville Road, as well. He said that depending on the site plan process, VDOT might approve secondary access onto Route 20 directly. He said that a condition requiring the provision of this means of secondary access could be considered by the Commission and staff.

Mr. Missel said that to clarify, the reason for implementing this change was because of the transition from a capacity of 250 to 400.

Ms. Firehock said yes, it was directly tied to the request.

Mr. Missel said that he was reiterating this point because it felt awkward to change a previously approved special use permit.

Mr. Bivins said that they were not actually changing it. He said that circumstances had changed since 2019 when it was initially approved, and this request to change the census of the campus meant that a secondary exit was necessary for safety purposes.

Mr. Moore said that the proposed change was to preserve secondary egress from the property in general. He said that he wondered if they should add some amended comments to pass on that indicated the Commission considered a modification of 20 feet or so to the building envelope, which would be minor.

Mr. Barnes said that he suggested that for condition 1C, the location of buildings, with the exception of the middle school, may be moved to improve secondary access.

Mr. Carrazana said that he did not believe they were suggesting that they must retain that exit; therefore, he was uncertain as to whether they needed to delve into that matter further. He said that a second means of egress or exit from the property should be required, and the applicant should determine how to achieve this.

Mr. Missel said that the question was whether the location of the building necessitated providing a secondary egress. He said that if they said they would do so by keeping the existing egress, then tried to move their building to adapt to that requirement, this would not allow them to do so. He said that by adding the language Mr. Barnes recommended, it provided an opportunity for a second entrance and mandated a second entrance while also allowing for flexibility in design.

Mr. Carrazana said that he thought that moving the building by 20 feet would still be in general accord with the provided plan.

Mr. Barnes said that it probably was, but the condition would make sure that it was clear.

Mr. Missel asked if there were any members of the public who wished to speak on this item. Seeing none, he asked the Clerk if there were any speakers signed up online.

Ms. Shaffer said that there were none.

Mr. Missel closed the public hearing and the matter rested with the Commission.

Mr. Barnes said that to clarify, the Condition C would be modified to represent the locations of buildings, except for the middle school, which may be relocated to accommodate a secondary route for access.

Mr. Missel motioned the Planning Commission to recommend approval of SP202400005 Tandem Friends School Enrollment Increase for the reasons stated in the staff report and with Item C amended so the locations of buildings, except for the middle school, may be relocated to accommodate a secondary route for access. The motion was seconded by Ms. Firehock and passed unanimously (7-0).

Adjournment

At 8:02 p.m., the Commission adjourned to June 11, 2024, Albemarle County Planning Commission meeting, 6:00 p.m. in Lane Auditorium.



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: June 11, 2024
Initials: CSS