

Albemarle County Planning Commission
July 17, 2018

The Albemarle County Planning Commission held a public hearing on Tuesday, July 17, 2018, at 6:00 p.m., at the County Office Building, Lane Auditorium, Second Floor, 401 McIntire Road, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Members attending were Tim Keller, Chair; Julian Bivins, Pam Riley, Vice-Chair; Jennie More and Daphne Spain, Karen Firehock, Bruce Dotson and Bill Palmer, UVA representative.

Other officials present were Andrew Knuppel, Planner, Elaine Echols, Chief of Community Development; Bill Fritz, Manager of Special Projects; Andrew Gast-Bray, Assistant Director of Community Development/Director of Planning; Sharon Taylor, Clerk to Planning Commission and Andy Herrick, Assistant County Attorney.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum

Mr. Keller, Chair, called the regular meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and established a quorum.

The meeting moved to the next agenda item.

Regular Item.

CCP-2018-00002 Yancey Community Center

MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT: Samuel Miller

TAX MAP/PARCEL(S): 120A2000001800

LOCATION: Former B.F. Yancey Elementary School – 7625 Porters Road, Esmont, VA 22937

PROPOSAL: County use of the former B.F. Yancey Elementary School building to establish a public community center and provide enhanced access to programs and services to the Southern Albemarle community.

ZONING: RA Rural Area - agricultural, forestal, and fishery uses; residential density (0.5 unit/acre in development lots), and other uses including public uses.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: Rural Area – preserve and protect agricultural, forestal, open space, and natural, historic and scenic resources; preservation of crossroads communities that provide support services and opportunities to engage in community life, and residential (0.5 unit/ acre in development lots).

(Andrew Knuppel)

Andrew Kruppel presented a PowerPoint presentation to summarize the staff report for CCP-2018-00002 Yancey Community Center for the Commission's consideration. This is a review of consistency with the Comprehensive Plan for the proposed county use of the former Yancey Elementary School as a community center in accordance with Section 15.2.22.32 of the Code of Virginia.

You may know this as "2232 review" from the State Code requirement, but the purpose of this review is to consider whether the general location/character/extent of this proposed public facility are in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan. The scope of the review and action by the Commission is limited to the appropriateness of the site for the proposed use, and your findings will be forwarded to the Board of Supervisors for their information.

Yancey Elementary operated for 57 years in the Esmont community before its closure by the School Board and transfer to the Board of Supervisors in 2017, with the intent to use the building as a community facility. The School Division continued to maintain and operate the building and grounds at a reduced operating mode for the remainder of FY 2018, supporting near-term uses during the transition period. As a part of the transition, a Transition Advisory Committee was appointed, and meetings have been going throughout 2017 and 2018. The most recent community meeting was held on June 30 and a community meeting was not specifically held for this review.

The site is designated Rural Area in the Comprehensive Plan, and Zoned Rural Areas. The parcel is just over 7 acres, located on the east side of Porters Road, 1500' south of Route 6. The primary structure is the 28,000 gross square foot elementary school building containing a gymnasium, media center, cafeteria, and classroom spaces. The building is served by well and septic system.

The surrounding properties are primarily low-density residential and rural area uses, and Simpson Park (a county park) is located directly across Porters Road from the School.

The Community Center proposal follows the Long-Term Use Framework for the Yancey Community Center that was endorsed by the Board in March. The facility will have a mix of short-term rental, or "shared" spaces to be administered by Parks & Recreation Department, as well as dedicated spaces available for long-term leases to be administered by the county's Facilities and Environmental Services Department. The space plan can be seen in the presentation with the shared spaces in green, the dedicated spaces in blue, and other undetermined/available spaces in yellow also to be managed by Facilities and Environmental Services.

The Center anticipates a range of users and activities, including public users (such as Parks and Recreation; County and Schools departments; and citizen committees such as the Yancey Transition Advisory Committee), community agencies such as JABA or PVCC, and private organizations or businesses.

In moving into the conformity of this request with the Comprehensive Plan, the County's Growth Management Policy, it aims to promote the efficient use of County resources through a combination of: protecting the elements that define the Rural Area, and promoting the Development Areas as the place where a variety of land uses, facilities, and services exist, and are planned to support the County's future growth.

Although this proposal is located in the Rural Area and not the Development Areas, the proposal does utilize the existing structure and no new construction or expansion is proposed. The reuse of existing structures removes pressure to build new structures for community use, which helps protect the Rural Areas. This use does not promote new residential development, but helps meet the needs of existing residents.

Objective 5 of the Rural Area chapter of the Comprehensive Plan aims to: *"Recognize and support crossroads communities, which serve as rural-scale community meeting places and provide opportunities for residents to take part in community life."*

This objective refers primarily to the crossroads communities identified in the 2003 Survey of Historic Crossroads Communities, which is referenced in the Comprehensive Plan, although it notes that others

may be appropriate for a future designation. The Esmont community was not explicitly identified in this survey, but shares a number of characteristics, which staff believes makes this an appropriate measure for the conformity of this proposal.

Although it lacks the crossroads “center” of many communities identified in the survey, this community contains a number of small-scale public uses, including the Yancey School, Simpson Park and a post office. In the presentation, the red stars indicate other quasi-public institutions including churches and the Oddfellows’ Hall, which is home to the JABA Senior Center. In historic photos of Esmont, Mr. Knuppel noted the structures on Esmont Road as well as an updated photo from Esmont High School that was a segregated school opened in 1904 and then Yancey Elementary, which was established in the same location in 1960. There is quite a history there and interestingly historically a major site for the community.

Although not an explicitly identified crossroads community in the 2003 Survey, Esmont is a historic and significant rural community within Southern Albemarle of a comparable scale and containing a collection of small-scale public uses. Maintaining the Yancey Elementary School building as a community meeting place and center for community life will support the Esmont community and its existing residents.

The overall goal for the Community Facilities chapter of the Comprehensive Plan is, *“Albemarle County’s facilities and services will be of high-quality and delivered in an environmentally responsible and cost-effective manner.”* This proposal allows for the reuse of an existing facility and the recovery of associated costs wherever possible, as discussed in Objective 1, which is, *“Continue to provide public facilities and services in a fiscally responsible and equitable manner.”*

There are three strategies listed below which focus on prioritizing health and safety needs that has cost-benefit ratios for the population it serves as well as locating complementary services and facilities together and would be using obsolete facilities.

Strategy 1a: Give priority to facilities and services that address emergency needs, health and safety concerns, and provide the greatest cost-benefit ratio to the population served.

Strategy 1d: Continue to locate related or complementary services and facilities together when possible and when other goals of the Comprehensive Plan can be met.

Strategy 1h: Prior to the disposal of any existing but obsolete facilities and sites, determine the value of maintaining them for potential reuse by other services and facilities.

Again,

- This proposal maintains an existing public facility for residents in a geographically isolated area of the County.
- A mix of complementary services potentially including exercise classes, senior programming, and office access for police officers will facilitate the provision of health and safety services.
- Facility fees will be minimal and will be set for “cost recovery of operations, and facilitating access to excess County capacity”.

The factors favorable are:

- The proposed use would support an established rural community and its existing residents by providing services without encouraging new residential development in the Rural Area.
- The proposed use would provide public facilities and services in a fiscally responsible and equitable matter.

- The proposed use at this subject property does not appear to be contradictory with the Comprehensive Plan, and would support and advance goals, objectives, strategies, and other policies contained in the Plan.

No unfavorable factors were found.

Staff recommends that the Commission find the location, character, and extent of the proposed Yancey Community Center facility, and use thereof, to be in substantial accord with the County's Comprehensive Plan, for the reasons identified as the favorable factors in the staff report. Mr. Knuppel said that he would be happy to answer questions at this time.

Mr. Keller invited questions from the Commission for staff.

Ms. Riley asked were members of the community in the immediate area at the community open house and was there general accord with the recommendations of this advisory committee for those uses.

Mr. Knuppel replied there was not a specifically held meeting for this review and had not attended any of the prior meetings for the listening session. He said the county and the liaison working with them as an additional advisory committee prepared the proposal; however, the information that was provided appeared to be consistent with some of the activities and the uses that were suggested prior.

Ms. Firehock asked to add to that having attended a community appreciation dinner for the reopening of Yancey as a community facility two weeks ago that was very well attended by local residents and the County Administrator's Office that they talked about the different things that would be going on, what Parks and Recreation had already planned to do there and the food pantry that is operating there. She said there was great excitement and interest with high support. She noted one resident asked could it ever revert to a school again and nobody knew the answer to that, but hoped it would one day. Nevertheless, there was very great attendance and strong support with several dozen local residents there.

Mr. Keller invited public comment. Hearing none, he invited questions for staff.

Ms. Spain asked if the kitchen facilities would be kept operable.

Mr. Knuppel replied no, that details on the kitchen facilities were not included in the information.

Ms. Spain asked if the dinner was prepared there, and Ms. Firehock replied that they had it catered so they did not actually cook there; it was local barbecue and they did not need to use the facilities. She noted that everything seemed operable so my mind races with ideas like providing opportunities for people to create local jams because it could meet commercial kitchen standards. She said there is a whole lot of potential there and it is going to take a little time to iron out since lots of people want to use the facilities and so how do you do that and who is in charge of which rooms and spaces and how those are leased out.

Ms. Spain noted the precedence of the Jefferson Center of having food vendors or small restaurants there so if the kitchen was preserved in some working order would it have to be rezoned in any way if a commercial enterprise wanted to go in there.

Mr. Knuppel replied that maybe Elaine could answer this better; however, he did not believe so.

Ms. Echols said that Andy Herrick might be able to answer that a little better, but we know that Parks and Rec is doing the management of the different users there and so imagined that the County Attorney's office has looked at that with the Board of Supervisors.

Andy Herrick, with the County Attorney's Office, said this is not an issue that he looked at in advance of tonight's meeting, but can go take a quick look as to whether that is an anticipated use in the rural areas zoning district. He said that is something that we would need to look at.

Ms. Firehock said the way it was presented at the dinner it would be potential for use if you were an entrepreneur you could ask to lease one of the classrooms for some set period to teach a class or do a workshop so it is not limited to be just for county run things. It will have social services, voting will continue there; however, there certainly are opportunities for that. She said the details have not been worked out, but they have already got many activities planned to start this fall assuming that we make a favorable recommendation.

Mr. Keller asked if there were questions for staff. Hearing none, he asked for a motion.

Ms. Firehock said it was in my district and having been there many times was prepared to make a motion. Ms. Firehock moved to find that the location, character and extent of CCP-2018-00002 Yancey Community Center public facility and public use thereof, as proposed, to be in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Spain seconded the motion.

Mr. Keller invited further discussion.

Mr. Bivins said having been in and out of Esmont for a good 30 years and being down there recently that while being glad that there was excitement over the repurposing of that building that actually it looks like the Esmont community is being forgotten and the town of Esmont looks like a place on hard times now. He said the play equipment was lovely, which was actually put there by a generous grant in the school, could be repurposed some place. He said what this is coming to is that if it is only going to be a satellite operation then in fact he thinks we will probably lose that critical space in our community. If there is a way to put an activity in that space that has purpose and presence on an ongoing basis then he thinks it may actually be able to survive; otherwise, in five or six years you will see an empty space.

Ms. Firehock noted there were several county agencies that already asked to continue to use certain spaces whether it was the media center or the gym area and she also had talked to Supervisors Palmer and other community members about the idea about some targeted housing restoration in that area maybe similar to what was done by AHIP recently in my district. She suggested that was something to think about is the regeneration of that community using that structure as a place to help build the community and bring people together. She said that it has been a site of a lot of disappointment with the closing of the school and thinks that it could be turned around as an opportunity thinking of housing rehab and affordable housing and maybe that is a focal area.

Mr. Keller asked if she would like to do a friendly amendment or perhaps a resolution of intent as an added push. He said there seems to be a significant interest in the historically African American schools in the state, there is a major movement for preservation of Virginia and we know that one of our members of our staff has done a very interesting program on the public schools.

Ms. Firehock asked to add that they have received a grant to do a historic interpretation display to be put in the lobby; it is a very small lobby, but Monticello has also offered assistance in design of that display and the committee has already been up to Monticello to meet with the team of designers to help them. She noted that they have funding and experts and so they are excited to work on the history and a whole number of things so that story telling has already begun.

Mr. Keller invited further discussion. Hearing none, he asked for a roll call.

The motion passed by a vote of 7:0.

Mr. Keller said the motion was approved and it seems in light of the discussion that we have had here and the work that has been done by you and others on this that there is the opportunity for this to be turned in to a shortened piece for the website for public distribution.

The meeting moved to the next item on the agenda.