



PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING

21 Main Street

Tuesday, May 20, 2025, at 7:00 PM

MINUTES

A REGULAR MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE TOWN OF WARRENTON, VIRGINIA, WAS HELD ON MAY 20, 2025, at 7:00 PM

Regular Meeting

PRESENT

Mr. Ryan Stewart, Chair; Mr. Terry Lasher, Vice Chair; Ms. Darine Barbour, Secretary; Mr. Steve Ainsworth; Mr. James Lawrence; Mr. Rob Walton, Community Development Director; Heather Jenkins, Zoning Administrator; Patrick Corish, Associate Town Attorney

ABSENT

N/A

The minutes laid out will be a brief recap of the agenda items. Please see recorded video for more in-depth information.

CALL TO ORDER AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM.

The meeting opened at 7:00 PM by Chair Stewart and declared a quorum present.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Commissioner Lawrence moved to approve the January 21, 2025 and April 22, 2025, with the correction of a misspelling of "work session." The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ainsworth. The motion passed 5-0.

PUBLIC HEARING.

1. Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment - ZOTA-25-1 – A Text Amendment to Remove Data Centers as a Permissible Use within the Industrial District. On March 22, 2025, Town Council adopted a Resolution to initiate a text amendment to Articles 3, 9, and 12 of the Town of Warrenton Zoning Ordinance. This text amendment is for the purpose of removing Data Centers as a Permissible Use within the Industrial District, and therefore make Data Centers an impermissible Use within the Town of Warrenton.

Ms. Heather Jenkins, Zoning Administrator, gave an overview of the March 11, 2025, Town Council initiated text amendment and the Planning Commission’s work session from April 22, 2025.

Chair Stewart opened the floor up to questions of staff.

Commissioner Lawrence inquired the Zoning Ordinance Legislative Intent sections at the beginning of each District. Staff explained that the consideration is whether the proposed text amendment falls within the guidelines of the legislative intent of the Industrial District of the Zoning Ordinance and Plan Warrenton 2040.

Chair Stewart then opened the Public Hearing at 7:15 PM.

Ali Zarabi – 344 Richards Drive, Warrenton

Ken Alm – 194 Culpeper Street, Warrenton

David Gibson – 7548 Foxview Drive, Warrenton

John McAuliffe – Chilton House, Culpeper Street, Warrenton

Denise Schaffer – 6080 Whipperwill Drive, Warrenton

Cindy Burbank – Barn Owl Court, Warrenton

Chair Stewart closed the Public Hearing at 7:33 PM

Commissioner Lawrence discussed that data centers were not contemplated in the comprehensive plan. Plan Warrenton 2040 took a lot of pride in being citizen driven. Data centers were not part of that discussion. Since its adoption in 2021, the community has been vocal about removing data centers as an approved use in Town. He stated he feels a personal responsibility to representative democracy to honor the wishes of the community.

Commissioner Ainsworth discussed the Planning Commission not serving as a rubber stamp for Town Council but to properly vet land use decisions. Data centers was discussed as a possible use in the Industrial District, which by-right allows for wholesale, distribution centers of similar structure size and form that are similar to data centers. The land is surrounded by car dealerships and strip malls. Stated he believes it is not very different from other allowable uses and is an integral part of utility infrastructure. He raised concerns about one group of elected officials finding the use to be reasonable with the strict requirements under a Special Use Permit process, which requires vetting through the Planning Commission and Town Council. At this time he does not see a driving force to remove the use from the Zoning Ordinance.

Secretary Barbour spoke to there is only being one parcel available for another data center and asked if this was a use they would want to contemplate based on the required time, expense, and staff resources for one potential applicant. She stated she is not interested in being part of that type of legislative application and the citizens have spoken that they do not want data centers. Secretary Barbour continued that she wants to protect Warrenton' unique character and listen to the citizens. She believes the Planning Commission is looking at the proposal and asking questions, not rubber stamping a Town Council initiation, by looking at studies and doing their research before making a recommendation. She takes pride in the Planning Commission's due diligence and hopes the community understands they have thought about the citizens no matter what decision is recommended.

Vice Chair Lasher thanked Commissioner Ainsworth, Commissioner Lawrence, and Secretary Barbour for all raising great points. However, from his standpoint he relies on Plan Warrenton 2040, which tried to bring all the viewpoints in the community into one guiding document and he does not see where data centers fit within it. He agreed the Town needs economic development opportunities to achieve a workable community. He found that when one decision takes up a large chunk that limits the Town's ability to have a workable community then it impacts having a livable community. He clarified his previous comments regarding cost and revenues by stating he was inferring the costs associated with staff and decision makers time to revisit over and over. Wants a constructive dialogue and commends the community for coming out.

Chair Stewart stated that he stands by the original Planning Commission's recommendation for the original text amendment; however, believes that everyone has learned a lot since that time. A lot has been learned about the impact of data centers from a land use perspective and the impacts on communities, public processes, and the way residents relate to their Town. He stated he also was in agreement with Commissioner Lawrence about the previous comments about Plan Warrenton and the Character Districts. He went on to review the development of the Urban Development Areas to state he understands the intent that was developed behind all those guidelines. There is no defined area for data centers on a large scale, industrial facility like seen in Loudoun or Prince William counties. The road map of the comprehensive plan does not include the intent to have data centers. From a practical standpoint, data centers are limited to only a few sites in town and don't see how they match the intent or character in their current form. However, Chair Stewart did believe there may be opportunities for smaller scale data center footprints. If allowed for a computer warehouse that looked like a single family home that does not require any additional utilities or demand on the water system, then it might work as viable infill development for a diversity of uses in the Industrial District. However, the Town does not have anything on the books to promote this. As the Zoning Ordinance is being updated, this may be something the community might want to look at. The staff draft of the proposed Zoning Text Amendment appears to meet the intent of the Commission and the Town Council leading him to support it.

Chair Stewart concluded the Planning Commission discussion and asked for a motion.

Commissioner Lawrence moved to recommend to Town Council to approve ZOTA 20-01 to amend Articles 3, 9, and 12 with the Staff's draft to remove data center uses from the Industrial District of the Zoning Ordinance.

Secretary Barbour seconded the motion.

There was no further discussion.

The motion passed 4-1 (Ainsworth against).

NEW BUSINESS.

Planning Commission Bylaws Update which had been reviewed over the course of several months was brought forward for adoption.

Secretary Barbour requested consistency with the wording of "Chair" over "Chairman."

Chair Stewart said he would prefer gender neutral wording of "Chair" over "Chairman."

Chair Stewart asked for a motion with this administrative modification.

Commissioner Lawrence moved to adopt the updated Planning Commission Bylaws as amended. Commissioner Ainsworth seconded the motion. The Planning Commission approved the updated Bylaws 5-0.

COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSION.

Secretary Barbour thanked staff and reminded everyone that next month is Juneteeth on June 14th. Asked to help get the word out to come celebrate.

Chair Stewart thanked staff for their hard work on the data center issue. It has been a long road for everyone involved. Also thanked the public for voicing their concerns on the issue.

COMMENTS FROM THE STAFF.

Ms. Heather Jenkins reviewed two land use applications that have been submitted, including a legislative waiver for street connectivity and a Special Use Permit for Home Depot for covered storage.

Director Walton advised there is nothing for the agenda next week.

Chair Stewart and the Planning Commission advised staff to cancel the Work Session the following week.

ADJOURN.

Commissioner Lawrence moved to adjourn the meeting; Commissioner Ainsworth seconded the motion. With no further business, the Chair Stewart adjourned at 7: 55 PM.

I hereby certify that this is a true and exact record of actions taken by the Planning Commission of the Town of Warrenton on May 20, 2025.

Darine Barbour, Secretary
Planning Commission

DRAFT