



Powhatan County Planning Commission

Agenda: Workshop Meeting

Wednesday, January 14, 2026, 3:00 p.m.

Powhatan Village Building Conference Room
3910 Old Buckingham Road

MEETING PROCEDURE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

All Planning Commission meetings are open to the public and interested persons may participate on the day and time specified above. The meeting may be watched live at powhatanva.gov/432/Live-Stream-of-Powhatan-County-Meetings.

1. Call to Order

Craig Hughes

2. Adoption of Agenda

Request to postpone action, amend, or approve Agenda as presented

3. Discussion Items

- a. Review of Citizens Working Group's recommendations for Housing and Future Land Use Maps & Housing Affordability Study Recommendations
- b. Review of Citizens Working Group's Future Land Use Map
- c. Discussion: Future Workshop Meeting Dates (Wed., Jan 28, Wed., Feb 11, Wed., Feb 25, and Wed., March 25, 2026 – as needed)

4. Adjourn – Next Regular Meeting: Tuesday, February 3, 2026 (6:00 p.m.)



January 9, 2026

To: Planning Commission

From: Ligon Webb, Planning Director

RE: Planning Commission's December Workshop Follow-Up: CWG and Housing Study Committee Policy Recommendations

Summary of Planning Commission Discussion and Key Considerations (December 10, 2025, Workshop)

At its December 10, 2025, workshop, the Planning Commission reviewed and discussed recommendations from the Citizens Working Group (CWG) related to economic development, housing, and future land use. The discussion focused on directing growth to designated growth areas, balancing housing options with rural character, and evaluating potential zoning and policy tools to implement the County's Strategic Plan goals. The summary below highlights key themes and considerations raised by the Commission.

I. Private Roads and Large-Lot Rural Subdivisions

The Planning Commission discussed the role of private roads in facilitating large-lot residential development within the County's agricultural areas. One potential policy lever raised during the discussion was limiting the use of private roads to subdivisions serving a small number of lots (e.g., three to four lots), with larger subdivisions required to meet VDOT public-road standards.

Under this concept, subdivisions exceeding three to four lots would remain permissible; however, the requirement to construct a public road could increase development costs and complexity. The Commission discussed whether such an approach could, as a practical matter, reduce the prevalence of large-lot rural subdivisions and help redirect residential growth toward designated Growth Areas, where public utilities, roadway capacity, and long-term service provision are better aligned.

Issue Identified

The Commission acknowledged that large-lot residential development served by privately maintained roads represents a significant and recurring development pattern within Powhatan County's rural areas.

It is important to note that limitations on private roads were not a recommendation of the Citizens Working Group (CWG) or the Housing Study Committee. Rather, this topic was introduced as a planning consideration based on staff observations of development trends and their potential long-term implications for rural land consumption, infrastructure maintenance, and growth management.

As part of the discussion, it should be noted that limitations could include narrowly tailored exceptions, such as allowing a greater number of lots on a private road in the case of qualified family subdivisions, where land is divided among immediate family members rather than for speculative development. For example, a modest increase in the allowable number of lots (e.g., up to six lots) could be contemplated in such circumstances, while still requiring larger, market-driven subdivisions to meet public-road standards. This concept was discussed at a high level and would require further policy direction and refinement if pursued.

Planning Director Considerations

During the December 10, 2025, workshop discussion, the Planning Commission appeared generally open to exploring whether the current allowance of up to ten lots on a private road remains appropriate; however, no definitive recommendation or direction was taken.

From a staff perspective, one potential approach for future consideration could include limiting private-road subdivisions to up to four lots by right, without additional Board of Supervisors approval, while allowing a modest increase—up to six lots—where additional lots are created for qualified family divisions. Such an approach could help distinguish between family-based land divisions and larger, market-driven subdivision activity.

As is currently required, any private road serving such subdivisions would continue to be constructed to applicable standards, with recorded maintenance agreements and associated plat notes to ensure long-term functionality and responsibility.

II. Unified Development District (UDD)

The Planning Commission discussed the concept of a Unified Development District (UDD) as a potential zoning and implementation tool to support coordinated, master-planned development within designated Growth Areas. The discussion centered on the limitations of the County’s existing zoning framework (particularly the number of village-related and planned development districts) and whether a more consolidated, flexible tool could improve long-term development outcomes.

The UDD concept was discussed as a mechanism that could allow applicants to present a comprehensive master plan for a site—whether residential, mixed-use, commercial, or employment-oriented—rather than relying on incremental rezonings or multiple conditional use permits. Commissioners discussed the potential benefits of reviewing development proposals holistically, including layout, internal connectivity, buffering, open space, and general design intent, rather than evaluating projects on a lot-by-lot or use-by-use basis.

Issue Identified

The Commission acknowledged that the County’s current zoning structure—particularly within Growth Areas—can be complex and fragmented, with multiple districts and planned development overlays that may be difficult for applicants and the public to navigate. The discussion reflected interest in whether a unified master-planning district could simplify the ordinance, improve predictability, and allow for better coordination between land use, infrastructure, and long-term growth objectives.

It is important to note that the Unified Development District concept was endorsed at a policy level by both the Citizens Working Group (CWG) and the Housing Study Committee as a potential implementation tool to support economic development, housing diversity, and mixed-use planning within Growth Areas. The discussion at the Planning Commission workshop was consistent with those recommendations and focused on how such a tool might function in practice.

Commissioners emphasized that the UDD would not be a by-right entitlement, but rather a rezoning-based tool (and a “stand alone” zoning district) requiring public review and approval, with each proposal evaluated on its

individual merits and compatibility with surrounding land uses. The Commission also discussed the importance of ensuring that flexibility does not result in unintended outcomes, such as all-residential development in areas intended for employment or commercial uses.

Planning Director Considerations

From a staff perspective, a Unified Development District (UDD) could serve as a consolidated master-planning tool to replace or simplify several existing village and planned development zoning districts, while remaining limited in application to designated Growth Areas. The intent would be to provide flexibility in layout and use, while still allowing the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to evaluate each proposal through a rezoning process.

Based on December 10, 2025, workshop discussion, the Planning Commission appeared generally supportive of further exploration of the UDD concept, recognizing its potential to improve coordination, simplify the zoning framework, and support higher-quality development outcomes within Growth Areas. No definitive recommendations were made at that time, and the discussion remained conceptual in nature.

At this stage, it is emphasized that no ordinance language has been drafted, and key elements—such as allowable densities, use-mix expectations, design standards, buffering requirements, and procedural thresholds—would be developed through a future ordinance-writing process with Planning Commission and Board input. The December 10 discussion was intended to assess whether the UDD framework is an appropriate direction for further study, rather than to define specific regulatory standards.

III. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

The Planning Commission discussed Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) as an existing zoning tool that provides limited housing flexibility within the County’s residential framework. The discussion focused on how ADUs currently function as a secondary housing option and whether modest adjustments to existing standards could better support aging in place, multi-generational living, and family-based housing needs.

Commissioners discussed ADUs as an incremental policy tool, rather than a primary solution to housing affordability, and emphasized the importance of maintaining appropriate scale and compatibility with surrounding development. The discussion centered on whether targeted changes to size and configuration standards could improve usability without altering the underlying zoning structure where ADUs are permitted.

Issue Identified

The Commission acknowledged that current ADU standards may limit the practicality of ADUs for certain households, particularly where size limitations restrict their ability to function as viable long-term living units. At the same time, Commissioners emphasized that ADUs should remain clearly accessory in nature and not fundamentally alter neighborhood character.

During the discussion, it was noted that one potential approach could be to increase the maximum allowable ADU size to up to 60 percent of the principal dwelling’s square footage, and to allow ADUs to be either attached or detached in all zoning districts where ADUs are currently permitted. This concept was discussed as a relatively straightforward, small adjustment to existing regulations.

Planning Director Considerations

From a staff perspective, allowing ADUs to be up to 60 percent of the principal dwelling’s square footage, and clarifying that ADUs may be attached or detached in all zoning districts where they are permitted, could enhance the functionality of ADUs while maintaining their accessory status. The Planning Commission appeared to concur with this too.

As with other topics discussed at the December 10 workshop, no ordinance language has been drafted, and any potential amendments to ADU standards would be developed through a future ordinance-writing process with Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors input. Key considerations, including owner-occupancy requirements, design standards, and compatibility—would be evaluated as part of that process. The discussion was conceptual in nature and intended to inform whether further refinement of ADU regulations is appropriate.

IV. Cluster Housing

The Planning Commission discussed cluster housing as a potential housing type that could provide smaller, more attainable homes while preserving open space and directing higher-intensity residential development to appropriate locations. The discussion focused on cluster housing as a possible tool to expand housing options without relying on large-lot subdivision patterns.

Commissioners discussed cluster housing to accommodate a wider range of household types, including younger households and older residents seeking to downsize, while maintaining overall site density and minimizing land disturbance. The discussion emphasized that cluster housing would need to be carefully designed and located to ensure compatibility with surrounding land uses.

Issue Identified

The Commission acknowledged that cluster housing could offer meaningful housing diversity but raised questions regarding implementation standards, including minimum lot sizes, overall density, infrastructure requirements, buffering, and architectural design. Commissioners emphasized that without clear standards, cluster housing could risk inconsistent outcomes or compatibility concerns, particularly outside designated Growth Areas.

The discussion reflected general agreement that cluster housing—if pursued—should be limited to Growth Areas and subject to a discretionary review process (Conditional Use Permit) to ensure high-quality site design and appropriate transitions to adjacent properties.

Planning Director Considerations

From a staff perspective, cluster housing could function as a targeted housing tool within designated Growth Areas to support smaller home sizes, shared open space, and more efficient use of land and infrastructure. Cluster housing could be implemented through a conditional use permit or master-planned zoning approach, allowing the County to evaluate site-specific design, access, buffering, and infrastructure capacity. The Planning Commission appeared generally receptive to the concept of cluster housing as a potential tool to expand housing options within designated Growth Areas, while emphasizing the need for careful design standards and discretionary review.

At this stage, no ordinance language has been drafted, and key elements—such as allowable density, minimum lot sizes, ownership structure of common open space, architectural standards, and review procedures—would be developed through a future ordinance-writing process with Planning Commission and Board input. The December 10 discussion was conceptual in nature and intended to assess whether cluster housing is an appropriate tool for further study.

V. Conservation Subdivisions and Density Bonuses

The Planning Commission discussed the Citizens Working Group's (CWG) recommendation to modify the County's conservation subdivision provisions, including consideration of increased density bonuses beyond those currently allowed by ordinance. The CWG's report identified conservation subdivisions as a potential tool to balance rural land preservation with housing opportunities by clustering development and placing a significant portion of a parent tract under permanent conservation.

The discussion focused primarily on two related concepts: (1) whether a higher maximum density bonus—up to 85 percent—should be contemplated for conservation subdivisions via a Conditional Use Permit, and (2) whether environmentally constrained lands (such as floodplains, wetlands, and similar natural features) should be excluded from the acreage used to calculate allowable density bonuses.

Issue Identified

The Planning Commission did not reach consensus in support of increasing the conservation subdivision density bonus to 85 percent during the December 10 workshop. While Commissioners acknowledged the CWG's intent to make conservation subdivisions more attractive as an alternative to conventional large-lot rural development, several Commissioners expressed caution regarding higher density levels, particularly if applied by right rather than through a CUP.

In addition, the Commission expressed clear reservations about the concept of removing natural conservation areas—such as floodplains and wetlands—from the overall acreage used to calculate density. Commissioners noted that these features already limit development potential by their nature and questioned whether excluding them from density calculations would unfairly penalize properties with significant environmental constraints.

Planning Director Considerations

From a staff perspective, the December 10 discussion suggests that any future revisions to the conservation subdivision ordinance would benefit from careful calibration between incentive and oversight. While increased density bonuses may improve the viability of conservation subdivisions and encourage clustered development patterns, the Planning Commission appeared receptive to applying higher density bonuses to a CUP.

During the workshop, the Planning Commission was shown comparative conceptual layouts illustrating how a conservation subdivision could be designed on the same parcel using the existing by-right density bonus (20 percent) versus a higher bonus (up to 85 percent). Based on that discussion, staff observed that Commissioners appeared to view the higher-density scenario more favorably from a land-planning and conservation standpoint, particularly where increased clustering allowed for greater preservation of contiguous open space and setback from roads.

Staff also notes that the Commission showed limited support for removing environmentally constrained lands from density calculations. Retaining total parcel acreage as the basis for density determination—while requiring preservation of floodplains, wetlands, stream buffers, and other natural features through design standards and recorded easements—was viewed as a more balanced and transparent approach.

No formal recommendations were adopted at the December 10 workshop. Further discussion will be necessary to build consensus on the appropriate role, scale, and review process for conservation subdivisions.

VI. Gateway Business and Economic Opportunity – Future Land Use Considerations

The Planning Commission discussed the relationship between the County's Gateway Business (GB) and Economic Opportunity (EO) future land use categories, particularly within designated Growth Areas and along the Route 60 corridor. The discussion focused on whether the current future land use framework remains sufficiently flexible to respond to changing market conditions, infrastructure availability, and the County's long-term economic and housing objectives.

Consistent with the Citizens Working Group (CWG) recommendations, Economic Opportunity is intended to function as a flexible mixed-use future land use category, allowing combinations of commercial, office, institutional, light industrial, and—where appropriate—residential uses within a coordinated, master-planned

development framework. This role for EO was generally understood and accepted by the Planning Commission during the workshop.

At the same time, the Commission reaffirmed the importance of Economic Priority (EP) areas as employment-focused land reserved for business, industrial, logistics, technology, and other job-supporting and tax-positive uses. No discussion occurred regarding allowing residential uses within Economic Priority areas, and EP was consistently viewed as a critical component of the County's long-term economic development strategy and fiscal goals.

The Planning Commission discussion instead centered on whether the continued use of a separate, strictly commercial Gateway Business designation remains necessary in all Growth Area locations. Commissioners noted that many of the commercial uses envisioned under Gateway Business are also permitted within Economic Opportunity, raising questions about overlap, clarity, and long-term adaptability of the future land use framework.

Issue Identified

The Commission identified potential redundancy and rigidity within the current future land use structure, particularly where Gateway Business and Economic Opportunity are applied in close proximity. The discussion suggested that maintaining strictly commercial designation in certain locations may limit the County's ability to respond to evolving development patterns, especially where a mixed-use approach could support both economic activity and housing needs.

While no recommendation was made to eliminate Gateway Business, the discussion reflected interest in evaluating whether a more expansive mixed-use framework—centered on Economic Opportunity—could better serve certain Growth Areas, while retaining Economic Priority areas exclusively for employment and job-supporting uses.

Planning Director Considerations

From a staff perspective, the December 10 discussion supports further exploration of whether Economic Opportunity could function as the County's primary flexible mixed-use future land use category within Growth Areas, potentially reducing reliance on Gateway Business in selected locations. This approach is not intended to be rigid or prescriptive, but rather to allow land use decisions to be guided by infrastructure availability, surrounding land uses, and market feasibility.

Importantly, this approach would preserve Economic Priority areas for business and employment uses, consistent with the CWG's recommendations and the County's Strategic Plan objectives. Any shift toward greater reliance on Economic Opportunity would continue to rely on discretionary rezonings, Unified Development Districts (UDD), or other master-planned tools, ensuring that the mix and intensity of uses are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

VII. Housing Study – Key Considerations for Planning Commission Discussion (moving forward)

As the Planning Commission continues its review of the CWG recommendations, the Housing Study provides additional context regarding the scale, timing, and types of housing needed in Powhatan County. While the Study is generally consistent with the CWG's focus on directing growth to appropriate areas and expanding housing options, it also highlights several considerations that may warrant further discussion or emphasis as part of future policy and ordinance work.

Key points for Planning Commission consideration include:

Quantified Housing Need:

Unlike the CWG's policy-focused recommendations, the Housing Study identifies a specific, near-term benchmark—approximately 250 affordable or workforce-oriented housing units over the next five years—to address demonstrated gaps in the County's housing supply. This target provides a measurable context for evaluating the effectiveness of proposed land use and zoning tools.

Market Feasibility and Timing:

The Housing Study places greater emphasis on market feasibility, noting that many housing types desired by the community will not be produced without zoning flexibility, reduced regulatory barriers, or incentives. This reinforces the need for tools such as UDDs, cluster housing, and mixed-use designations, rather than reliance on conventional large-lot development patterns.

“Missing Middle” Housing Gap:

The Study more explicitly identifies the absence of small-scale, lower-maintenance housing types—such as cottage courts, small-lot subdivisions, and senior-oriented housing—as a structural issue in the County's housing supply. While the CWG acknowledges housing diversity broadly, the Housing Study underscores this gap as a priority concern.

Aging Population and Housing Retention:

The Housing Study places particular emphasis on the County's aging demographic profile, highlighting the limited availability of downsizing and age-in-place housing options. This framing positions housing diversity not only as a growth issue, but also as a retention strategy for long-term residents.

Accessory Dwelling Units as a Supporting Tool:

While ADUs are identified as a useful component of the housing toolkit, the Study notes that they are supplemental in nature and unlikely to meet affordability or supply goals on their own. This perspective supports modest regulatory adjustments to ADUs while recognizing the need for broader housing strategies.

Consistency with Growth Area Strategy:

The Housing Study reinforces the CWG's conclusion that new housing—particularly higher-density or alternative housing forms—should be focused within designated Growth Areas, where infrastructure and services are available. Both efforts emphasize that rural preservation and housing affordability can be complementary when growth is appropriately directed.

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