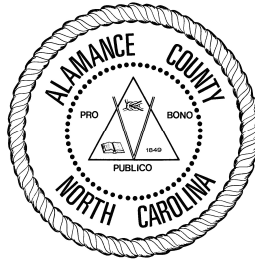


Board Chair:
Rodney Cheek

Planning Director:
Matthew Hoagland



Alamance County Development Center
Conference Room
1946 Martin Street
Burlington, NC 27215
July 9, 2026 at 6:30 PM

ALAMANCE COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

Meeting Minutes

Livestream: <https://www.youtube.com/@alamancecoplanning9852>

Members Present: Stephen Dodson, Amie Perkins, Rodney Cheek, Lee Isley, Lee Kimrey, Henry Chandler, Tom King, Mac Jordan,

Members Absent: Smokey Bare, *County Commissioner* Sam Powell

Staff Present: *Planning Director:* Matthew Hoagland, *Planner I:* Keyshawn Haith, *Planner Technician:* Terri Burns, *Assistant County Manager:* Brian Baker, *Environmental Health Director:* Rebecca Rosso, *Assistant County Attorney:* Michelle Horn, *Assistant County Attorney:* Kwama Opata

I. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Hoagland noted that there was a majority present necessary to conduct business.

III. APPROVAL OF PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

A. June 11, 2026 Regular Meeting

Chairman Cheek asked whether board members had reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting. Mr. King raised several corrections, including removing a repeated section regarding the 10% allocation, correcting the spelling of Henry Chandler's name, and clarifying a statement related to a project near Highway 11.

Motion:

- *Motion to approve the minutes as amended* was made by **Stephen Dodson**.
- Seconded by **Tom King**.
- **Motion carried unanimously.**

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS*

Tom Schopler encouraged the Board to finalize and submit their UDO modification recommendations to the County Commissioners ahead of the next meeting, if possible. He expressed interest in seeing how the process will move forward and noted he is eager for progress on the matter.

Peter Childress, a resident of Moore Mill Road, voiced concerns regarding large-scale development near his property. His primary issue was potential water usage by the Moore Mill project and other “mega-developments.” He noted that based on typical household water usage estimates, the development could draw several million gallons per month from local aquifers. He emphasized that the aquifer’s capacity and replenishment rate are unknown, especially given current drought conditions. He also expressed concern about wells being drilled near the Alamance landfill area and questioned potential impacts on nearby residents. Childress warned that any problems discovered later might not result in developer accountability once the project is completed. Additionally, he described the project as similar to a “mini data center,” noting that such facilities can require significant water. He stated his intention to speak to the County Commissioners about possibly establishing limits on water usage for data centers. He also commented broadly that AI-related industries could reduce local jobs. Childress concluded by asking for an update on the status of the board’s subcommittee.

Laura Streitfield, a resident of the Morrow Mill Road area, spoke on behalf of numerous community members from Morrow Mill Road, Thom Road, Austin Quarter Road, Highway 54, and surrounding rural areas. She stated that many residents support the Planning Board’s efforts to eliminate community wells and septic systems in agricultural and rural residential districts where public water and sewer infrastructure is not available or planned. She emphasized concerns about two large proposed developments: one on Austin Quarter Road and one on the Morrow Mill property, which together could add more than 1,200 lots in an area that already experiences low-yield wells and extreme drought conditions. She noted that projected water usage from these developments could far exceed local aquifer recharge rates based on available studies. Streitfield expressed strong community support for the rural preservation zoning map being developed by planning staff and the Rural Preservation Subcommittee, stating that residents want clear distinctions between areas that can sustain large developments and areas that cannot. She also mentioned interest in subdivision-timing restrictions used in other counties, where parent tracts cannot be repeatedly subdivided within a set period, such as ten years. Finally, she stated that residents want a more transparent review process for subdivisions, including a public hearing step before County Commissioners, allowing both community members and developers to share concerns and plans before decisions are made. She concluded by thanking the Board for their work.

Debbie Schaner, a resident of the Mebane/Saxapahaw area, expressed concern about a recently signed state law that allows licensed and certified contractors to bypass local environmental health departments when installing wells and septic systems in certain situations. She stated that while the intent of the law is to expedite the permitting process, she worries that removing local health department oversight could reduce protections for residents. Schaner noted that contractors may not prioritize community health and safety in the same way environmental health officials do. She

added that this change adds to broader community concerns surrounding large-scale “mega-developments,” including risks to groundwater. She concluded her remarks by reiterating her unease about these cumulative impacts but did not offer additional points.

Henry Vines stated that after listening to other speakers, he felt compelled to comment. He noted that the county continues to face recurring issues stemming from a lack of a comprehensive development or zoning plan. Vines emphasized that Alamance County is one of the fastest-growing counties in North Carolina, which he believes makes planned growth essential. He acknowledged that the Planning Board’s authority is limited but encouraged members to continue pushing for a countywide development framework, suggesting that now may be the right time for meaningful progress. Vines also shared concerns about long-term water availability and infrastructure. He referenced past issues in the Ossipee area where a private water provider failed, requiring the City of Burlington to extend water service. He cautioned that current large-scale developments using community water and sewer systems could similarly fail in the future, ultimately forcing municipalities to extend public utilities into rural areas at significant cost. In his view, this pattern could lead to increased development pressure and further loss of rural land. He concluded by expressing appreciation for the Board’s efforts and stated his hope that County Commissioners will take action.

Virginia Callaghan, who lives near the proposed Morrow Mill development, expressed deep concern about the impact the project would have on her small neighborhood of approximately 14 homes, each on about 2.5 acres. She noted that her neighborhood has ordinances in place preventing further lot division, preserving its rural character and quiet environment where families walk, bike, and children play outdoors. Callaghan shared her distress about the potential increase in traffic, noise, and activity that a large development would bring, stating that it would significantly change the nature of the area and diminish the quality of life for current residents. She also mentioned that a neighbor’s well ran dry two years ago, requiring drilling a new well, an expense she said she could not afford herself. She emphasized that many residents fear that major development would worsen already-fragile groundwater conditions. She concluded by urging the Board to recognize the substantial negative impact such development could have on the community.

Lisa Clark, a resident of Morrow Mill Road and long-time member of the Saxapahaw community, expressed concerns about the significant impact proposed subdivisions would have on the immediate area. She described the small four-mile radius around the proposed developments as a rural, close-knit community with limited infrastructure and narrow roads that she believes cannot support the level of growth being proposed. Clark emphasized that rapid, large-scale development threatens the character and livability of the area, noting that the community is not a municipality and lacks the infrastructure to accommodate heavy traffic and dense residential projects. She questioned how a single developer could initiate changes that would dramatically alter the lifestyle of thousands of existing residents. She stated that zoning exists to promote sustainable and sensible growth and urged the Board to take action to protect the community. Clark concluded by stating that, if approved, the development would severely harm the area and potentially destroy the community as it exists today.

Vicky Childress, a resident of Morrow Mill Road, asked who determines the allowable number of homes in a proposed development. She referenced the proposed 541-lot project and questioned what would prevent a developer from requesting 1,000 or 2,000 homes on the same property. Childress expressed concern about whether the land and local resources could support such density. She stated that longtime residents have invested in their homes and value the quiet, rural character of the area. While she acknowledged that some development is acceptable, she emphasized that the scale of the proposed projects is far beyond what she believes the community can sustain. Childress reiterated that developments of this size would negatively impact the community and thanked the Board for their time.

Laura Streitfield spoke again to emphasize the urgency of advancing rural-preservation planning efforts. She acknowledged the extensive work the Planning Board and staff have undertaken over several years, including last year's presentation to the County Commissioners. However, she urged the Board to expedite completion of the updated zoning map and UDO draft, noting that multiple development proposals are advancing rapidly. She stated that delays in finalizing the rural-preservation framework could allow major subdivisions to proceed under current rules, despite widespread community concern. Streitfield requested that a draft be completed and forwarded to the Commissioners by the next meeting so that it could be considered for adoption later in the summer. She acknowledged ongoing uncertainty about which projects may be grandfathered, given the preliminary sketches already submitted, but reiterated that residents want action "as fast as possible." She referenced the county's 2020 public survey showing strong support for rural preservation and stated that residents feel little progress has occurred since then. She closed by urging the Board to move quickly to finalize the rural-preservation plan.

Trish Tolbert, a resident of Shagbark Lane near several proposed development sites, shared a historical example from 2012 to illustrate the importance of community engagement. She recalled a past effort to privatize and expand the county landfill—a proposal that was ultimately rejected. Although the final decision occurred at a County Commissioners meeting, she explained that the outcome was largely shaped by individual conversations residents had with commissioners beforehand. She noted that commissioners became aware of broad public concern only when community members discussed the issue informally in everyday settings, such as church groups. Tolbert emphasized the value of residents talking directly with both commissioners and neighbors to build understanding about zoning. She noted that while some people may never change their misconceptions about zoning, others simply lack information or may not yet feel personally affected. She encouraged the public to help expand awareness and understanding of zoning policies throughout the community, stating that such grassroots efforts support both the Planning Board and the county's long-term goals.

V. BOARD/COMMISSIONER RESPONSES

Chairman Cheek thanked the community for their strong support and engagement. He noted that efforts to establish development and zoning regulations have taken many years and that earlier in the process, community participation was limited. He emphasized that, over time, he has come to understand that having no zoning can create more problems than having zoning. Mr. Cheek explained that the Board has faced challenges when proposed regulations were sent to the County Commissioners, often encountering significant opposition from various stakeholders. He stated

that the Board must proceed carefully and deliberately when drafting regulations to avoid legal issues or loopholes that could undermine their intent. He assured the public that the Board is actively working on rural-preservation measures and appreciates the community's involvement. Mr. Cheek encouraged residents to communicate their concerns directly to the County Commissioners when the Board forwards recommendations, noting that commissioners ultimately make the final decisions. He stated that public input will strongly influence how commissioners vote and urged residents to remain engaged throughout the process. Mr. Cheek concluded by inviting other board members to offer their own responses.

Mr. Dodson stated that he cares deeply about Alamance County and its communities, noting that he has lived in the county his entire life and has personal, family-based ties to the area. He explained that serving on the Planning Board allows him to apply his professional expertise to help guide decisions that protect and improve the community. He echoed earlier comments stressing the need for countywide zoning. He noted that the pace of construction is surpassing the county's ability to address emerging issues, and that a zoning ordinance with practical, common-sense guardrails is essential to reflect the values and priorities of Alamance County residents. He also briefly referenced public comments regarding data centers, stating that the topic is receiving attention not only from the Board but also from County Commissioners. Although it was not on the agenda for the evening, he indicated he has resources and information he would be willing to share if time permits.

Mr. Chandler addressed concerns raised earlier regarding state-level approval of septic systems despite county rejection. He stated he shares those concerns and does not support situations in which state authorities override local environmental health decisions. He noted that such occurrences have happened for years, though he is uncertain how the state approval process bypasses county determinations. Mr. Chandler also responded to a public question regarding how the number of homes permitted in a development is determined. He explained that allowable density is based on existing ordinance requirements, including minimum square-footage and lot-size standards for specific zoning districts. While these standards limit the total number of homes, he acknowledged they still allow for significant development under current rules. He invited Planning Director Matthew Hoagland to elaborate further if needed.

Mr. Hoagland responded to questions regarding how the number of homes allowed in a development is determined. He explained that there is no fixed "magic number"; instead, allowable density is dictated entirely by the regulations in the county's ordinance. Each project must meet requirements such as minimum lot size, road-access standards, buffer requirements, and other existing criteria. He noted that the proposed Morrow Mill development resembles a cluster or conservation subdivision. Even under the standard minimum lot size of 30,000 square feet, the acreage involved could still accommodate the number of lots shown in the preliminary concept due to how the ordinance is currently written. He explained that water-and-sewage arrangements directly affect lot size, which in turn determines overall density. He also addressed a question about whether acreage calculations include watershed and floodplain areas. He stated that staff are actively refining ordinance language, mostly focused on updating legal references and cleaning up ambiguous language. As part of ongoing ordinance updates, staff and the Board are working

toward more precise standards—such as clearer percentages for required open space and more detailed rules governing how community well and septic systems affect lot sizing. Mr. Hoagland concluded by saying that, under today’s regulations, density is determined by measuring the parent property’s size and applying the minimum lot-size standards, but future revisions aim to make those calculations more explicit and better aligned with rural-preservation goals.

Mr. Chandler reiterated Mr. Cheek’s comments about the importance of public involvement when the Board’s recommendations move to the County Commissioners for consideration. He encouraged community members to attend and speak at the eventual Commissioners’ meeting, noting that there will likely be strong opposition present. Mr. Chandler emphasized that residents must ensure their voices are heard during that stage of the process.

Peter Childress responded from the audience, stating that residents in his area have lived there for decades and previously supported zoning efforts presented many years ago. He said that if he had known the Board was working on zoning five years earlier, he would have participated then and noted that past attempts at zoning were defeated due to organized opposition. Chairman Cheek replied, acknowledging the difficulty the Board has faced in generating broad public engagement over many years. He explained that despite efforts such as postcards, newspaper notices, radio announcements, public-access TV segments, and social media outreach, it has historically been challenging to get residents to attend meetings or participate early in the process. Mr. Cheek stated that resistance to zoning in earlier years was common and that he himself initially opposed zoning due to misconceptions about what zoning involves. He clarified that county zoning is not about restrictive aesthetic rules but about directing appropriate types of development to areas that can support them, for example, preserving rural areas for agricultural and low-density uses, while concentrating dense residential or industrial growth in areas with water and sewer infrastructure. He emphasized that without action, the county could soon reach a “point of no return” where unmanaged growth leads to irreversible impacts. He noted that large proposals, such as a 541-lot subdivision on a 400-acre tract, tend to draw public attention only after they are already in the development pipeline. He explained that he has been advocating for zoning reform for more than 30 years and stated that ongoing community involvement is essential for meaningful progress.

During an extended exchange between the Board and members of the public, several participants discussed the long history of efforts to establish zoning in Alamance County and the difficulty of engaging the community early in the process. Board members noted that despite multiple outreach efforts, attendance and participation were often low until large development proposals sparked broader concern. The discussion emphasized that residents frequently become aware of zoning issues only when major development applications are already moving through the approval pipeline. Board members explained that zoning is intended to direct appropriate development to areas with the necessary infrastructure, while preserving rural parts of the county from dense subdivisions or incompatible land uses. Participants acknowledged that past misconceptions about zoning contributed to public resistance, and the Board reiterated that zoning is primarily about managing growth responsibly, not imposing aesthetic restrictions. The dialogue conveyed shared frustration over how difficult it has been to inform the public early enough, as well as a shared desire—both from the Board and residents—to establish clearer development rules before growth reaches an irreversible point.

Mr. Kimrey followed up on earlier comments about data centers, noting that he has repeatedly raised concerns about their potential arrival in Alamance County. He explained that the combination of available electricity, water access, and the installation of high-speed internet several years ago makes the county especially attractive to data-center developers. Mr. Kimrey emphasized that companies tend to locate in areas with fewer regulations, and he warned that Alamance County's lack of zoning makes it particularly vulnerable. He stressed the need for the county to act proactively before data-center proposals materialize, stating he could not overstate the importance of preparing safeguards now. Mr. Kimrey also updated the public on the Rural Preservation Subcommittee's work, noting that Commissioner Powell, who serves as the Board's liaison, has instructed the subcommittee to take its time, gather community input, and ensure the proposal is fully developed before presentation to the County Commissioners. Although the Board and subcommittee were initially moving quickly in response to community concerns, they were advised to aim for a complete and thoroughly vetted proposal by the end of the year rather than the next meeting. Mr. Kimrey encouraged residents to continue expressing their views to County Commissioners, acknowledging both the political considerations and the importance of clear public support.

Mr. Cheek explained that if the committee wants staff to call out issues directly, they can do so but emphasized that any failure in the process would not be on staff because they already know the likely outcome. He noted he was not upset but wanted to be transparent about what he had been told. He advised allowing the process to continue as required procedurally, holding the necessary meetings, and letting the situation play out. He acknowledged he dislikes the situation as much as others. Another participant added that the concern within the community is that the Morrow Mill development is viewed as a lost cause.

Commissioner Pam Thompson spoke from the audience and stated that she does not support additional data centers and has requested a discussion on the topic to be added to the July 20 Commission meeting agenda. She explained that after speaking with colleagues, she also requested a one-year moratorium, noting that other counties with similar zoning needs have taken the same approach. She referenced public concerns and emphasized the need to avoid future criticism about allowing problematic development. Thompson stressed the importance of considering the community's long-term interests. She added that data centers typically do not create many jobs and mentioned Rockingham County's struggles, despite earlier expectations that casinos would help.

Someone from the audience asked the Planning Board whether, if their recommendations are rejected, the Board could simply revise and resubmit them at the following meeting. Mr. Hoagland confirmed that nothing prevents the Board from bringing back an edited recommendation. The speaker then noted that, from a political standpoint, repeated submissions could either allow the board to be "played" or allow them to "play the game." They suggested that showing consistent community pressure for zoning changes could signal to potential developers that the county is taking a firm stance. The speaker also asked whether recommendations can be presented alongside the potential negative consequences of not adopting them, like explaining the risks of ignoring medical advice. They clarified that if such implications are included in the public record and the commissioners vote the recommendations down, the commissioners would then have to publicly explain their decision despite knowing the stated consequences.

Chairman Cheek addressed the public, emphasizing that the discussion was not personal but part of a larger issue facing Alamance County. He described county commissioner elections as a popularity contest, noting that residents in municipalities often vote differently from those in unincorporated areas, who tend to be more vocal about zoning and development concerns. As a result, commissioners elected from the more populated areas may not reflect the priorities of rural residents. Mr. Cheek explained that when the “popular” group wins those elections, they appoint members to boards, which can affect how forcefully board members speak up on controversial issues. He gave an example of a former Planning Board member who was not reappointed after being outspoken, even though the Planning Board had recommended him for reappointment. He compared the situation to living without zoning protections—everything seems fine until a serious issue arises. Mr. Cheek also pointed out that all five county commissioners live within municipalities that already have zoning protections, even though some oppose zoning in unincorporated areas. Another participant added that commissioners have privately expressed support for zoning, while others countered that they publicly support planning and development ordinances but not zoning, as stated during their campaigns.

Mr. Chandler added that concerns about development often don’t arise until issues directly affect residents. He noted that everyone present appeared to be from the southern part of the county, with no representation from the northern areas. Mr. Chandler stressed that county commissioners need to hear support for zoning and development changes from across the entire county, not just one region, in order to act. He emphasized the importance of building a broader coalition that includes northern residents. Mr. Chandler concluded by noting that the planning board is already about five months behind on its work related to the Unified Development Ordinance.

Mr. Kimrey added that the amendments the board has been working on for a long period are close to being completed. Aside from the new zoning proposal, which already has a solid framework, the board is not far from being able to submit their work. He emphasized that the main remaining step is engaging the community. He stressed that the board has been preparing diligently by reviewing all amendments to improve both the Unified Development Ordinance and the future preservation proposal, and he assured attendees that the board is well-prepared.

Mrs. Perkins asked for clarification about a previous submission the planning staff had presented at the request of the Board of Commissioners. Mr. Hoagland confirmed that this occurred in August of last year. Mrs. Perkins noted that the Planning Board had approved and supported that proposal at the time. She then asked what action the commissioners took, and it was clarified that the Board of Commissioners did not table the item nor take any official action; they only took it under advisement.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Subcommittee Recommendations Discussion

Mr. Kimrey explained to the public that the board has been reaching out to various parts of the community for input. Their most recent meeting was with the Builders Association, where they met with about 15–20 builders. He said they also plan to meet with the Farm Bureau, the Chamber

of Commerce, and other key groups to gather broader feedback. In addition, Mr. Kimrey noted that Mr. Cheek is helping coordinate upcoming public meetings to continue expanding community engagement.

Mr. Hoagland also explained that he had been in discussions with the county attorney about the subcommittee's work and current state-level restrictions. He noted that a recent change to North Carolina law prohibits what is known as "downzoning," meaning a county cannot reduce the allowed uses of someone's property without the owner's consent. Because Alamance County does not yet have zoning, there was initial concern that adopting zoning might require consent from every property owner in the unincorporated areas of the county. However, legislative staff in Raleigh clarified that the restriction applies only after zoning is adopted. Under their interpretation, the initial adoption would be allowed, but any later amendments that reduce permitted uses would require individual property-owner consent. Given this, the county attorney recommended combining the ongoing Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) revisions with the rural preservation/zoning proposal into a single package. Mr. Hoagland emphasized that the county effectively has "one chance" to adopt zoning cleanly under this interpretation, making it important that the combined document be accurate before submission to the commissioners. Mr. Hoagland went on to explain that once zoning is adopted, the county will face additional restrictions under state law related to "downzoning." He noted that any amendment that creates a nonconformity, such as changes to landscaping requirements, setbacks, or other standards, cannot be made unless the affected property owner consents. This means future revisions must be carried out very carefully to avoid unintentionally creating nonconforming uses. Mr. Hoagland then said the subcommittee is working on improving the nonconforming language in the UDO to help ensure that properties would be considered conforming from the start, rather than becoming nonconforming immediately upon adoption. He clarified that after zoning is adopted, amendments can only make the ordinance less restrictive, not more restrictive.

Mr. Hoagland was asked whether the state has provided guidance or whether opposition to the new downzoning law exists. He responded that there has been significant opposition to the downzoning restriction, with more than 40 attempts by local governments to reverse it, though only one has succeeded. The only successful exemption was granted to the Town of Mills River in Henderson County, which had already begun revising its UDO and zoning map before the state law took effect. He noted that Alamance County had similarly started UDO work in early 2024 but did not specifically considering zoning until later in 2024.

The subcommittee (Lee Kimrey, Henry Chandler, and Rodney Cheek) reported that they have held four meetings with various community groups to collect input on development and zoning issues. They explained that the ideas gathered during these meetings are reflected in the materials reviewed that evening, although the work is still ongoing. They emphasized the importance of continuing outreach, meeting with different community groups, and ensuring everyone has a voice in the process.

Members of the public asked whether the community had been invited to attend subcommittee meetings. The subcommittee clarified that while the public has not joined the internal subcommittee meetings, they actively incorporate public comments from Planning Board meetings and separate outreach meetings with civic groups, private individuals, county commissioners, and the Builders Association.

A public participant asked whether water sustainability had been discussed. Subcommittee members confirmed that water supply concerns have been a major topic. They noted the lack of aquifer mapping data and referenced an example from Raleigh showing the importance of evaluating finite groundwater resources. Environmental Health Director Rebecca Rosso contributed expertise, explaining that groundwater supply, well capacity, and system design all play roles in sustainable development.

The board acknowledged the high level of public engagement and noted they had relaxed public comment rules slightly for this meeting to allow more meaningful dialogue.

The discussion then shifted to clarifying differences between public water and sewer systems versus community systems. The Builders Association had pointed out that many subdivisions begin with community wells but convert to public utility systems before completion. Mr. Hoagland explained that this can create legal complications because a system termed “community” by our local ordinance may legally be classified as “public” when it is transferred to a management agency. He noted that any system with 15 or more service connections is classified by the state (NC DEQ) as a public water system, regardless of whether it is groundwater-based or surface-water-based. Rosso added that those definitions come from federal and state regulations, including EPA standards, which govern water sampling, testing frequency, permitting, and operational requirements.

She clarified:

- It is the number of connections, not the number of wells, that determines whether a system is treated as “public.”
- “Community” and “public” are regulatory terms that can overlap depending on system size and usage.
- Large groundwater-based systems serving 15 or more connections are legally considered public supplies, even if operated by private entities.

The group discussed how these rules might affect regulating wells in subdivisions like Morrow Mill, where drilled wells could eventually be transferred to a public utility provider, making them ineligible for certain restrictions the county hopes to implement. Ms. Rosso continued explaining regulatory definitions used by EPA and NC DEQ for water systems. She noted that classifications such as “community,” “non-transient,” and “transient” depend on the number of individuals served and the length of time they receive water. For example, a “community non-transient” system

typically serves more than 25 people who use the water for at least six months of the year. These categories affect sampling, maintenance, and regulatory requirements.

A public member asked whether the state has gallon-per-day production requirements for wells. Ms. Rosso confirmed that for any system serving 15 or more connections, DEQ requires yield testing and documentation showing the well can produce the necessary gallons. She added that DEQ also requires backup sources, holding tanks of specified size, and treatment systems for larger public utilities, such as municipal systems like Burlington. Ms. Rosso offered to provide DEQ contact information for further technical guidance. The board then returned to the legal question: whether the county can prohibit public water systems under a subdivision ordinance. Members discussed that many assume “public water” means “municipal water,” but legally, community groundwater systems with 15 or more connections are also classified as public utilities.

Mr. Hoagland noted this complicates any attempt to regulate development based on water system type. A public attendee shared information they heard from DEQ: typical household water usage is estimated at roughly 400 gallons per day, and subdivisions with more than 49 lots are usually required to have at least two wells. The attendee also asked whether the county can legally define “public” more precisely to distinguish municipal utilities from private water companies. Mr. Hoagland said such distinctions are difficult to use in land-use regulations because they begin to overlap with public health and safety regulation, which would require strong evidence to necessitate a policy change. Rather than using a public health justification for land use regulations, he suggested the zoning ordinance is a more appropriate place to make distinctions about where certain types of development should occur.

The subcommittee and board members then discussed applying zoning or land-use designations to control where cluster subdivisions are allowed. They discussed potentially eliminating cluster subdivisions altogether or maintaining larger minimum lot sizes to avoid legal challenges over whether water systems are “public” or “community.” They explored how minimum lot size affects land capacity. For example, while a theoretical one-acre minimum could allow hundreds of lots on a large tract, board members noted that actual development capacity is limited by soil suitability, topography, and septic feasibility. Ms. Rosso confirmed that the ability of land to “perk” naturally limits density, since many lots require off-site systems if soils or slopes are unsuitable.

There was additional discussion of community sewer systems, which require large areas for infrastructure and can significantly reduce the number of buildable lots. Board members explained that cluster subdivisions currently allow lots as small as 8,000 square feet when connected to community or public systems. They discussed raising that minimum to 30,000 square feet across the board to restrict dense development in rural areas and encourage maintaining agricultural use when land cannot support high-density septic or sewer systems.

Ultimately, the conversation emphasized:

- The complexity of state water system classifications.

- The overlapping definitions of “community” and “public” systems.
- The technical and legal limits of regulating development based on water type.
- The importance of zoning or clear minimum lot sizes to steer development toward areas served by municipal utilities

Board members explored a new idea for modifying cluster subdivision rules: applying a one-acre minimum lot size while requiring a graduated open-space percentage that increases with the total number of homes in a development. This sliding-scale approach would keep lot sizes consistent but reduce overall density by mandating more preserved land in larger projects. The board discussed using this model specifically in agricultural and rural residential zones, with higher density allowed only near municipal service areas and ETJs. They also noted that even with cluster options retained, requiring one-acre lots would significantly reduce the likelihood that developers pursue dense cluster designs.

A public participant raised a new concern: open-space definitions must be tightened, so developers cannot count land that is already unusable for building—such as septic fields or mandatory buffers—as “preserved” open space. They also highlighted the county’s 2020 Land Development Plan, which recommends 2- to 5-acre minimums in agricultural areas, suggesting that 30,000-square-foot lots may still be too dense in rural regions with limited groundwater recharge capacity.

The group introduced a new groundwater point: the average household uses roughly 400 gallons per day, and some soils can recharge at only that rate per acre. This raises concerns about higher-density development in areas with limited aquifer productivity.

The board asked Ms. Rosso and Mr. Hoagland whether developers using community wells must perform ongoing monitoring to ensure new high-demand wells do not impact existing private wells. Ms. Rosso stated she is not aware of any long-term monitoring requirement beyond initial yield and safety testing, and that neither community systems nor municipal utilities can guarantee future water supply. She also said that well regulations are based on the number of connections, not the number of wells. Multiple wells may feed into shared storage tanks and treatment systems, meaning developers could design systems to stay below regulatory thresholds if wells are separated into smaller utility groupings. The board noted that regardless of water system type, actual development capacity in rural areas will always depend heavily on soil suitability, topography, and septic feasibility, which naturally limit how many lots can be created. This reinforced the idea of minimum lot sizes and strong open-space requirements as practical tools to manage rural growth.

After more discussion, Mr. Hoagland asked to show the county’s draft zoning map on screen. He noted the following to refresh the board’s memory and for the good of the public:

- In the green agricultural districts, the proposed by-right minimum lot size is 5 acres, with options for density subdivisions averaging 5 acres and cluster designs that require defined open space.

- In the light-blue rural residential districts, the minimum lot size is 2 acres, with optional cluster subdivisions if open-space criteria are met.
- In the dark-blue suburban transition areas nearer municipal services and ETJs, lot sizes can go as low as 8,000 square feet, reflecting the expectation of municipal or public utilities.
- The orange and yellow districts would be rural communities and mill village districts that promote a mixture of uses. The one difference in the mill villages would be the use of form based code to ensure that future development matches the current development aesthetic.

A public participant asked whether the map accounts for major rivers. Mr. explained that while rivers were not the basis for drawing district boundaries, existing state watershed rules already require 1- to 2-acre minimums in regulated watershed areas, and, for example, Jordan Lake buffer rules impose fixed buffer protections along perennial streams and rivers. These rules would remain unchanged regardless of zoning. He also noted that in areas such as Saxapahaw and Carolina Mill Village, zoning recommendations were designed to complement historic settlement patterns near the river rather than specifically to regulate river impacts.

Subcommittee members discussed whether to consider larger minimum lot sizes than the earlier 30,000-square-foot suggestion, noting that any final number; whether one acre, 50,000 square feet, or something larger, will ultimately need to be a negotiated compromise among various community and development stakeholders. The goal would be to bring forward a recommendation that competing groups may not love, but can at least accept, so commissioners see unified support. A public participant asked whether minimum lot sizes could vary by district (agricultural vs. suburban). Board members explained that this can only occur if zoning is adopted, because using district-specific minimums without zoning would be legally impermissible. If the draft zoning map passes, larger minimums could apply in agricultural areas, with smaller sizes allowed in suburban or transitional districts.

Subcommittee members discussed the challenge of proposing changes that restrict development. They acknowledged that any regulation reducing land-development potential—lot size increases, limits on community systems, or prohibitions on off-site septic—will reliably trigger opposition from parts of the development industry, particularly volume builders. They noted that some large builders oppose limits on community systems because such restrictions reduce the feasibility of high-density projects. Several board members and public attendees highlighted the changing dynamics of the home-building market. One board member stated that historically, local builders would purchase a few lots at a time in rural subdivisions. However, the current trend is for larger volume builders to acquire entire subdivisions upfront, leaving few opportunities for small, local builders. This shift concerns some members, who argued that development decisions should consider long-term county residents and local building businesses, not just large companies that may leave once land is built out.

A community member asked, “Who are we planning for?” prompting discussion about serving longtime residents, newcomers drawn by low land prices, and developers seeking new markets. The sentiment expressed was that planning decisions must prioritize people who live in and depend

on Alamance County, while acknowledging external pressure from developers who often resist any new limits. The commentary concluded with a public question asking Mr. Hoagland whether any attempt to limit development capacity will always be met with developer protests, regardless of the changes proposed.

Board members noted that some local builders understand the need for stronger protections and may support balanced regulations but emphasized the importance of crafting a plan that all stakeholder groups can tolerate, even if no one is completely happy with it. Several public participants said invitations to earlier subcommittee meetings were unclear, which may have limited the range of feedback provided. They asked the subcommittee to clarify what direction and input they need going forward. The subcommittee responded that they will continue gathering comments through additional meetings and incorporate everything discussed tonight.

In conclusion, Mr. Chandler raised strong objections to a proposal allowing smaller lot sizes for tiny homes and similar developments, urging that the idea be removed entirely. He argued that regulating lot sizes based on home size is risky and that tiny-home lots should not be permitted anywhere except possibly in very specific areas, such as historic mill villages, only if zoning is adopted. Multiple board members agreed, noting tiny homes must meet NC building code if placed on permanent foundations, and that any lots allowing them should still meet the standard minimum lot size in that district (such as 8,000 square feet in suburban transition areas). Several members favored eliminating sub-8,000-square-foot lots altogether, stating that even if tiny homes are allowed, their lots should not be smaller than what the zoning district allows. The board briefly discussed infrastructure limits in Saxapahaw, noting that while water service exists, sewer capacity is very limited and serves only the historic mill area. Members agreed that decisions about tiny-home allowances should be handled later through detailed zoning district rules and tables of permitted uses.

VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS/DISCUSSION

Mr. Dodson announced to the board that he would like to discuss the issue of data centers. He cited a round table discussion from Villanova University that he had recently seen which was very informative. He also said he could share a model data center ordinance that he found from a local government in Pennsylvania which he found to be well written and comprehensive. He explained the growing public concern around data centers and that he thought the board needed to be ahead of the curve on this issue.

Mr. Hoagland asked whether the model ordinance made a distinction between larger hyperscale data centers and more traditional enterprise data centers. Mr. Dodson responded that he was not sure and asked about the difference between the two. Mr. Hoagland explained that hyperscale centers are the larger variety which have caused so much recent public concern. On the other hand, enterprise centers support everyday technology use like internet browsing and social media use and have existed for years without significant opposition. To illustrate, Mr. Hoagland noted that

an enterprise data center may use around five megawatts of power per second while a hyperscale center may use some 300 megawatts and require tremendous amounts of water for cooling needs.

Mr. Dodson responded noting the importance of understanding these dynamics as a board so that they could potentially craft the best rules moving forward. He also mentioned he had contacted an attorney who drafted data-center regulatory language used elsewhere and may seek clarification from that source.

Mr. Hoagland also commented about the other communities across the state where short-term moratoriums were enacted. He said he fears that due to North Carolina's down-zoning restrictions, many local governments cannot permanently block data centers once moratoriums expire without property-owner consent. If that happens, there will be a lot of unhappy citizens on the back end when data centers get developed anyway because all the other necessary components are in place.

Board members noted that North Carolina currently has over 93 data centers either built or planned, raising urgency for the county to act strategically.

Commissioner Thompson reiterated her intent to pursue a moratorium discussion at the upcoming July 20 meeting.

A public member questioned whether similar moratoriums could apply to large-scale residential builders, especially during drought conditions. Staff clarified that state law prohibits residential development moratoriums unless a public health or safety emergency is proven.

There was discussion described about a potential alternative: placing a moratorium on specific high-volume water uses, rather than on residential development itself.

It was suggested that, during an exceptional drought, the county might legally pause projects exceeding certain water-use thresholds to allow time for developing broader water-policy protections. The planning director said this water-use-based moratorium concept is not explicitly prohibited and would require further legal review. The section closed with acknowledgment that a moratorium based on water-demand volume, rather than land use, might offer the county a lawful and temporary tool during drought conditions though that is not a guarantee.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Perkins, seconded by Mr. Isley, and passed unanimously.