

OFFICE OF THE CITY ASSESSOR

MINUTES
MEETING OF AGRICULTURAL-FORESTAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
CITY OF STAUNTON, VIRGINIA
Tuesday, June 2, 2026
5:30 p.m.
Planning Conference Room

PRESENT: Stephen Talley, Chair
 Faye C. Cooper, Vice Chair
 Presley W. Moore, III
 Stephen Beam
 Kim Woodwell
 Vacant
 Vacant
 Vacant
 Douglas Flinn, City Assessor
 Jeff Overholtzer, Council Liaison

ALSO PRESENT: Tim Hartless, Planning Manager
 Amy M. Brown, Secretary of the Committee
 Meggie Taylor, Long Range/Comprehensive Planner

The members of the Agricultural-Forestal Advisory Committee met on Tuesday, June 2, 2026 for consideration of a request to add two parcels to the Middlebrook Agricultural-Forestal District.

Tim Hartless called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. Hartless opened the floor for nominations for Chair. Ms. Cooper nominated Mr. Talley to be Chair.

Mr. Talley was elected by unanimous vote.

Mr. Talley opened the floor for nominations for Vice Chair. Mr. Talley nominated Ms. Cooper for Vice Chair.

Ms. Cooper was elected by unanimous vote.

NEW BUSINESS

Consideration of a Request by Thomas Bowen for the Addition of two parcels of Land to the Middlebrook Agricultural-Forestal District.

Mr. Talley stated that the subject property was surrounded on three sides by Agricultural-Forestal District and that he was impressed with the application. He further stated he was aware that a "hoop house" was not allowed in the front yard of the property according to provisions of the R-1 zoning.

Mr. Hartless confirmed that in R-1 zoning, this structure would be allowed in the side or the backyard and that they would be restricted on what they could grow, so having it in the district would allow them to use this as a bona fide agricultural facility.

Mr. Talley asked if the applicants later decided to remove themselves from the district would they then fall back under the R-1 regulations and have to remove the hoop house.

Mr. Hartless answered that they would be an existing non-conforming use at that point because the building was legally constructed in the Agricultural District, so they would not be required to remove the building but there is a possibility, the Zoning Administrator, could tell them they could no longer grow for agricultural purposes and they would revert back to only growing for their own residential use.

Mr. Talley said it would be somewhat of an incentive for them to not leave the district.

Ms. Woodwell asked if they would have to go through a process to withdraw from the district.

Mr. Hartless stated it was basically the same process to withdraw from a district as it is to be included.

Mr. Talley stated he had encouraged applicants to be present at the meeting or to use some form of remote participation to answer any questions the committee may have.

The applicants participated remotely as they were out of the country at the time of the meeting.

The remote access was initiated and committee members greeted the applicants.

Mr. Beam asked if there was a minimum acreage requirement for the district.

Ms. Woodwell stated that the applicant was not applying for land use taxation, only to join the district,

Mr. Hartless said there was no longer a minimum. There used to be a 20-acre minimum to join the district but the code of Virginia was amended by the General Assembly and the city amended its local ordinance to comply with that change.

Ms. Cooper thanked the applicant for letting them visit the property and commented on the garden and saw that there was already food being produced and that it was her understanding the applicant wanted to expand their production.

The applicant commented that was correct, his intention for the hoop house would be to expand operations and also let the land rest a little bit, so they can produce enough food on what they have now to feed their family, and give away some to friends. If they wanted to increase that while also not eroding soil quality, they would need to have the hoop house. The hoop house would give them more acreage under tillage, and also extend the season so they could grow throughout the winter.

Mr. Moore asked the applicant if the intent was to have an actual business or just to enlarge the operation that he currently has, which is primarily for family and friends.

The applicant replied that he did not have a firm business plan written out and didn't think they would necessarily go that way, that they would probably just increase the amount they share with friends and family.

Ms. Cooper asked Mr. Hartless about the current R-1 zoning. This property is nearly five acres; how many lots could be created now for by-right development.

Mr. Hartless replied the two lots are nearly five acres; a public street would have to be built in order to plat any new lots and that would be cost prohibitive.

Discussion ensued about the surrounding properties in the Middlebrook Agricultural District. This part of Staunton was annexed from Augusta County in 1986, and historically this would have been general agricultural when it was in the county.

Mr. Talley asked the applicant if he had anything further to discuss.

The applicant stated he tried to be as complete on the application as he could and said they are responsible stewards of the land and the front property was really the only place to cite the hoop house in considering the soil, slope, existing trees, and existing structures.

Ms. Woodwell asked Mr. Hartless if the applicant did not get in the district, and the zoning remains R-1, is there a possibility they could get some sort of exemption or special variance from the city.

Mr. Hartless responded that the Code of Virginia regulates zoning variances and a variance cannot be issued for a use. Variances may only be granted for area and yard requirement such as minimum setbacks. He stated that the applicant's only real option would be to join the district, or do an amendment to the residential zoning district that would allow agricultural use by right, which is not something the city should allow.

Mr. Talley asked the committee their thoughts.

Mr. Moore said that their mandate is to determine whether the application meets the intent and spirit of the Agricultural-Forestal District guidelines and that a significant factor in this request is that the applicant is surrounded by the existing Agricultural-Forestal District.

Ms. Woodwell expressed her thoughts about how the property aligns to the purpose of the districts and it is surrounded by agricultural land.

Mr. Beam said they are growing and producing food for their family, which is the purpose of a farm.

Ms. Cooper stated she had concerns until her visit to the property and saw the combination of resources. She said she is very supportive of this application.

Mr. Flinn said he fully supports the application, one of the main reasons is that it fully complements and is developed completely with the Middlebrook Agricultural District. The structure they want to build enables them to increase the production of agricultural goods. He said that one key element recognizes that this farm predominantly comprised of land with steep slope and stream buffers make it difficult to farm, so this would be the best and highest use of this land to be included in the Agricultural-Forestal District.

Councilor Overholtzer said this was kind of an entrance corridor to the city, that right down the road there is heavy housing developments on both sides. He stated that he thought it would be nice for an entrance corridor to have a nice view of rural vistas as you get off the bypass.

Mr. Talley asked if anyone else had any comment and with no further questions he made a motion to approve the application.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Woodwell and carried as followed:

Mr. Talley	aye	Ms. Cooper	aye
Mr. Moore	aye	Mr. Beam	aye
Ms. Woodwell	aye	Mr. Flinn	aye
Mr. Overholtzer	aye		

The committee asked Ms. Taylor a few questions about the upcoming Comprehensive Plan update and how the draft plan relates to the Agricultural-Forestall Districts. Ms. Taylor explained the draft Future Land Use Map and draft goal and objectives how they could impact the future of the districts.

There being no other business and, on a motion, properly made, the meeting adjourned at 6:24 p.m.

Amy M. Brown

Amy M. Brown, Secretary