

Minutes
Isle of Wight County Planning Commission
17140 Monument Circle, Isle of Wight County
February 24, 2026

1. Call to Order

Bobby Bowser, Chairman, called the Isle of Wight County Planning Commission meeting to order at 6:00 PM on February 24, 2026, in the Board of Supervisors Room at the Isle of Wight County Courthouse, Isle of Wight, Virginia.

Invocation

Commissioner Gibbs delivered the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Bowser invited everyone present to join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Roll Call/Determination of a Quorum

Roll was called and the following members were present: Bobby Bowser, Brian Carroll, James Ford, Jennifer Boykin, Raynard Gibbs, Matthew Smith, Brian Shotwell, George Rawls, Keith Johnson, Thomas Distefano.

A quorum was determined

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Amy Ring, Community Development Director
Bobby Jones, County Attorney
Trenton Blowe, Planner III
Amanda Landrus, Secretary
Heather Crocker, Permit Tech I

3. Action on Requests to Withdraw or Table Pending Agenda Items

Chairman Bowser asked if there were any requests to table or withdrawal agenda items. Amy Ring stated there were no requests.

4. Approval of Agenda

Chairman Bowser called for a vote to approve the agenda. Commissioner Boykin made the motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Carroll seconded the motion. Chairman Bowser asked for all in favor to signify by saying aye. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Consent Agenda

A. January 27, 2026, Planning Commission Regular Meeting Minutes

Chairman Bowser moved to approve the consent agenda and the minutes, with one correction noted. The minutes originally stated that Chairman Bowser opened the nominations for Chairman; however, the nominations were actually opened by Attorney Jones. No other corrections were identified. Commissioner Boykin made the motion to approve the consent agenda with the correction. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. Chairman Bowser asked for all in favor to

signify by saying aye. The motion passed unanimously.

6. Citizens' Comments

Chairman Bowser opened the floor for any citizens' comments. There being no comment, Chairman Bowser closed citizens' comments.

7. Public Hearings

- A. Proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Zoning Ordinance Requirements**
An Ordinance to Amend and Reenact Appendix B. - Zoning, Article V. – Supplementary Use Regulations, Section 5-5003.M. Utility services, major of the Isle of Wight County Zoning Ordinance for the purposes of adding regulations for Battery Energy Storage Systems

Amy Ring, Community Development Director, gave the following presentation.

Proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Ordinance Public Hearing

AMY RING, AICP
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
FEBRUARY 24, 2026

Background

- February 2024 - Board of Supervisors established the Energy Task Force (ETF) to assess current energy infrastructure, remaining capacity of high-voltage transmission lines, potential future energy generation projects, emerging energy technologies, and other related items.
- ETF selected battery storage and data center facilities requirements as highest priorities.
- Staff developed draft ordinance based on models from several other jurisdictions as well including performance criteria from the County's existing utility scale solar requirements.
- June 2025 – January 2026 – Planning Commission discussed and refined ordinance requirements

Draft Ordinance Description

- BESS requirements to follow Utility Scale Solar Energy Generation facility requirements in Section 5-5003.M - supplemental use regulations for major utility services.
- BESS uses defined a major utility service which fall under the civic use types listed in Section 3-4000 of the Ordinance.
- Provisions of the Ordinance include the following:
 - ❖ Definitions
 - ❖ Application requirements
 - ❖ Technical standards
 - ❖ Public safety standards
 - ❖ Setbacks, screening, and noise standards
 - ❖ Site layout standards
 - ❖ Decommissioning requirements

Chairman Bowser opened the public hearing and called for anyone who wished to speak for or against the item.

David Tucker, 6251 Old Stage Highway, spoke in opposition to the application, presenting materials he distributed to the commissioners. He argued that Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESSs) do not generate energy and are inefficient, often resulting in wasted electricity and minimal local benefit. He expressed concern that state mandates and approvals for BESS projects exceed local authority and that oversight bodies lack sufficient expertise and meaningful performance metrics. Mr. Tucker cited data from Virginia and North Carolina showing capacity inefficiencies, negative financial impacts, and limited benefits to local communities, while noting that the state receives disproportionate advantages from these projects. He concluded his remarks by emphasizing the potential negative consequences of BESS deployment and offered to answer questions from the board.

Greg Creswell, 3400 Wesley Street, Richmond, Senior Development Manager with AES, spoke in support of utility-scale BESSs and provided comments on the draft ordinance under consideration. He noted AES's experience as an operator of solar and BESS projects in Isle of Wight County and across the region, highlighting over 20 utility-scale BESS projects totaling more than 1,800 megawatts.

Mr. Creswell expressed general support for the draft ordinance's intent to guide responsible energy facility growth but suggested that several provisions focus too narrowly on specific equipment and physical requirements rather than broader siting and zoning standards. He highlighted concerns regarding acreage caps, setbacks, noise study requirements, and safety-related language. Specifically, he stated that the ordinance's 2% acreage cap and setback requirements could unnecessarily remove land from productive use and limit revenue potential. He also noted that noise modeling at the time of application may not be feasible due to conceptual designs and that flexibility in equipment selection should be allowed as long as final sound thresholds are met.

Regarding safety provisions, Mr. Creswell recommended relying on existing fire, building, and electrical codes for detailed requirements, rather than codifying specific operational directives in zoning language, to ensure clarity for future projects. He concluded by thanking the commission for the opportunity to comment and offered AES's continued support, including potential workshops or discussions to provide additional guidance on BESS development.

Connor O'Donnell, a land use planner with Gentry Locke Attorneys, spoke in support of battery and solar development while emphasizing thoughtful land use and environmental protection. Drawing on his experience with BESS ordinances across the state, including Surry County, he described the draft ordinance as generally well-written and flexible for both applicants and the Planning Commission.

Mr. O'Donnell addressed two specific areas of concern. First, regarding safety standards, he stated that while the ordinance's standards are appropriate, much of the language duplicates national and state building codes, as well as NFPA 855 standards, which have since been adopted. He recommended simplifying the ordinance by referencing compliance with the most current standards, which would reduce redundancy and ensure clarity over time.

Second, he discussed the fencing requirement, particularly the mandated 100-foot setback from the equipment footprint. He noted that this requirement could unnecessarily increase the fenced area for smaller BESS projects, potentially doubling the land footprint and causing unintended impacts such as habitat fragmentation and interference with wildlife movement. He suggested that the requirement be reconsidered to balance security, land use, and environmental considerations.

There being no further public comments, Commissioner Bowser closed the public hearing and opened the floor for discussion among the commissioners.

Chairman Bowser asked Connor O'Donnell about examples of best practices in BESS ordinances.

Mr. O'Donnell noted that the Surry County ordinance he helped draft was a strong example due to its simplified language and practical approach to fencing and impervious area requirements, while acknowledging that newer ordinances generally incorporate lessons from prior ordinances.

Commissioner Jennifer Boykin inquired whether Mr. O'Donnell had been invited to speak, and he confirmed that he participates in various associations to provide guidance on BESS and solar development, balancing developer needs with land use and environmental considerations. He further explained that fixed 100-foot fencing requirements could necessitate removal of trees, impacting wildlife and habitat.

Commissioner Brian Carroll asked about the site visit to Dry Bridge Storage, and Ms. Ring explained that the facility was recommended by Dominion Energy, because it was more representative of typical BESS projects that the County might review. She also informed the commission that Senate Bill 443, recently passed by both houses of the General Assembly, could make BESS an accessory use to existing solar facilities by right, subject to local performance criteria. Commissioner Boykin noted that this change would not take effect immediately.

Commissioner Boykin also asked about training for Isle of Wight County fire personnel on solar energy facility emergency response.

Ms. Ring confirmed that the fire department signed off on the emergency response plan prior to final site plan approval, and that coordination with site managers had occurred.

Commissioner Carroll added that informal site walkthroughs had been conducted, and he felt safety measures outside the fence were adequately addressed.

Commissioner Rawls noted concerns when incidents occur outside fenced areas.

Commissioners then discussed ordinance provisions, including the timing of noise studies.

Commissioner Johnson indicated a need for additional time to review comments, noting that a noise study at the time of application may be challenging without a developed design.

Commissioner Boykin observed that the initial noise study serves as a baseline to assess potential impacts on the community.

Ms. Ring clarified that the ordinance requires demonstration of expected noise levels and mitigation measures for proposed equipment.

Commissioner Boykin also referenced a letter from Jeff Lurie raising concerns regarding multi-agency emergency response plans, staffing levels, and fiscal impacts, noting that Mr. Lurie did not take a position for or against the application. The email from Mr. Lurie is included below.

Dear Chair and Members of the Planning Commission,

Thank you in advance for allowing my public comment on the potential for Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) sites in Isle of Wight County.

To be clear, I am not speaking in favor of or opposition to these projects. My comments are focused specifically on public safety preparedness and interagency response capacity.

Major fires, hazardous materials incidents, and thermal events are not single-agency responses. They require coordinated and sustained fire/EMS, law enforcement, and emergency management operations over extended periods and, in the case of our county, often times involving both local and state-level resources.

Battery storage facilities of this scale, particularly those involving lithium-ion battery storage, present unique emergency response considerations. The effort would require extended scene security, traffic control, perimeter management, potential for evacuation coordination, and ongoing public communication, in addition to fire suppression and environmental monitoring.

We don't have to look far for examples. The large brush fires in November 2025 and again in January 2026 required road closures, mutual aid, and extended operations involving multiple agencies. Those incidents are a reminder of how quickly significant events can draw heavily on county and regional public safety resources; and in particular our water supply capacities.

Before any decision is finalized, I respectfully ask the Commission to consider:

- Whether a comprehensive, multi-agency emergency response plan has been developed in coordination with fire-rescue leadership, the Sheriff's Office, and emergency management
- Whether current staffing levels are sufficient to sustain a prolonged incident
- Whether specialized training and equipment needs have been fully evaluated
- What the fiscal impact would be to ensure county agencies are adequately prepared
- Whether financial assurances or mitigation measures are in place to offset potential response costs
- How the projected economic benefits of the facility compare to the potential long-term public safety and emergency response costs borne by county taxpayers.

Regardless of the ultimate outcome of tonight's meeting, it is essential that we evaluate not only land use compatibility and economic considerations, but also the full public safety footprint of a facility of this nature.

Thank you for your service to the county and for your careful consideration of these preparedness concerns.

Respectfully,

Jeff Lurie
Isle of Wight County Land Owner
1455 Lawnes Neck Dr

After discussion, Commissioner Johnson moved to table the matter to the next meeting to allow additional time for review. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Carroll. The motion passed, with Commissioner Bowser, Commissioner Carroll, Commissioner Ford, Commissioner

Boykin, Commissioner Gibbs, Commissioner Smith, Commissioner Shotwell, Commissioner Rawls, Commissioner Johnson, Commissioner Distefano voting in favor of the motion and none voting against the motion. (10-0)

- B.** AGF-26-1 Old Stage Satellite Communication Facility Moonlight District Removal
Application AGF-26-1 of Deborah Dashiell, Elizabeth Chabot, and Joseph T. Epps Jr., property owners, to withdraw one acre of land located on Old Stage Highway (Rt. 10) on tax map parcel 06-01-043 from the Moonlight Agricultural and Forestal District for the purpose of constructing a communication tower facility

Trenton Blowe, Planner III, gave the following presentation.

AGF-26-1 Old Stage Satellite Communication Tower Moonlight District Removal

TRENTON BLOWE, PLANNER III
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
FEBRUARY 24, 2026



ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY 1

Application Summary

- Tax Map Number: 06-01-043
- Election District: District 3
- Zoning: Rural Agricultural Conservation (RAC)
- Purpose: The request aims to remove the acreage associated with the approved satellite communication tower use from the Agricultural and Forestal district, while the remaining acreage will still be included.



ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY 2

Background

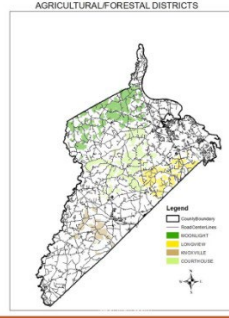
- The Moonlight Agricultural/Forestal District was renewed ten (10) years on September 15, 2022.
- A conditional use permit for a communication tower was approved in April 2025.
- At its meeting on February 4, 2026, the Agricultural and Forestal Advisory Committee recommended approval of the withdrawal request.



ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY 3



ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY 4



ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY 5

Ordinance Review

- Landowners have the right to submit a written request for withdrawal from the Agricultural and Forestal district.
- The Agricultural and Forestal Advisory Committee hears the withdrawal request.
- The advisory committee recommends to the Planning Commission, which then advises the Board of Supervisors



ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY 6

Chairman Bowser opened the public hearing and invited the applicant to speak.

Colin Camp, representing Crossroads Group on behalf of Vertical Bridge, stated that Vertical Bridge holds the lease for the one-acre property and is working with the County to bring the parcel into compliance with applicable codes.

There being no further speakers for or against the application, Chairman Bowser closed the public hearing and opened the matter for commissioner discussion.

During discussion, Commissioner Carroll noted that the request appeared to be administrative in nature and was intended to remove the one-acre parcel from the district prior to the original approval.

Commissioner Carroll moved to recommend approval to the Board of Supervisors for application AGF-26-1. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Boykin. The motion passed, with Commissioner Bowser, Commissioner Carroll, Commissioner Ford, Commissioner Boykin, Commissioner Gibbs, Commissioner Smith, Commissioner Shotwell, Commissioner Rawls, Commissioner Johnson, Commissioner Distefano voting in favor of the motion and none voting against the motion. (10-0)

The application will go to the March 19, 2026, Board of Supervisors meeting.

8. Old Business

Amy Ring confirmed there are no old business items for discussion.

9. New Business

Commissioner Rawls raised a matter from the most recent Board of Zoning Appeals meeting regarding an application for a duplex unit located within a manufactured home park on Route 258. He explained that the structure has the same footprint as a single-wide manufactured home but contains two separate dwelling units, generally consisting of one bedroom and one bathroom each. The application was approved for placement within the park.

Commissioner Rawls noted that this type of unit is not currently contemplated within the zoning ordinance and suggested the Commission may want to consider amendments to address similar units in the future. He stated that such units could provide additional workforce or low-income housing opportunities, particularly within manufactured home parks, and observed that this was reportedly the first unit of its kind constructed in Virginia. He anticipated that similar proposals may arise and encouraged consideration of potential ordinance changes.

Commissioner Gibbs inquired about the square footage of the unit. Commissioner Rawls responded that while he was unsure of the exact square footage, the structure has the same footprint as a standard single-wide manufactured home, approximately 76 feet by 16 feet.

A. EXC-25-11 Vertical Bridge Fence Exception

Application of Colin Camp of Crossroads Group LLC, for an exception to section 5-2000.G.1 of the zoning ordinance. The purpose of the application is a exception to allowfor an eight-foot fence to be installed on the property.

Trenton Blow, Planner III, gave the following presentation.

EXC-25-11 Vertical Bridge Fence Exception

TRENTON BLOWE, PLANNER III
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
FEBRUARY 24, 2026



FILE OF MOUNT COUNTY



FILE OF MOUNT COUNTY

Application Summary

TPIN: 06-01-043
Election District: District 3
Zoning: Rural Agricultural Conservation (RAC)
Purpose: An exception to section 5-2000.G.1 of the zoning ordinance to allow for an eight-foot fence to be constructed on the site.

Background

- The project is proposed on one acre of a larger 239-acre property that is zoned RAC.
- A conditional use permit was approved for a communication tower use, or a communication satellite array, on one acre in April 2025.
- The applicant plans to replace an existing six-foot tall fence with an eight-foot fence.

Project Description

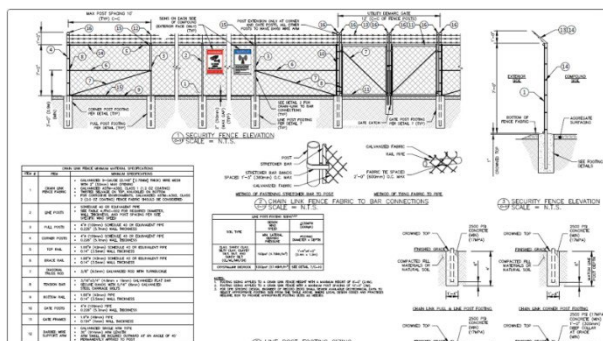
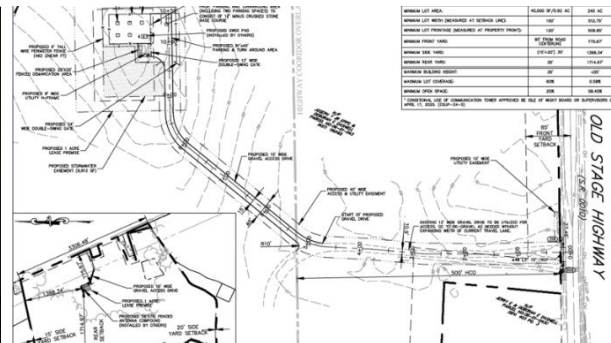
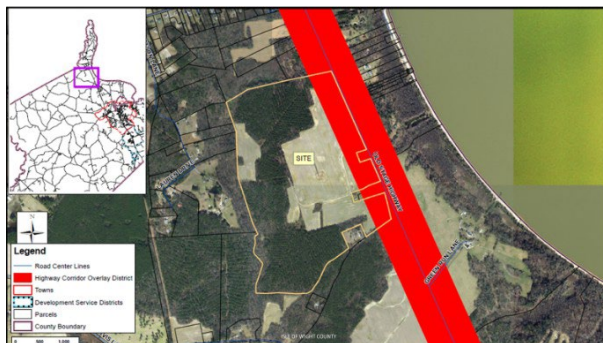
- Applicant requests an exception to the fence height standards specified in Section 5-2000.G1 of the zoning ordinance to have an eight-foot-tall chain-link fence.
- Applicant wishes to install an eight-foot fence with seven feet of chain-link topped by one foot of barbed wire.
- Company standards require a minimum of eight feet for security purposes.



FILE OF MOUNT COUNTY



FILE OF MOUNT COUNTY



Ordinance Review

- Section 5-2000.G.1 states that fences, walls, and gates cannot exceed a height of six feet.
- The zoning ordinance does allow fencing up to eight feet tall for public utilities.
- The satellite array communication facility is for private use and is not classified as a public utility.



CLERK OF SUPERVISORS

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Ordinance Review CTD.

- Under section 5-2000.D.5, the Board of Supervisors may authorize an exemption to the height regulations.
- In granting exemptions, the board of supervisors, with a recommendation by the planning commission, may impose reasonable conditions.



CLERK OF SUPERVISORS

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Staff Analysis

Strengths:

1. The proposed fence will be positioned at a distance that reduces visibility from the roadway.
2. The proposed fence will be screened by a required landscaping screening buffer.

Weaknesses:

1. The proposed fence height will exceed the maximum permitted in the Ordinance.



CLERK OF SUPERVISORS

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Staff Recommendation

Based on the identified strengths and weaknesses, staff recommends approval of the exception with the following conditions:

1. The fence height shall not exceed eight feet and height and;
2. The chain-link fence shall be coated in black or dark green to reduce the visibility from the roadway created by the increased height.



CLERK OF SUPERVISORS

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Chairman Bowser and Planning staff discussed the proposed fence coating and its visibility from the roadway. Staff explained that visibility would vary depending on travel speed, season, and surrounding vegetation, and noted that a black or dark green coating would help reduce visual impact from the road. Chairman Bowser indicated agreement with that approach.

Commissioner Gibbs stated that the request was straightforward and moved to recommend approval of application EXC 25-11, the Vertical Bridge fence exception, with the following staff-recommended conditions: the fence height shall not exceed eight feet, and the chain link fence shall be coated in black or dark green to reduce visibility from the roadway.

Commissioner Boykin seconded the motion.

Commissioner Distefano briefly inquired whether the applicant had expressed any concerns regarding the proposed fence color. Mr. Blowe confirmed there were no concerns.

The motion passed with Commissioner Bowser, Commissioner Carroll, Commissioner Ford, Commissioner Boykin, Commissioner Gibbs, Commissioner Smith, Commissioner Shotwell, Commissioner Rawls, Commissioner Johnson, Commissioner Distefano voting in favor of the motion and none voting against the motion (10-0).

The application will go to the March 19, 2026, Board of Supervisors meeting.

B. 2025 Planning Commission Annual Report

Amy Ring presented the 2025 Planning Commission Annual Report, noting it was attached to the agenda materials and included within the staff report. Commissioners were asked to review the report for consistency and any potential errors.

Chairman Bowser commented that he was surprised to note within the report that both the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors reflected 100% concurrence on actions in 2025.

Commissioner Gibbs made the motion to approve the 2025 Planning Commission Annual Report.

Commissioner Boykin seconded the motion.

Chairman Bowser asked for all in favor to signify by saying aye. The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Boykin inquired whether staff had received any complaints related to the Windsor Solar project, specifically regarding potential property damage by AES.

Ms. Ring indicated that no formal complaints had been received by the County.

Trenton Blowe noted that a nearby resident had communicated with the construction company regarding a berm condition included in the conditional use permit, but stated this was not a formal complaint.

Commissioner Boykin acknowledged receiving a phone call on the matter and was confirming whether the County had been contacted directly. Commissioner Boykin also asked whether burning was permitted on the project site.

Ms. Ring explained that the County does not specifically permit burning through zoning, and any such activity would need to comply with Fire Rescue regulations. She indicated they would follow up with Fire Rescue for clarification after concerns were raised that burning had been occurring for several months.

Commissioner Boykin expressed appreciation for Ms. Ring's work on the draft battery energy storage ordinance, noting that although she remains opposed to BESS, she commended the thoroughness of the draft.

Ms. Ring clarified that fire and safety provisions included in the ordinance were reviewed by Fire Rescue, the Building Official, and Dominion Energy's fire safety administrator.

Commissioners discussed the potential impact of pending state legislation that could make certain battery energy storage systems accessory uses by right if associated with previously approved solar facilities. Staff confirmed that such facilities would still be required to meet local performance standards, provided they do not conflict with state law. It was noted that any local ordinance provisions would need to be in place prior to July 1 to ensure applicability.

Further discussion occurred regarding the 100-foot fence setback requirement. Staff explained that the provision was based on other ordinances and consultation with Fire EMS personnel, who referenced fire code setback considerations. Commissioners noted observations from the Dry Bridge site visit regarding fence proximity.

Ms. Ring advised that over the next one to two months, approximately 22 housekeeping amendments to the zoning ordinance would be presented for review. These updates are intended to address outdated references, inconsistencies with current practice, conflicts with state code, and internal inconsistencies within the ordinance. Proposed changes may include updates to landscaping requirements, setback uniformity, and removal of obsolete approval processes. She also noted ongoing work on a data center ordinance.

Commissioners discussed whether the amendments should be presented during a regular meeting or at a work session.

Ms. Ring indicated a preference to introduce them during a regular meeting, with the option of a work session if more in-depth review is desired. Commissioners requested that materials be provided as early as possible to allow sufficient review time.

Discussion also touched on rural community planning considerations, including landscaping and site design requirements for small businesses in agricultural areas.

Ms. Ring provided clarification regarding the Darden Store project, explaining that available ordinance credits and reductions significantly lowered initial landscaping requirements.

Commissioners agreed that further discussion could occur when broader ordinance amendments are presented.

C. County Attorney's Report

Bobby Jones confirmed there were no items for the County Attorney Report. Mr. Jones advised that he would not be present at the next meeting and that Mandy Rogers would attend in his place.

D. Planning Director's Report

Amy Ring confirmed there were no items for the Planning Director's Report

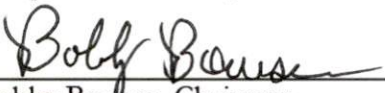
10. Closed Meeting

Bobby Jones confirmed there were no items for closed session.

11. Adjournment

There being no further information to discuss, Chairman Bowser adjourned the meeting at 7:00 PM.

Adopted this 24th day of March 2026



Bobby Bowser, Chairman
Isle of Wight County Planning Commission

Attest: 

Amanda Landrus, Secretary