



Planning Commission Annual Report 2018

2018's Numbers

In 2018 the Planning and Zoning Division approved the following¹:

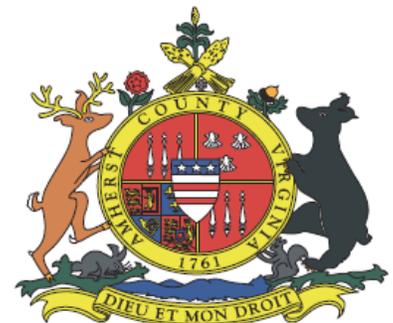
- 369 Zoning permits
- 87 Single family dwelling permits.
- 23 Building addition permits.
- 75 Home occupation permits.
- 118 Accessory structure permits.
- 20 Wireless communication facility permits.
- 11 New sign permits.
- 7 Replacement or modification sign permits.
- 8 Site plans.
- 1 PC Approved Major subdivision.

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Community Development

In May 2018, Planning and Zoning along with Building Safety and Inspections successfully merged into a unified Community Development Department. The two offices work dependently upon each other every day, which allows staff to work more effectively together. Check out the newly combined website at countyofamherst.com.



¹ For a complete breakdown of 2018's numbers please see Appendix A

Business Friendliness & Ordinance Changes

In August 2017, the Board of Supervisors discussed the matter of the County’s reputation for being unfriendly to businesses. Therefore, the Planning Commission provided a list of thoughts and ideas to change County ordinances, processes, policies and procedures to improve the business environment for both existing and new businesses in Amherst County. In January 2018, the Economic Development Authority decided to spearhead the initiative, and in July, presented their findings to the Board of Supervisors. Research included one-on-one interviews with business owners and front-line customer service staff, along with a survey which received over 50 responses. In September, the Board set a prioritized list of business friendly initiatives, with the goal of tackling 5 at a time.

Business Friendly Initiatives

ID#	Recommendations	Department	Cost Estimate
1	Policy instead of ordinances for flexibility in decision making	Board of Supervisors	Staff time
2	Review ordinances and special exceptions and make recommendations	Community Development	Staff time
3	Consultant to study the best tax structure, fees, and incentives for the County	EDA/Comm. Of Revenue	\$10,000
4	More decision making authority for Director of Community Development	Community Development	Staff time
5	Website review for business friendliness for County and Constitutionals	EDA/IT	Staff time

In November 2018, the Planning Commission held a workshop to complete a comprehensive review of special exception uses that could be modified, removed, or added in order to fulfill Initiative #2. Language was added to allow the Community Development Director leeway to determine if a desired use is consistent with the statement of intent for the district, allowing a chance for a special exception hearing on a use that would previously not be considered. Short-term tourist rentals of dwellings can sometimes be considered a permitted use under certain criteria. Additionally, 5 uses in the B-2 General Commercial District are proposed to be moved from special exceptions to permitted uses. These revisions as well as other business friendly ordinances are expected to move forward in early 2019.

In July 2018, the Planning Commission reviewed and recommended approval of a new ordinance regarding Derelict Structures, Blight Abatement, and Tax Abatements. The ordinance reduces the cost of building and demolition permits to encourage redevelopment and offer tax abatements for rehabilitation. The taxes on the property can be abated for a period of no less than 15 years and transfers with the property. This ordinance will allow County staff to better assist those hoping to redevelop, and would be a tool to help eliminate blighted structures. The Board of Supervisors approved the ordinance in September.

Meet the Planning Commission

Member	Phone Number	Email	District
Derin S. Foor – Chairman	941-7345	dsfoor@countyofamherst.com	District 2
Beverly C. Jones – V. Chairman	929-7617	bcjones@countyofamherst.com	District 5
Jim D. Thompson	841-7499	jdthompson@countyofamherst.com	District 3
Michael D. Bryant	929-4525	mdbryant@countyofamherst.com	District 4
Michael K. Martineau	941-7345	mkmartineau@countyofamherst.com	District 1
Catherine L. Gamble	946-5835	clgamble@countyofamherst.com	At-Large
David Pugh (Board Liaison)	509-2038	dwpugh@countyofamherst.com	District 4



Member Update

George J. Brine, Jr. completed his second term in August 2018, totaling 8 years of service to the Planning Commission. Deciding not to renew for a third term, Amherst County thanks him for his years of service and wishes him well on his next endeavor! Motion to adjourn!

Michael D. Bryant was selected by the Board of Supervisors to fill the District 4 Planning Commissioner seat shortly after Mr. Brine’s departure. An Amherst native who currently works for Hurt & Proffitt, Mr. Bryant is due to complete his Planning Commissioner Training in early 2019. He is looking forward to contributing and Amherst County warmly welcomes him!

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Special Exceptions, Site Plans & Rezonings

Eleven special exceptions were reviewed by the Planning Commission in 2018, and all but one were approved by the Board of Supervisors. In February, the Planning Commission heard a request for a short-term tourist rental of a dwelling, commonly known as Airbnb, in the A-1 Agricultural Residential District. The Commission also recommended approval for an increase in height to an existing telecommunications tower in the A-1 Agricultural Residential District. In March, a request for a sign for Heartpine, a hardwood flooring company in the A-1 Agricultural District was recommended for approval. A private aviation facility for medevac and law enforcement use, as well as a new personal wireless service facility, both in the A-1 Agricultural Residential District were heard in April. A request was approved to allow a solid waste trash disposal facility within the FH Flood Hazard District in June, and in July there was another request for a short-term tourist rental of a dwelling in the A-1 Agricultural Residential District. A request for a kennel in the A-1 Agricultural Residential District was reviewed in August, and sequentially denied by the Board of Supervisors in the following month. In September, a third short-term tourist rental of a dwelling with a wedding venue was recommended for approval in the V-1 Village Center District. New construction of a telecommunications tower in the A-1 Agricultural Residential District was approved in October. Finally, in November, Poplar Grove's Homeowners' Association requested a revision to an existing condition of a previously approved special exception. After much research and deliberation, the Planning Commission were not able to make a recommendation on this case, which was later approved by the Board of Supervisors.

Eight site plans were also approved by the Planning Commission in 2018. Among the site plans that accompanied previously or simultaneously approved special exceptions, are a kennel in the A-1 Agricultural District, all three telecommunications tower requests, and the solid waste convenience center which is due to begin construction in Spring 2019. A minor site plan for additions at Cooper Steel, formerly Lynchburg Steel, was approved in June. Redevelopment site plans approved later in the year and located in the B-2 General Commercial District include a Sheetz Convenience Store Renovation, due to be completed in Spring 2019, and a Waffle House Restaurant.

The solid waste convenience center which will be located where Buffalo Springs Turnpike meets Route 60 was also approved for a rezoning from V-1 Village Center District to P-1 Public Lands District in June. The ability to simultaneously pursue multiple requests for the same project is a recurring trend, allowing the Planning Commission to make informed and efficient recommendations.

After the closing of Pleasant View School, the fate of the abandoned structure is unknown. The County was able to sell the property in late 2018, and a joint meeting between the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors was held in December to review a rezoning request from P-1 Public Lands to A-1 Agricultural Residential. This is consistent with the surrounding land designation, and opens up a multitude of opportunities.

Route 29 Business Beautification Committee

"The purpose of the Route 29 Business Beautification Committee is to beautify the roadways of Amherst County so as to instill pride and appreciation of the citizenry in the attractiveness of their community."

This Committee has made great strides in 2018, with improvements coming to fruition and becoming more noticeable. In April 2018, the Committee took a field trip through the corridor to identify the areas in most need of aesthetic improvement. With \$25,000 designated in the budget for trees and banners, the Committee strategically chose the types and placement of trees, as well as intersection locations for banners. Through months of planning and coordination with the Committee, VDOT, Public Works, Public Safety, the Sheriff's Office, and Community Development staff, approximately 120 trees were planted in these locations in November. The Committee received permits from American Electric Power (AEP) to use certain utility poles for banner placement. Banner production and installation are currently in the procurement process. Blooming trees and colorful banners can be expected throughout the corridor in 2019.

Another noteworthy accomplishment of the Committee is the removal of the abandoned Exxon sign located on Route 29 Business. This is a prime example of the changes that can happen through shared aspirations and collaboration. The Committee, property owner, business owner, and Commercial Steel Erection (CSE) were able to come together and remove the sign at low cost and low impact.

A change to the Charter occurred in 2018, to allow not only those who own businesses in the corridor but also those who do business in the corridor to become members of the Committee.

Route 29 Business Beautification was identified by the Board of Supervisors as a top priority at their 2018 Strategic Planning Workshop. Therefore, to maintain and increase efforts, future funding will keep the momentum moving forward.



Broadband

Over the past year, staff and the Amherst County Broadband Committee have been collaborating to facilitate the private sector development of wireless broadband infrastructure in Amherst County. One way that this is being implemented is by creating a process to allow wireless service providers to locate on existing public safety towers in the County. County staff collaborated with Region 2000 and their attorneys to prepare an agreement for wireless internet service providers to locate their equipment on such towers. Region 2000 manages five (5) towers that are used by the radio board, those towers are: Amherst Control Point, High Peak Mountain, Panther Mountain, Buffalo Ridge and Rocky Mountain towers.

Staff and the Amherst County Broadband Committee has also worked closely with Sweet Briar College to utilize a 2.5 Gigahertz spectrum that could allow wireless internet service providers the ability to use this frequency and improve coverage across Amherst County. Sweet Briar College has been working closely with their staff to determine a mechanism to offer this broadband for the best use of the community.

In talks with wireless internet service providers, the deployment of wireless broadband infrastructure will also include small towers on private property to allow for better connection to homes in areas where the terrain is more challenging. A code change was approved by the Amherst County Board of Supervisors to allow for the placement of such towers. Wireless broadband facilities are now permitted as accessory structures.

Community Development Block Grant

In 2018, Amherst County entered into a contract with Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (VDHCD) to implement the Old Town Madison Heights (OTMH) Main Street Improvement Project. Amherst County received \$1.2 million dollars for a Community Development Block Grant as part of multi-year funding for Old Town Madison Heights rehabilitation project. The grant will provide housing rehabilitation, road drainage improvements and light pole relocation to the Main Street area of Old Town.

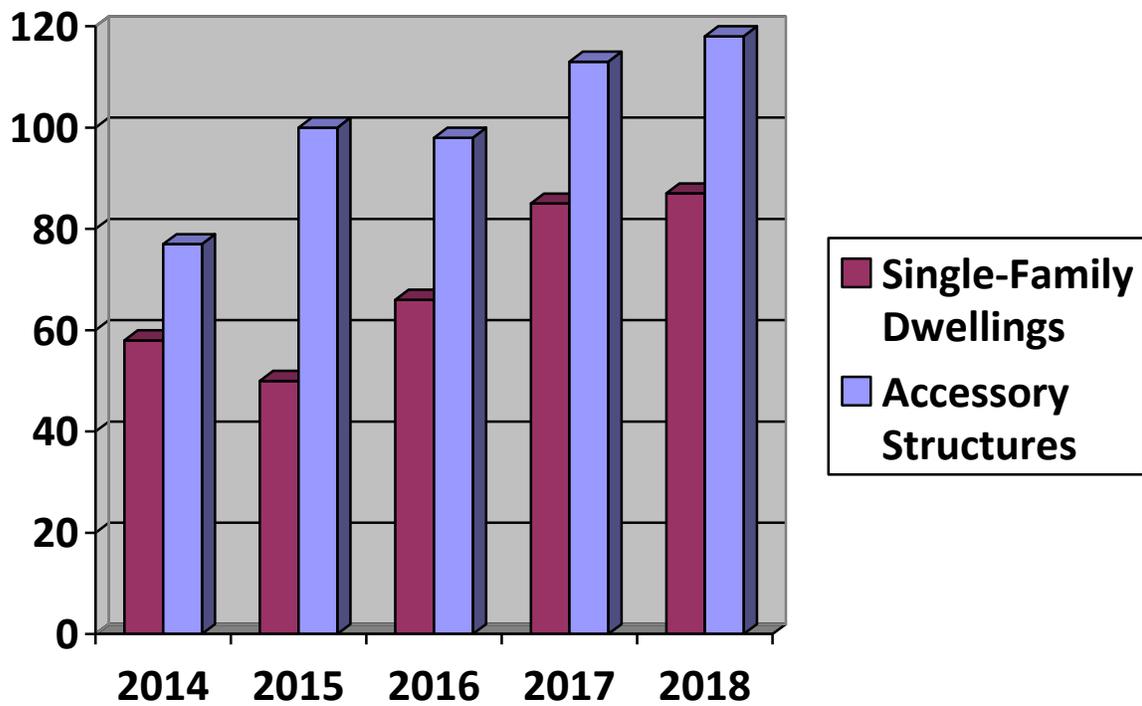
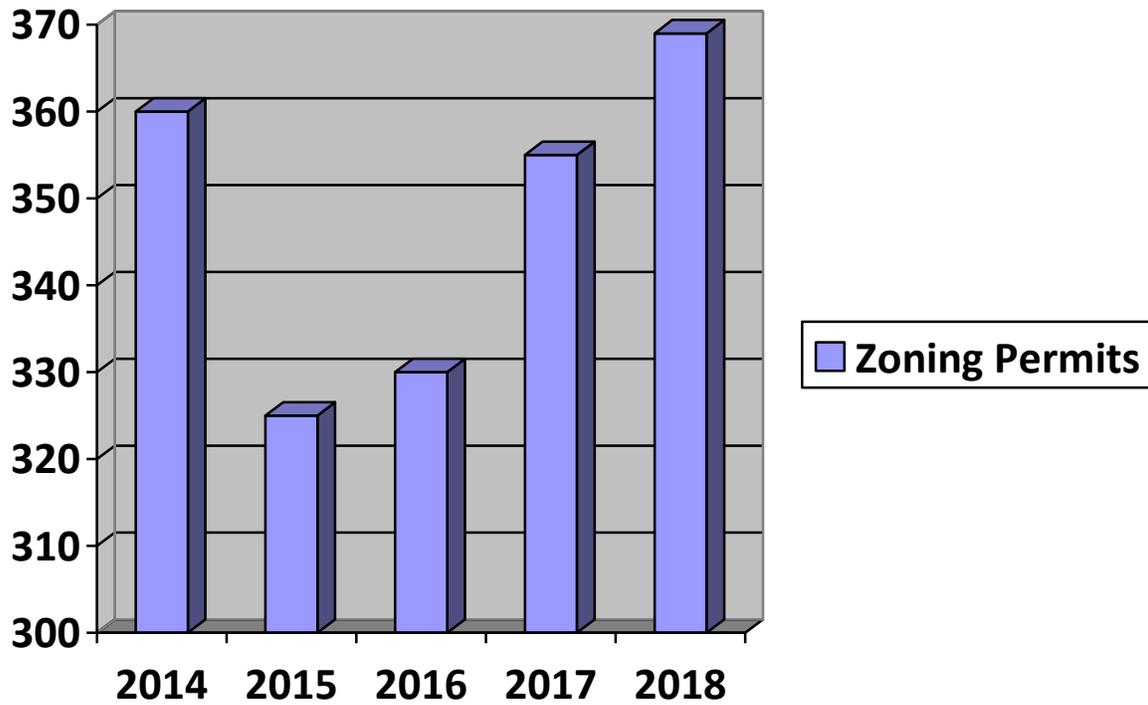
The second grant targets upgrading the approximately 82-year-old sewer lines along Main Street in Old Town Madison Heights. The Amherst County Service Authority has agreed to a \$250,000 match and a \$67,000 contribution toward design and permit approval. Gov. Terry McAuliffe announced more than \$8.8 million in CDBG funding spanning 15 projects in Virginia, including the Madison Heights work project. Amherst County's proposal was one of 32 submitted by localities, which totaled more than \$25 million in requests, according to a news release by McAuliffe's office. According to the release, multi-year funding projects will receive a contract allocating part of the funds this year, and once specific performance targets are met, the project will be eligible for additional funding. CDBG funding supports projects that improve health care access, water and sewer infrastructure, downtown revitalization, public safety and housing rehabilitation.

What to Expect in 2019

- Implementation of Business Friendly Initiatives
- Ordinance updates including sign ordinance, personal wireless service facility ordinance, erosion and sediment control ordinance
- Route 29 Business Beautification efforts including banners
- Site plan for Phelps Road School
- Broadband
- Software revisions to improve usability

In 2019, the Amherst County Planning Commission will meet on the third Thursday of every month at 7 PM at the Amherst County Administration Building.

Appendix A



Permit Date 01/01/2018 TO 12/31/2018

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Row Total
Accessory Structure- Deck/Porch	1	1	4	2	2	3	3	1	1	4	2	0	24
Accessory Structure-Agriculture Building	1	2	2	2	1	3	1	2	2	1	0	0	17
Accessory Structure-Carport/Garage	1	0	3	1	2	0	3	2	3	4	1	0	20
Accessory Structure-Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	4
Accessory Structure-Pools	1	1	3	3	0	8	2	2	0	0	0	0	20
Accessory Structure-storage/shed	1	1	2	3	3	3	8	0	2	6	2	2	33
Erosion and Sediment Control Plan	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	6
Land Disturbance-Residential	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	2	3	5	0	2	19
NULL VALUE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Resurvey	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	4
Rezoning	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Sign-Alter/Modify Existing	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	7
Sign-New	1	1	0	2	0	0	3	2	0	1	1	0	11
Site Plan-Commercial	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	6
Site Plan-Industrial	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Special Exception-Commercial	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Special Exception-Residential	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	6
Subdivision Plat- Administrative	1	4	0	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	13
Subdivision Plat- Family Division	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	7
Subdivision Plat- Reconfiguration	3	1	4	0	0	2	2	2	5	5	8	1	33
Subdivision Plat-Planning Commission	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Variance	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Wireless Communication Facility	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	5
Wireless Communication Modifications	0	2	2	2	1	1	0	3	2	0	0	2	15
Zoning - Home Occupation	4	2	7	12	3	9	10	6	6	9	5	2	75
Zoning - Multi-Family	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Zoning - Single-Family	2	6	9	5	6	13	4	6	4	10	3	2	70
Zoning- Change in Use	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Zoning- Other (Business Licenses)	3	1	1	2	1	2	0	1	2	4	2	1	20
Zoning-Addition/Expansion	2	0	2	4	1	3	2	3	4	0	1	1	23
Zoning-Other	0	0	0	1	0	3	1	0	0	1	0	0	6
Zoning-Single-Family, Doublewide	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	5
Zoning-Single-Family, Singlewide	0	0	1	3	1	1	2	1	0	2	1	0	12
Totals:	28	24	47	50	30	62	50	38	37	58	33	19	476

