



OCCOQUAN TOWN COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes - Draft
Town Hall - 314 Mill Street, Occoquan, VA 22125
Tuesday, October 21, 2025
7:00 p.m.

Present: Mayor Earnie Porta; Vice Mayor Loges, Councilmembers Robert Love, Eliot Perkins, and Theo Daubresse

Absent: Councilmember Cindy Fithian

Staff: Adam Linn, Town Manager / Chief of Police; Philip Auville, Town Clerk; Jason Forman, Deputy Chief of Police

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Porta called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. PUBLIC HEARING

a. Joint Planning Commission and Town Council Public Hearing on Zoning Text Amendment to make changes to the sign ordinance

Mayor Porta noted that this is a joint Public Hearing on a zoning text amendment and that the Planning Commission will hold a Public Hearing jointly with the Town Council. The purpose of the Public Hearing is to hear from interested members of the community about the advisability of making proposed changes in the zoning code. The proposed changes to the zoning ordinance relate to the sign ordinance.

Planning Commission Chair Perkins called the Planning Commission to order at 7:03 p.m.

Present: Chair Elliot Perkins, Commissioners Don Wood, Ralph Newell, Richard Grant, Samantha Sparks, and Margaret Pepin

Absent: Commissioner Darryl Hawkins

Chair Perkins opened the public hearing for the Planning Commission at 7:04 p.m.

Mayor Porta opened the public hearing for the Town Council at 7:04 p.m.

Mayor Porta invited the public to speak.

The first speaker was Pam Konwin, a former Councilmember, business owner since 1998 with a business presence in town since 1987, former Architectural Review Board (ARB) Chair, and former Town Council liaison to the ARB. She expressed concern that allowing additional A-frame signs could create visual clutter. She also noted her concern that the current ARB Chair, Brenda Seefeldt, had not been adequately consulted regarding this zoning text amendment.

Michelle White, resident, local business owner & member of the Architectural Review Board, spoke in support of the zoning text amendment.

Jordan Sanders, a local business owner, spoke in support of the zoning text amendment to include two A-frame signs including one off-premises. She expressed the belief that this would be beneficial to her business.

Jordan Sanders also read a letter on behalf of two business owners: Donna and Craig Sherman. Their businesses are located off of Mill Street, up four stairs and facing an alley. Having two A-frame signs helps customers find their shops and is vital to their business.

Kristin Becka, from Forever Young, spoke in support of the zoning text amendment allowing for 2 A-frame signs.

Sherry Mangas, a business owner in town, spoke in support of the zoning text amendment allowing for 2 A-frame signs.

Brenda Seefeldt, Chairperson of the Architectural Review Board, spoke against the zoning text amendment and indicated that as a town resident, she believes the town is crowded with A-frame signs already. Speaking as the Chairperson of the Architectural Review Board, she noted that her Board was not notified or allowed to comment on this zoning text amendment and not allowed to provide historical perspective on it. She noted that originally the A-frame was a compromise to allow for temporary signage. The off-premises A-frame sign is her main concern for adding to the clutter in the right of way. She also noted her disapproval of colored lights and holiday lights staying up year-round.

Sarah Burzio, business owner of Hitchcock Paper and Tiny Supply Co, as well as Executive Director of Visit Occoquan, supported the zoning text amendment. Speaking as a business owner, she brought a packet demonstrating alternatives for signs as the A-frame sign takes up a large portion of the sidewalk and makes it hard for wheelchair users and strollers. She proposed keeping code-approved materials such as wood and metal, but getting rid of the chalk board requirement. She indicated that many other Virginia Towns have less stringent sign codes and do not look as messy.

Laura Jones, local gallery owner, spoke in support of the zoning text amendment allowing for two A-frame signs for businesses located on second floors. She requested removing the requirement for only wooden or metal A-frames as vinyl alternatives are not allowed.

Young Grams, owner of D'Rocco's, spoke in support of the zoning text amendment allowing for two A-frame signs. She understands worrying about the clutter, but the signs are helpful for customers to figure out what is a residence and what is a business. She is also for less stringent requirements on the materials of A-frames.

Jeremey Barber, owner of Mill Street Beer Garden, spoke in support of the zoning text amendment allowing for two A-frame signs.

Josephine Tullo, a local business owner, spoke in support of the zoning text amendment allowing for two A-frame signs. Two signs would be useful for events sponsored by her gallery.

Thalia Wyatt, owner of Too Bee, spoke in support of the zoning text amendment allowing for 2 A-frame signs. She noted that stores in the alley are hidden, and signs on the larger streets push customers to look for hidden businesses. Since taking the sign down, she has had less walk-in traffic. Having an offsite A-frame would be meaningful in driving new business to her shop.

Sarah Burzio read a letter on behalf of Nicola Eisen, a local business owner, who wanted to make a comment on the zoning text amendment. Instead of an A-frame, she suggested a slimmer metal sign that would provide a clearer streetscape without detracting from the charm of the Town.

As there were no further citizens interested in speaking, Chair Perkins asked if there was a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Grant moved to close the public hearing. Commissioner Pepin seconded. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

A discussion by the Planning Commission started with Commissioner Pepin. She sees both sides of the A-frame debate as some signs are not as visible as others.

Planning Commissioner Wood spoke in support of the zoning text amendment allowing for two A-frame signs. He is intrigued by the additional design concepts outside of A-frame signs.

Planning Commissioner Sparks spoke in support of the zoning text amendment allowing for two A-frame signs. She also believed this matter should have been looked at by the Architectural Review Board.

Chair Perkins added that this is not the end of discussions on signs; this was to address having two A-frame signs with one being permitted to be off premise. Discussions on different signage can be had at a future date.

Commissioner Newell moved to recommend approval of the attached draft ordinance, O-2025-12, as presented. Commissioner Wood seconded. Motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Ayes: Chair Perkins, Commissioner Wood, Commissioner Newell, Commissioner Pepin, Commissioner Sparks, and Commissioner Grant

Nays: None

Commissioner Grant moved to close the Planning Commission meeting. Commissioner Pepin seconded. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Chair Perkins closed the Planning Commission at 7:41 p.m.

Vice Mayor Loges moved to close the Town Council public hearing. Councilmember Love seconded. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Mayor Porta closed the Public Hearing at 7:42 p.m.

3. REGULAR BUSINESS

a. Request to Approve Amended Sign Ordinance

Mayor Porta asked for unanimous consent to move this item up on the agenda with no objection. He stated that while the Town Council already had the opinion of the Planning Commission, a vote did not have to happen on the sign ordinance tonight, but could be deferred to a later date if the Council so desired.

Mayor Porta also addressed ARB Chair Seefeldt's comments. He noted that six previous Council meetings have included discussion of changing the sign ordinance with regard to the A-frames dating back to June 2024. At one of these meetings, he noted, a zoning text amendment had been referred to the Planning Commission for action. As a result, he was not clear how there could be an impression that the discussion was a surprise, though he noted that the ARB Chair appeared to indicate that she expected the ARB representative on the Planning Commission to consult with her or the ARB. Mayor Porta also noted that he considered the ARB Chair to have long been a guardian of what he characterized as a "traditionalist's" view of historic district regulations, which he believes is a critical voice to have in striking an appropriate balance in historic districts, and thus her opinion is one that should be given weight.

Mayor Porta confirmed Chair Seefeldt's position regarding A-frame signs being a historical compromise made to help business owners advertise their businesses. The insistence of chalk board signs was made to combat the vinyl and plastic materials used by some while the ability to have them off-premise was prohibited to limit clutter. He noted that these restrictions had been put in place in the past at the request of business owners.

He noted that it was precisely for this reason that he did not support a recommendation by the Planning Commission made a year or so ago that was similar to the one being discussed tonight. At that time no business owners were advocating for changing a rule that had originally been put in place at the request of business owners. He noted that the turnout this evening obviously represented a significant change in that sentiment with regard to A-frame signs.

In regard to other styles of signs, Mayor Porta suggested that this was not ripe for discussion and be talked about at a future date.

Councilmember Perkins reiterated that this is not a simple matter and both sides bring up good points. He also appreciated the feedback and turnout from businesses and residents on the sign ordinance.

Town Manager Linn requested that Mayor Porta amend the ordinance to include modifications suggested by Town Attorney Crim to the rename the agenda item and title of the Ordinance to, "Sign Ordinance Zoning Text Amendment."

Vice Mayor Loges moved to adopt Sign Ordinance Zoning Text Amendment O-2025-12 as presented. Councilmember Love seconded, which led to formal discussion.

Mayor Porta noted that the proposed adjustments with regard to lights was to appropriately address First Amendment concerns. Long ago the town's regulations only allowed colored lights during the December holidays. To address First Amendment concerns the Council then extended permission to what it considered to be the dark winter months period. As this was still arguably discriminatory in favor of certain holidays, the proposed rules would allow colored lights outside of the dark months on a temporary basis, once a year, with a permit. To the extent people were concerned about colored lights being on anywhere all year, this was an enforcement issue that staff would have to address.

Mayor Porta then talked about the right-of-way issue with A-frames. Historic Towns often have inaccurate surveys which has meant the Town has granted many no-fee licenses for encroachment on the public right-of-way. Enforcement for A-frames is enforced by maintaining at least three feet of space to pass around the sign. A limiting factor for off-premise signs under the proposed rules is that the applicant must submit the written permission of the property owner to have an A-frame at a location.

Vice Mayor Loges wanted to know what was within 150 feet at Washington St. and Commerce St.

Town Manager Linn and Councilmember Perkins noted that 50 yards was walked off by staff and had been ascertained that a business in the middle of an alley would be able to have a sign on a main street with 150 feet.

Vice Mayor Loges wanted to look at unintended consequences if, for example, 125 Mill St. allowed over twenty A-frame signs in the grassy area in front of the stores. Mayor Porta and Town Manager Linn noted that that building is out of the historic district and on private property, so the tenants and landlords would have to decide on these spaces.

Councilmember Daubresse asked how this would be enforced to which Town Manager Linn responded that our enforcement is complaint based due to staffing requirements. Councilmember Daubresse noted he was generally for allowing each business to have two A-frame signs but wanted to limit clutter in Town.

Councilmember Love spoke in support of the zoning text amendment allowing for two A-frame signs. He stated that the value to the businesses is greater than the cost of the clutter.

Councilmember Perkins stated that businesses want visibility, and certain groups are opposed to clutter. For him, enforcement is important to find the balance in regards to signs in town. He also would like to discuss types of signs at a future date.

Mayor Porta wanted to make a change on section 7(h) where businesses have two years to remove a sign from a closed business. He asked to change that time period to six months to which no one objected.

Mayor Porta recommended that this ordinance be looked at again in approximately eighteen months to tackle unintended consequences and allow for changes to be made.

Vice Mayor Loges modified her motion to adopt Sign Ordinance Zoning Text Amendment O-2025-12 with the amendment to section 7(h). Councilmember Love agreed to the modification of the original motion and seconded it. Vote passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Ayes: Vice Mayor Loges, Councilmember Perkins, Councilmember Daubresse, and Councilmember Love

Nays: None

Absent: Councilmember Fithian

4. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. Creation of River Road Residential Parking District

Mayor Porta asked for unanimous consent to move this item on the agenda with no objection. Mayor Porta opened up citizen's time for people to address the discussion item. The following residents of River Road spoke:

Denise V. is opposed to this measure and is here speaking on her own behalf. She acknowledged that there are issues on the road and asked that parking enforcement be directed at the individuals who are causing problems.

James E. agreed that people parking at non-traditional spaces are damaging the roads and that everyone might have to pay for. He notes that multiple people on their road do not have their stickers on their cars. He wondered if enforcement was going to go up to help manage these cars parking without permits or in non-parking zones.

Jesus S. lived at 105 River Road was told by police that he could park a third car on the fenced property.

Tony S. agrees that the proposed framework will not work. He noted that there is no overflow parking for this development. He noted the problem when the Town took back use of its lot at the end of River Road. While he noted that there is parking under Route 123 bridge, he suggested allowing for the lot of River Road to be used as a temporary parking space for guests.

Richard M. agrees with Denise V. and Tony S. He has never had visitors over and is hesitant to have workers perform work on their property because of the lack of parking.

Lisa S. agrees with her neighbors that there is no overflow. She mentioned that the dirt lot could be used for parking and be paved by the town. She also mentioned that there are cars parked near where the garbage trucks come by and that it is a matter of time before it clips one of the cars. She also would not appreciate paying for another parking permit.

Elizabeth T-D. is also opposed to a parking district. She noted that the permits from the Town do not guarantee a spot for themselves or their guests. This would make their guests have to park in the timed spots in the Town of Occoquan.

Mark L. agreed that there are two town homes that are rented out to multiple people with multiple vehicles and they monopolize the visitor spaces. There is no place for a guest to park as all spots are exhausted.

James E. spoke again about the shed recently built by the Town at the end of River Road and knows that the town would not like to have access to the shed blocked off by others parking on the Town's land.

Elizabeth T-D. asked the Town to be creative with the gravel road at the end of River Road to help out with parking.

Mayor Porta thanked everyone for their comments and coming to express their opinion. He noted that there seems to be a great deal of misinformation out there on this subject and so finds it particularly helpful that so many residents from River Road are attending the meeting.

The Mayor started by clarifying the purpose of the town decal. It provides no preference or rights with regard to parking. He explained that when the county dispensed with their decal years ago, they did not dispense with the fee, which is simply added to an individual's personal property tax bill. For the towns that have a decal, however, this fee is not charged by the county to town residents. The town has, in the past, looked at getting rid of the decal. If they do, however, then residents would still end up paying the fee, but the revenue would go to the county instead of the town. He further indicated that the Town has in the past investigated whether the County would collect the fee for the Town but that has not gone past the discussion phase.

Mayor Porta invited Town Manager Linn to speak on enforcement. Town Manager Linn said that manpower is the issue with regard to compliance with stickers and decals. The cost of having the officers go out and perform a parking sweep is cost and time prohibitive to do regularly, so the parking enforcement is scheduled periodically throughout the year.

Town Manager Linn also addressed the fallacy that cars cannot be ticketed on private property. He clarified that if a car can be seen, e.g. it is not in a garage, it can be inspected.

Mayor Porta agreed that they will bring this issue up at future Town Council meetings and meet with Town Manager Linn to find a solution on enforcement issues.

Mayor Porta also noted that there was no real interest on the part of the Town Council to implement a parking district. It was only being considered in response to complaints from residents of River Road about there being insufficient parking because some residents there had more cars than spots allocated to their units, and there was no active HOA to regulate parking. In short, only with some sort of residential parking district in place could the town enforce restrictions that some of the residents seem to want.

An extended discussion took place between the town council and community members about possible solutions. These included looking at ways in which some property owners or the town could make more parking spots available in that area. While the town staff was directed to evaluate some of these options, several council members, as well as members of

the public, noted that this was essentially a private community matter that is a natural consequence of moving into a neighborhood with noticeably limited or no guest parking, and sometimes by individuals who have more cars than there are spots allocated to their property. It is not, as a result, clear if the town government should even be involved in attempting to find a solution to this type of problem.

Mayor Porta noted, with the agreement of the Council, that the town will no longer consider the residential parking district proposal, since it was only proposed to assist the residents of River Road, most of whom seem to oppose it.

b. Event Transportation Discussion

Mayor Porta asked for unanimous consent to move this item up on the agenda with no objection.

Town Manager Linn clarified that the Town provides free shuttle service for some events and has paid shuttles for the Fall Craft Shows, Riverfest, and the Holiday Artisan Market.

Pam Konwin asked about the upcoming Holiday Artisan Market in which Union Street and Commerce Street will be closed which will lose 57 public parking spaces. She is worried about her customers not being able to get to her business. She is also concerned about the cost and location of the shuttle service.

Town Manager Linn confirmed that the Holiday Artisan Market is on Union Street and Commerce Street with a paid shuttle service from the Rt. 123/Old Bridge Road Commuter Lot.

Pam stated her objection to the closure of some of the town streets in one of their busiest seasons.

5. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Request to Accept October 21, 2025, Town Council Meeting Minutes

Town Attorney Crim requested that the minutes be changed to say, "Town Attorney Crim mentioned that a person who was denied a Special Use Permit could try to challenge the ordinance," to replace, "This could be challenged by someone who applied for a business that was denied by a Special Use Permit." As a result the Mayor pulled the minutes from the Consent Agenda.

Councilmember Love moved to approve the minutes of the meeting of October 21, 2025 as amended. Councilmember Perkins seconded. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Mayor Porta mentioned that in 2026, Jerry's Occoquan Jewelers, will be celebrating its 50th year in business and he was going to research if that would make them the longest on-going business in the Town. The Mayor also indicated that 2025 marks the 150th anniversary of first elected Occoquan Town Council and he would be bringing something to Council to commemorate it.

6. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:51 p.m.



Megan Lubash, Town Clerk & Assistant Town Manager