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Council OKs 4th Neighborhood Design District

By BRIAN BREHM The Winchester Star

Aug 26, 2026

City Council has approved the creation of the Old Town Neighborhood Design District, the fourth and presumably final NDD in Winchester.

"We're taking steps to plan a vision for the future," council President Corey Sullivan said at the panel's meeting on Tuesday night. "A lot of good things can happen."

Implementation of the districts began in early 2024 as a way to proactively rezone areas in each of the city's four wards in order to make it easier for residential and commercial developers to build without seeking special permits from council. The ultimate goal, Winchester Community Development Director Mike Ruddy has said, was to focus development in specific areas to better manage future growth.

The first NDD to be approved was the Cedar Valley NDD in Ward 4, which was added to Winchester's Comprehensive Plan for future development in November 2024. It was followed by the Cider Hill NDD in Ward 1 in October of last year, and the Berryville Avenue NDD in Ward 2 in June.

The Old Town NDD in Ward 3 is somewhat different than its predecessors because it aims to preserve and improve Winchester's downtown Historic District by bolstering pedestrian safety and targeting development or redevelopment of open lots and underutilized or vacant properties.

"We also emphasize wider sidewalks for the pedestrians [and] more gateway features to kind of mirror what's on the Piccadilly Street [traffic] circle right now ... to help citizens recognize that they're entering downtown," city Planner Sean Benson said in June.

The new Old Town NDD is bounded by East Cork Street to the south, North Braddock Street to the west, Baker Street to the north and South East Lane to the east. It also includes extensions to the west along Boscawen and Amherst streets, to the south along Braddock Street and to the southeast along South East Lane.

City Council voted 7-0 at its meeting on Tuesday to include the Old Town NDD in Winchester's Comprehensive Plan, clearing the way to implement the required zoning changes needed to support the NDD. Mayor Les Veach and council Vice President Emily Windle were absent.

"I'm happy and I'm proud to support this next step," Councilor Chip Newcome said.

In other business at Tuesday night's meeting and work session in Rouss City Hall, City Council:

- Voted 7-0 to approve an ordinance that conditionally amends the master development plan for Winchester Medical Center's campus at 1840 Amherst St. The revised plan includes construction of two new parking structures — one along Linden Drive and the other near the intersection of Amherst Street and Campus Boulevard — an expansion of the hospital's surgical facility along Medical Center Drive and the creation of a new medical office building adjacent to the proposed garage on Linden Drive. In exchange for the approval, the hospital's corporate parent, Valley Health, has agreed to pay for traffic flow and sidewalk improvements as needed on and around the campus. Valley Health also offered to proffer a one-time \$200,000 payment to offset emergency medical service costs incurred by the city, but the Code of Virginia states that such a cash proffer cannot legally be accepted.
- Voted 7-0 to amend City Code to include changes to the regulations regarding the personal property tax for businesses. Those amendments include a change in the filing date for the business tangible personal property tax from May 1 to March 1; an update to the annual business tangible property tax payment due date from Dec. 5 to semi-annual billing due on June 5 and Dec. 5; the enactment of an 1-cent per each \$100 tax rate for aircraft; and the exemption from taxation for farm animals, agricultural products and farm equipment. For a full list of the tax regulation updates, visit <https://bit.ly/4qDCxWI>
- Voted 7-0 to approve an ordinance switching the issuance of individual licenses for real estate brokers to a comprehensive license issued to brokerages. Rather than individual brokers paying taxes on their gross receipts, the comprehensive approach will tax all gross receipts from all employees at a real estate brokerage.
- Voted 7-0 to approve a change to a 2019 planned unit development (PUD) issuance that property owner Summerfield LLC sought to revise. Rather than following through with the initial plan to build 20 apartments at 501 Treetops Lane, the owner now plans to build 28 townhouses at the site.

- Voted 7-0 to approve the rezoning of a 0.158-acre property at 305 E. Piccadilly St. — the location of the former Timbrook House — from Education/Institute/Public Use (EIP) to Limited High-Density Residential (HR-1). The city owns the currently vacant parcel and sought the zoning change in order to allow for the construction of a duplex.
- Held a discussion regarding policy revisions to Winchester's Comprehensive Employee Management System, then voted 7-0 to approve a revised leave policy for city staff within the CEMS.
- Voted 7-0 to appoint Heidi Hiller to a four-year term on the Economic Development Authority, ending Aug. 24, 2030; Katie Mooney Buzby and Caleb Snyder to four-year terms on the Board of Architectural Review, ending Aug. 24, 2030; and Kylan Coffman and Courtney Phillips to unexpired terms on the Community Policy and Management Team, both ending on April 27, 2028.

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