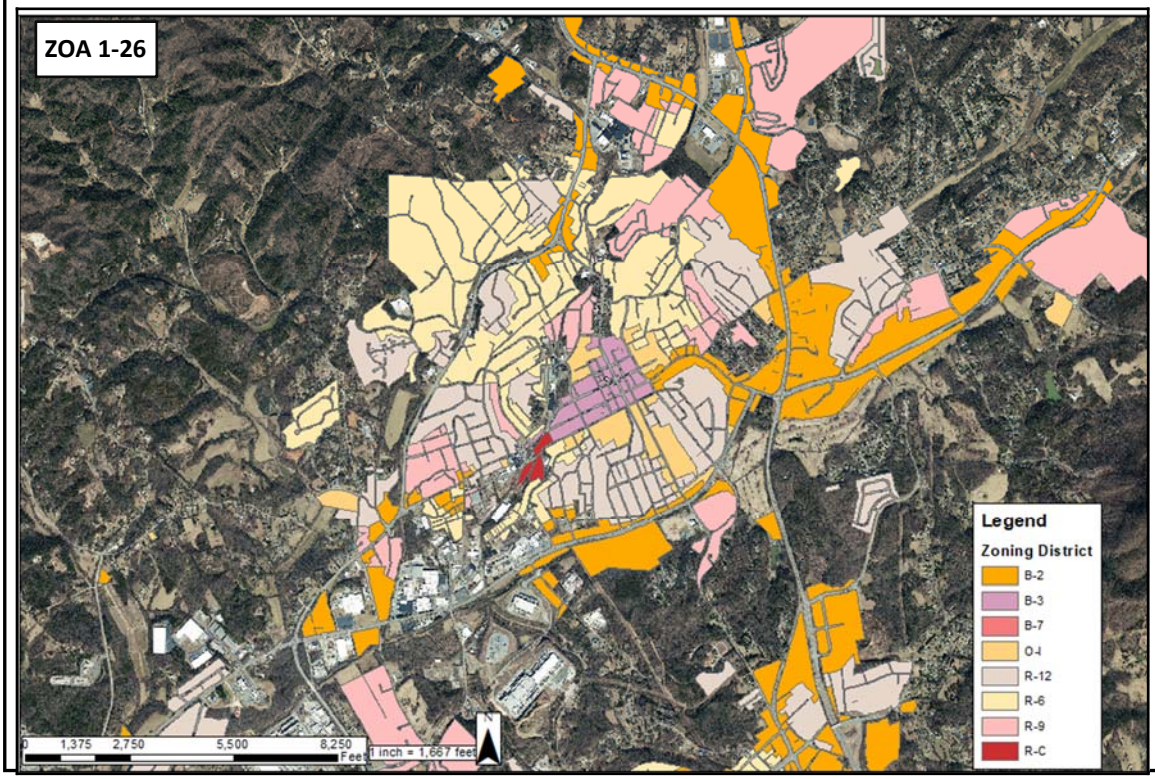
Staff Report

ZONING ORDINANCE AMENDMENT REQUEST

CASE NUMBER ZOA #1-26

CITY OF LENOIR
PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

AERIAL OF PROPOSED AREAS ZONED FOR SCHOOLS



Ordinance amendment would affect O-I, B-2, B-3, B-7, R-6, R-9, and R-12, and R-C zoning districts

Note: Map does not encompass all lots within these zoning districts.

SUMMARY

Owner
N/A

Applicant
Waterlife Church

Location
Citywide

NC PIN
Citywide

Project Planners
Hannah Williams, AICP, CZO
Matt Duchan, AICP, CZO

Updated July 30, 2026

Applicant's Request:

The applicant is requesting a text amendment to allow an educational facility to be a permitted and special use in various residential and commercial zoning districts in Lenoir.

Staff Recommendation:

Approval of the proposed amendment process outlined in this staff report.

Planning Board Recommendation:

Approval of request based on the consistency statement on page 6.

Public Comment:

Planning Board Meeting: Scheduled for July 13, 2026.

City Council (Public Hearing): Anticipated to be scheduled for August 4, 2026. An advertisement was published in the News Topic on July 22 and 29, 2026.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Intent of Zoning Amendments

Zoning amendments are an essential component of planning and community development. Without the ability to amend zoning code, rules and regulations would remain static throughout history without policymakers and decision makers having the power to recommend and contribute to growth and change. Zoning amendments can be initiated by planning staff, the Planning Board, City Council, or a property owner (or someone financially influenced by the property (or properties) in question).

Through the zoning amendment process, stakeholders are afforded the right to make reasonable and suitable changes to their properties. These properties are governed by the Lenoir Zoning Ordinance within the confines of recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan as well as reasonable, suitable, or pragmatic planning practices where appropriate.

Citywide Amendment

The properties affected by the proposed ordinance amendment are located in all areas of Lenoir. The zoning districts encompass several single-family residential districts (R-6, R-9, R-12, R-C), as well as several commercial zoning districts, most notably B-2.

Reason for Request

In conjunction with an SUP application, Waterlife Church is proposing a zoning amendment to designate Educational Facilities as a Permitted and Special Use in various zoning districts on the permitted use chart, in order to operate a private school at West Lenoir Elementary. West Lenoir Elemetary has been closed for four years. If West Lenoir Elementary remained a school, it would be effectively legally non-conforming in the City's current ordinances because R-12 did not allow for schools, permitted as a special use or by-right. Therefore, a zoning amendment is needed to allow for the building to be re-used as a school, whether public or private.

Currently, public schools are included in the "Public Service Facility" land use category. Educational Facility is an explicit use proposed to be added to the City's Permitted Use Chart (see next page for details). West Lenoir Elementary is located in the R-12 zoning district which prohibits public service facilities. Private schools are included in the definition of educational facilities, which are not currently in the permitted use chart.

Definition and Discrepancy

At the time of this meeting, neither the Lenoir Zoning Code nor the Permitted Use Chart explicitly accounts for educational facilities in totality. In Article IV *Definitions,* an educational facility is defined as:

A facility for the education of children and/or adults including public and private kindergarten, elementary and secondary schools, colleges, technical institutes and universities, but excluding specialized trade schools and nursery schools.

This designation is not on the Permitted Use Chart. However, the definition of Public Service Facilities encompasses public schools, but not private schools. Additionally, Studios and Specialty schools are included, but this definition applies to non-academic subjects such as dance, athletics, vocational training, music, and barber/beauty colleges. Educational Facilities, per the definition above, would account for both schools as public service facilities and as private academic education at all ages and grade levels.

Public Service Facilities and Changing the Definition

Public Service Facilities, as amended, will comprise services provided by local government such as public safety and public utilities. Educational facilities, however, will not be permitted in industrial districts. Included are two maps (page 5) comparing proposed zoning districts for educational facilities and the current zoning districts where public service facilities are permitted. The difference between the two maps show no industrial districts for educational facilities. Otherwise, there is mostly the same coverage area and there are no permitted by-right sites for educational facilities.

In addition to the proposal to add Educational Facilities as a designated use in the Permitted Use Chart, it is also necessary to

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS (CONT.)

amend the definition of Public Service Facilities. Because Public Service Facilities are permitted in industrial districts by right, the "schools" portion of the definition will be removed from the definition in Article IV. This change creates two fully separate use categories with no overlap, Below are definitions for each of the uses and the districts they will be allowed.

Designated Uses Definitions

In Article IV *Definitions,* an educational facility is defined as:

A facility for the education of children and/or adults including public and private kindergarten, elementary and secondary schools, colleges, technical institutes and universities, but excluding specialized trade schools and nursery schools.

In Article IV *Definitions,* a public service facility will be defined as:

A facility that is owned, operated, or financed, in whole or in part, by any public or governmental entity, and is dedicated to the provision of services to the general public. This includes public safety facilities (EMS, police, and fire protection), ~~schools and education,~~ hospitals and health care, and the public provision of social services. For schools, see Educational Facility.

Deletions indicated by ~~strikethrough~~; additions indicated by underline, omissions indicated by ****

Zoning Districts Summary

Educational facilities will be allowed by right in B-2, B-3, B-7, O-I, and with a Special Use Permit in the following zoning districts: R-6, R-9, R-12, R-C.

Public Service Facilities are allowed by right in the following zoning districts: B-2, B-3, B-7, O-I, I-1, I-2.

Public Service Facilities are allowed with a Special Use Permit in the following zoning districts: R-6, R-9, R-C.

Use	Type of Permit	Zoning Districts
Educational Facilities	By Right (P)	B-2, B-3, B-7, O-I
Educational Facilities	Special Use (SU)	R-6, R-9, R-12, R-C
Public Service Facilities	By Right (P)	B-2, B-3, B-7, O-I, I-1, I-2
Public Service Facilities	Special Use (SU)	R-6, R-9, R-C

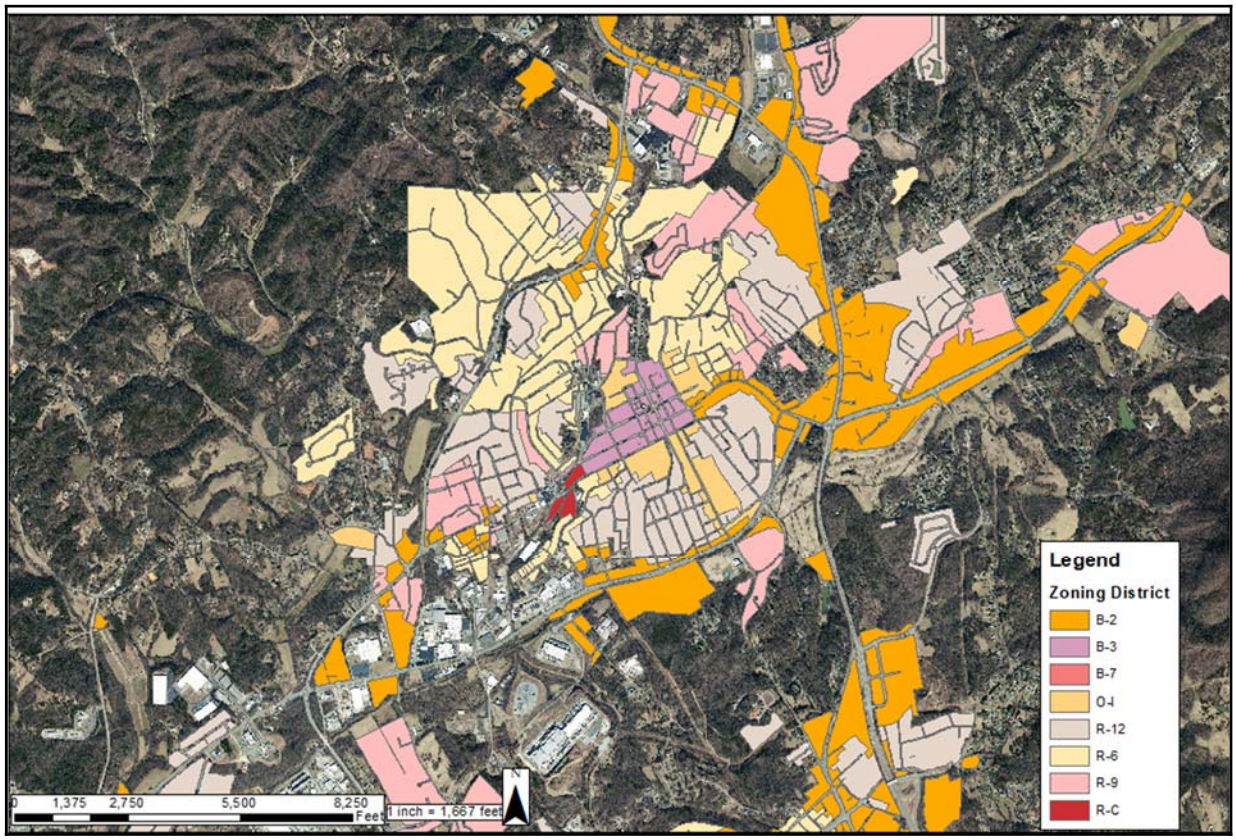
SECTION 600, TABLE A: Chart of Permitted and Conditional **NON-RESIDENTIAL** Uses

P=Permitted Use • PS=Permitted w/ Separation Requirements • S=Special Use • Blank = Prohibited

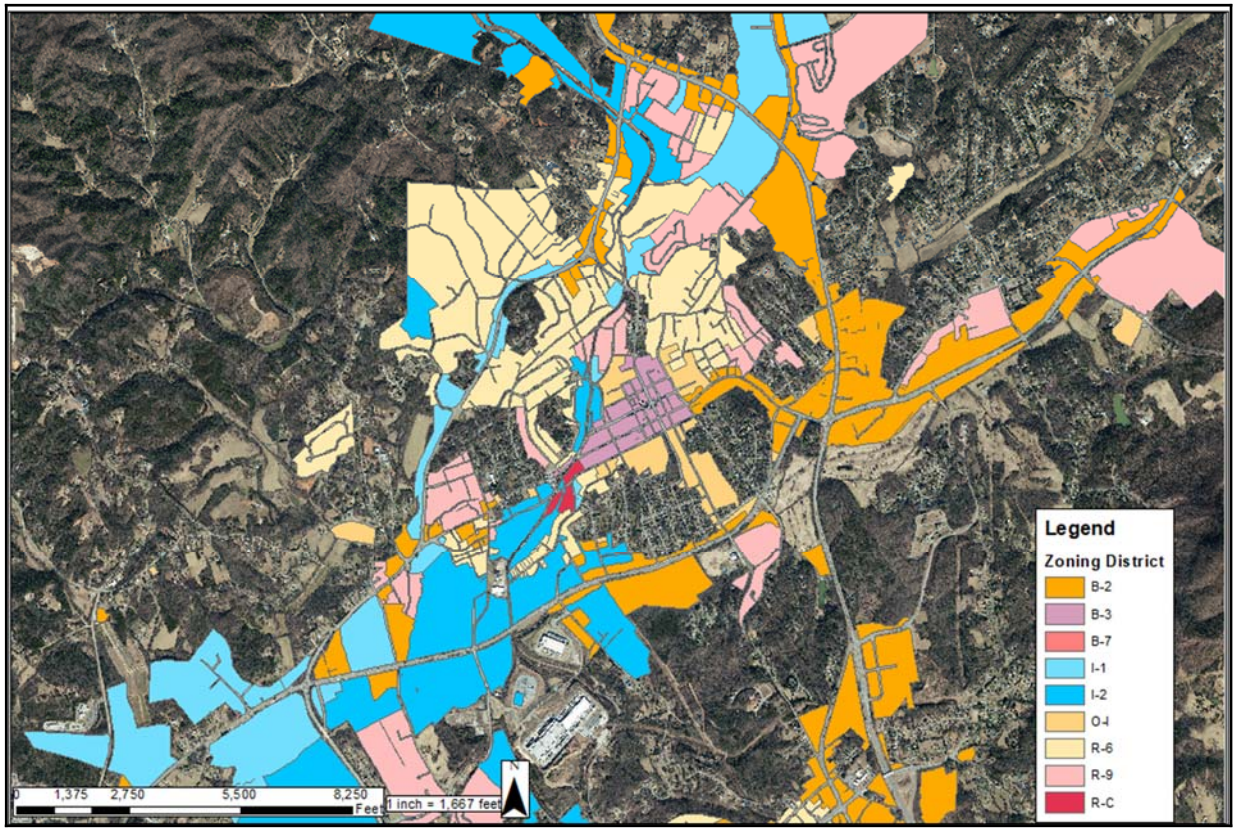
	Residential							*Mixed Use/Commercial*							*Industrial*	
NON RESIDENTIAL (1)	***R-R***	***R-20***	***R-15***	***R-12***	***R-9***	***R-6***	***R-C***	***O&I***	***B-1***	***B-2***	***B-3***	***B-5***	***B-6***	***B-7***	***I-1***	***I-2***
Adult Establishment/Adult Use/Sexually Oriented Business (2)										PS					PS	
Adult Gaming Establishment (3)										PS					PS	
Agriculture	S	S(9)													S(9)	S(9)
Billards and Pool Halls (10)										P	P					
Day Care Centers	S			S	S	S	P	P	P	P	P	P	S	P	P	P
Communication Towers (4)	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S		S	S	S	S
Cultural and Community Facilities, Churches, Synagogues, Mosques	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	P	S	P	P	S	S	P	P	P
Kennels, Commercial (12)										p				P	P	p
Eating and Drinking (without drive-through)							P	P	S	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Eating and Driving (with Drive-through)							P			P				P	P	P
<u>Educational Facility</u>				**<u>S</u>**	**<u>S</u>**	**<u>S</u>**	**<u>S</u>**	**<u>P</u>**		<u>P</u>	**<u>P</u>**			**<u>P</u>**		
Flea Markets										S				S	P	P
Green Houses, Commercial (5)	S	S								P	P			P	P	P
Hospital/Clinics								P		P	S			P	P	P
Hotels/Motels										P	P			P		
Junk Yard/Salvage Yard (11)																P
Manufacturing & Processing: Boutique/Artisan							P	P	P	P	P			P	P	P
Manufacturing & Processing: Light										P(6)				P(6)	P	P
Manufacturing & Processing: Heavy																P
Night Clubs/Private Clubs (7)										PS	P					
Office (includes Medical and Dental)							P	P		P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Public Service Facilities					S	S	S	P		P	P			P	P	P
Personal Storage (mini warehouse)										P				P	P	P
Recreation, Outdoor	(8)	(8)	(8)	(8)	(8)	(8)	(8)			P				P		
Recreation, Indoor										P	P			P	P	P
Retailing, Light							P	P		P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Retailing, Intensive										P				P	P	P
Retailing: Neighborhood Business	S	S					P	P	P			P	P			
Services, Automotive (13)										P				P	P	P
Services, Major Vehicle										S				S	P	P
Services, Business and Personal							P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Shooting Range, Indoor										P					P	P
Studios and Specialty Schools								P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Veterinarians (no outdoor kennels)										P			P	P	P	P
Warehousing										P(14)				P(14)	P	P

Public Service Facilities & Educational Facilities Maps

Educational Facilities Zoning



Public Service Facilities Zoning



Consistency Statement/Staff Recommendations

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan/Reasonableness of Amendment

When adopting or rejecting any zoning amendment, City Council must adopt a brief statement describing whether or not the action is consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan, in accordance with G.S. 160D-605(a), and must also address the reasonableness of any proposed map amendments. Staff offers the following draft statement on the consistency and reasonableness of the request.

The proposed zoning amendment is consistent with the 2045 Comprehensive Plan in that initiating zoning changes within target areas to encourage development is a primary proactive strategy. In the long-term, adjusting the ordinance to account for all forms of educational facilities would effectively encourage a variety of developments in growing areas serving families. This amendment would also help to revitalize vacant and historic sites such as West Lenoir Elementary which aligns with the Comprehensive Plan's goal to enhance livability.

Planning Board Recommendations

Approval of request based on the consistency statement above.