Staff Report

Special Use Permit

Case Number SUP #2-26

Location map/Aerial Photograph



West Lenoir Elementary School

Closed permanently in 2022.

SUP for church in auditorium (pictured) in 2024.

Summary

Owner

HASO Holdings LLC (Jay Harrill)

Applicant

Waterlife Church

Location

117 Maple Dr NW

NC PIN

2749450612

Project Planner

Hannah Williams, AICP, CZO

Matt Duchan, AICP, CZO

Updated July 30, 2026

Applicant's Request:

The applicant is requesting a Special Use Permit for a private school to locate in the former West Lenoir Elementary school. This request is pending an approval of a zoning text amendment that would designate Educational Facilities as a Special Use in various zoning districts including R-12.

Staff Recommendation:
Approval of the request.

Planning Board Recommendation:

Approval of the request, see page 8

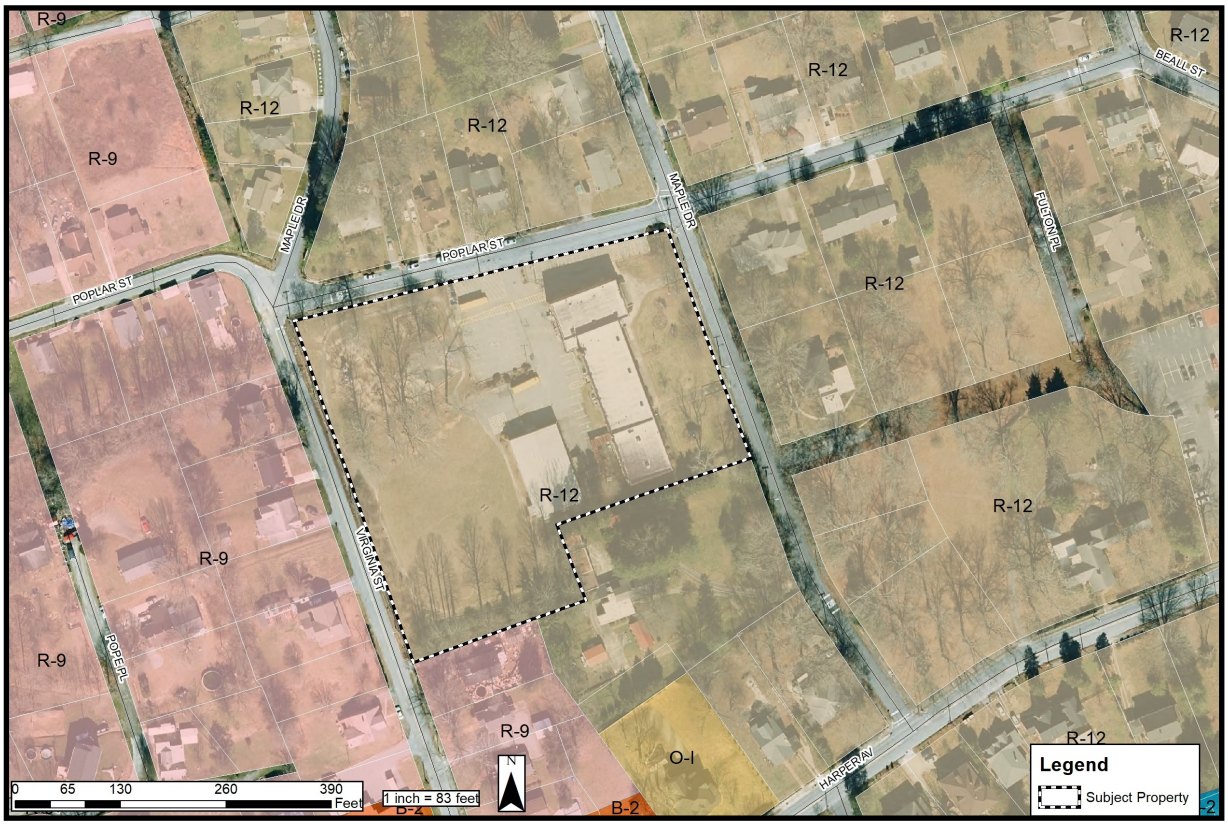
Public Comment:

Planning Board Meeting: Scheduled for July 13, 2026. Notices were mailed to adjacent property owners on July 1, 2026.

City Council Hearing: Scheduled for August 4, 2026. Notices were mailed to adjacent property owners on July 22, 2026.

******This request is considered quasi-judicial. You should not discuss this case with decision makers outside of the scheduled public meeting******

Zoning Map & Adjoining/Abutting Properties Map





BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Intent of Special Use Permits

Special uses are recognized in the zoning ordinance as uses which may be compatible with an area depending on the specific details of the project, its surroundings, and the level of services available to the site, but are not permitted "by right" in the zoning district. The special use permit process gives the City sufficient flexibility to determine whether a specific land use on a given site will be compatible with the environment and the Comprehensive Plan. Through the approval of a Special Use Permit, the Planning Board and City Council may set conditions or use limitations, thereby establishing a realm of acceptability for the particular use that will be neither arbitrary nor capricious, and will promote the spirit and character of the surrounding neighborhood. The process requires the Planning Board to review and make a recommendation to the City Council on the request. The City Council must then decide whether nor not to issue a Special Use Permit following a quasi-judicial hearing.

Intent of the Zoning District

Article V of the Lenoir Zoning Code states:

R - 12 Residential (Single-family) District is intended to establish and preserve land within the city for medium density single-family residences and compatible land uses. Regulations are designed to allow predominately single-family residences at medium densities, with duplex, townhome, low-rise apartments, and planned residential developments allowed at compatible densities as special uses. Any uses which would adversely affect or interfere with the residential character and development of these areas are excluded.

Subject and Surrounding Properties

The subject property is 4.01 acres and is zoned R-12. This single parcel includes the main West Lenoir Elementary School building with classrooms, as well as the auditorium on the north side of the building and the standalone gym on the south side of the property. There is a large parking lot as well as a small playground area on the west side of the parcel.

West Lenoir Elementary ceased operations at the close of the 2021-2022 school year. It was sold to HASO Holdings LLC in 2023. Aside from a special use permit approval for a church in the school's auditorium, no other use or development has occurred on the site since the school closed.

The surrounding area largely features residential zoning. All parcels to the north and east including the subject property are zoned R-12 for single-family residential. Properties west of the subject parcel are zoned R-9 for multi-family residential but the majority of dwellings in this area are single-family. However, there is a long stretch of Lenoir Housing Authority multi-family properties along Poplar Street towards Creekway Drive. South of the property is a mix of B-2 and O-I zoning, which is customary for a main thoroughfare such as Harper Avenue.

Proposed Use

The applicant intends to open a private school with an approved special use permit in the old West Lenoir Elementary school. In conjunction with a proposed text amendment, a private school would be able to locate here. Educational Facilities would be a new use designation on the City's Permitted Use Chart, and R-12 would be one of several zoning districts where Educational Facilities would be allowed with an approved Special Use Permit. As the code is written today, there is no designation that specifically fits a private grade school. Public Service Facilities account for public schools, while Studios and Specialty Schools specifically account for non-academic and vocational subjects. Because this was an elementary school several years ago, the building is currently non-conforming and would not be able to operate in a similar manner without coming into compliance via the Special Use process whether private or public. The applicant plans to clean up the exterior and replace all broken glass, carry out interior renovations HVAC, paint, carpet, and basic clean-up, and fill in the sinkhole as well as repair and clean up the playground area.

Historic Significance

Because of the historical significance of the building and the Fairfield Park Neighborhood, the City is proposing several conditions to ensure the applicant maintains historic character as much as possible. The building is of a colonial revival style similar to brick schools and schoolyards of the early 1900s. The conditions will concern making no changes to the brick, retaining window and door

Background and analysis (Cont'd.)

openings, and leaving the concrete accents unaffected. Due to changes in the past made to windows and doors, the building would likely contribute to a National Register of Historic Places district, should the Fairfield Park neighborhood be listed in the future. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has stated that the school has likely been altered too much to be an individual listing.

The 2017 Lenoir Architectural survey discusses the formation and development of the Fairfield neighborhood and was promptly study-listed to be added as a district to the National Register shortly thereafter in 2018. Fairfield is known for being a "charming, fast-growing section" of Lenoir and is a foundational neighborhood that represents Lenoir's connections to industry and small-town living. What was once pastoral back in the late 1800s to early 1900s was then transformed into one of Lenoir's foundational neighborhoods essential to its 20th century growth, development, and culture.

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan

All decisions of the Planning Board and City Council should be based on consistency of the proposal with the comprehensive plan and any other officially adopted plan that is applicable. The City's Comprehensive Plan encourages reuse and redevelopment of vacant and historic buildings. Part of this process entails initiating zoning changes to encourage development and making the zoning code more practical and easier to understand. Revitalizing a historic property with its original use fulfills those goals.

Site Photos



Above: Back of West Lenoir Elementary; auditorium



Above: Front of West Lenoir Elementary



Above: Front of West Lenoir Elementary with gazebo



Above: Front of West Lenoir Elementary Auditorium

Site Photos Cont'd.



Above: Sinkhole on basketball court adjacent to playground



Above: Current state of West Lenoir Elementary playground



Above: Maple Street along front of West Lenoir Elementary facing neighborhood park towards Harper Avenue



Above: Poplar Street along side of West Lenoir Elementary

FAIRFIELD PARK NEIGHBORHOOD (SL STATUS, HPOWEB)



FINDINGS

No Special Use Permit shall be approved unless the Planning Board and City Council find that:

1. The proposed special use will comply with all height, yard, lot and area requirements and other regulations of the district in which it is located unless otherwise specified. *The applicant has no plans to expand the exterior structure of the school so all building heights and setbacks will remain the same.*

2. All driveways will be designed with respect to such matters as proper ingress and egress for automobiles in order to minimize traffic congestion and increase pedestrian safety and conveniences. *Current driveways and parking will remain in place as the applicant is not planning an expansion to the buildings. Necessary renovations to the parking areas, as confirmed by engineer study, will be carried out prior to opening the school.*

3. Off-street parking and loading areas will be provided in compliance with the Zoning Ordinance. *The existing parking area is adequate for intended use of the development.*

4. The establishment of the special use will not hinder the normal and orderly development and improvement of surrounding property for uses already permitted in the district. *The usage will have a similar or a lesser impact than the previous school that occupied the building for many years.*

5. Any required screening and landscaping will be designed or planted with full consideration of the effectiveness of individual plant types, dimensions, and characteristics in minimizing the noise, glare, visual impacts and other economic effects on adjoining properties. *A vegetative buffer of 15 feet must remain in place or be restored on the southern property lines. Applicant will maintain the plants and if any need replacing, new plants will be planted in accordance with the City's zoning criteria.*

6. Any permitted signs and proposed exterior lighting will be designed to reduce glare and to mitigate any adverse effects of sign size and height; so as to make the signs aesthetically pleasing and compatible with adjoining properties. *The applicant will use a 6-foot tall monument sign with 32 square feet of lettering. It will be designed to have a low impact on the neighboring properties.*

7. The exterior architectural appearance and functional plan of any proposed building or structure will not vary greatly from any buildings or structures already construction or in the course of construction in the immediate vicinity or from the character of the applicable district, so as to cause a substantial depreciation in the property values of the immediate vicinity. *The applicant will maintain the historic nature of the structure. No additions to the current West Lenoir School Building will occur.*

8. The type, size, hours of operations, location of the use upon the site, and intensity of the proposed special use will not be harmful or annoying to surrounding properties. *The school will have a similar impact as the previous school. The children (and parents) that attend will sign a code of conduct, stating it is a privilege to attend and must adhere to a standard level of conduct. Applicant states that 7am-5pm will be the hours of operation. Projected enrollment for the first year is around 125 students and the maximum enrollment projected over time Is 250 students.*

Staff Recommendations

Staff recommends approval of the requested Special Use Permit for the proposed school, with the following conditions:

1. *The brick exterior of the school building must not be painted, stuccoed, or in any way obscured, nor the decorative brick patterns altered in any way*
2. *All concrete accents including the parapet coping, the cornice, the swag relief panel, and the "stones" around the entrances must be retained.*
3. *No additions shall be attached to the existing school building. If accessibility ramps are needed, these should be added to side or rear elevations.*
4. *Existing window and door openings must be retained. The current windows and doors do not appear to be original to the building. If the current windows and doors need to be replaced, the materials should fit within the existing openings without requiring the openings to be resized, and "filler" material should be avoided.*

Planning Board Recommendations

Approval of the request with the findings of fact and the conditions listed above.

APPENDIX A—APPLICANT'S RESPONSES

SPECIAL USE APPLICATION—PAGE 2

The Planning Board shall not recommend and the City Council shall not grant a request for a Special Use unless the requested use is (1) not detrimental to the public health or general welfare; (2) is appropriately located with respect to transportation facilities, water supply, fire and police protection, waste disposal and similar services; and (3) will not violate neighborhood character and not adversely affect surrounding land uses. **To that end, the ordinance specifies criteria and standards that, when satisfied, allow the granting of the Special Use. In the spaces below, provide your responses as to how you believe your proposed project satisfies each of the standards. (Attach additional sheets as necessary.)**

The Planning Board and City Council must find that ALL of the standards are met and may impose specific conditions to assure that the proposed use and its location will be harmonious with the area in which it is located and with the spirit of the zoning ordinance and to insure that the proposed use will not be detrimental to surrounding environment and property values.

Criteria for SUP approval

(1) The proposed special use will comply with all height, yard, lot and area requirements and other regulations for the district in which it is located unless otherwise specified.

There are no plans to expand the exterior structure of the school so all building heights and setbacks will remain the same.

(2) All driveways will be designed with respect to such matters as proper ingress and egress for automobiles in order to minimize traffic congestion and increase pedestrian safety and conveniences.

Current driveways and parking will remain in place as we will are not planning an expansion to the buildings.

(3) Off-street parking will be provided in compliance with Section 1000 and off-street loading will be provided in compliance with Section 1001 of Lenoir's Zoning Ordinance.

The existing parking area is more than adequate for our intended usage.

(4) The establishment of the special use will not hinder the normal and orderly development and improvement of surrounding property for uses already permitted in the district.

The usage will have a similar or a lesser impact than the previous school that occupied the building for many years.

(5) Any required screening and landscaping will be designed or planted with full consideration of the effectiveness of individual plant types, dimensions, and characteristics in minimizing the noise, glare, visual impacts and other economic effects on adjoining properties.

I believe 15' screening is in place on the southern property lines. We will maintain the plants and if any need replacing, we will re-plant new plants in accordance with the city's zoning criteria.

(6) Any permitted signs and proposed exterior lighting will be designed to reduce glare and to mitigate any adverse effects of sign size and height; so as to make the signs aesthetically pleasing and compatible with adjoining properties.

We will use a 6' tall monument sign with 32 sf of lettering. It will be designed to have a low impact of the neighboring properties.

(7) The exterior architectural appearance and functional plan of any proposed building or structure will not vary greatly from any buildings or structures already constructed or in the course of construction in the immediate vicinity or from the character of the applicable district, so as to cause a substantial depreciation in the property values of the immediate vicinity.

After conversing with planning, the historic nature of the structure will remain in place. No additions to the current West Lenoir School Building will occur.

(8) The type, size, hours of operations, location of the use upon the site, and intensity of the proposed special use will not be harmful or annoying to surrounding properties.

The school will have a similar impact as the previous school, or possibly even less so. The children (and parents) that attend will sign a code of conduct, stating it is a privilege to attend and must adhere to a standard level of conduct. 7 am-5pm will be the hours of operation.