



General Government & Planning (GGP) Committee

December 2, 2025

Summary and Motions

Committee members Liz Sheehan (Chair), Shayla Lynch, J.D. (Vice Chair), Dan Wu, James Brown, Chuck Ellinger II, Hannah LeGris, Emma Curtis, Whitney Elliott Baxter, Dave Sevigny, and Jennifer Reynolds were present. Council members Tyler Morton, Lisa Higgins-Hord, Joseph Hale, Amy Beasley, and Hil Boone were present as non-voting members.

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Chair Sheehan.

I. APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 9, 2025 COMMITTEE SUMMARY (Sheehan)

A motion by Ellinger to approve the September 9, 2025, Committee Summary, seconded by Brown, passed without dissent.

II. APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 16, 2025 SPECIAL COMMITTEE SUMMARY (Sheehan)

A motion by Ellinger to approve the September 16, 2025, Special Committee Summary, seconded by LeGris, passed without dissent.

III. PURCHASE OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS (PDR) REVIEW (Sheehan/Overman)

Sheehan introduced the annual review of the Purchase of Development Rights Program (PDR) presented by Beth Overman, PDR Director. Housed in the Department of Planning and Preservation, the program is governed by the Rural Land Management Board (RLMB), which includes 13 voting members, three non-voting members, and an Urban County Council representative.

Overman reported that the RLMB and PDR Program has been designated a Certified Entity by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, allowing conservation easements to close more efficiently by eliminating multiple layers of federal approval. Since receiving this designation, the program has closed 16 farms totaling 1,075 acres, bringing total conserved acreage to 33,333 acres, with four additional farms under contract. The most recent November application cycle yielded 10 new applications, more than double the prior year. Qualifying farms will be included in the federal grant application due December 31.

Overman also reviewed the Small Farm Program (SFP), adopted in January 2025, which serves actively farmed parcels between 10 and 19.99 acres. The inaugural application cycle received 37 applications, of which 14 met eligibility requirements related to active farming, zoning, and mortgage subordination. Two offers have been extended, six appraisals remain pending, and additional appraisal authorizations are expected at the RLMB meeting on December 10, 2025. Applications that do not yet meet requirements will stay in the queue as issues are resolved, and the next application cycle is anticipated in the spring or early summer of 2026.

During the discussion, councilmembers asked whether any SFP applications were in rural hamlets and how the program's funding levels would be determined, given the absence of a federal match. Staff indicated that no applicants were in rural hamlets—many of which contain parcels under 10 acres—and that no funding percentage has been set; allocations will depend on the number of qualified applications. Members also sought clarification on eligibility thresholds and confirmation that small farms count toward the program's 50,000-acre conservation goal; staff confirmed this. Staff explained that disqualifying factors included zoning issues (since modified), lack of active agricultural use, and difficulty obtaining mortgage subordination from lenders unfamiliar with conservation easements. Members noted the need to clarify further how agricultural use is assessed, particularly given its potential impact on future dual-use land considerations, such as solar development.

IV. LEXINGTON'S PRESERVATION & GROWTH MANAGEMENT PROGRAM (LPGMP) (Wu/Baillie)

Wu introduced the second presentation on Lexington's Preservation and Growth Management Program (LPGMP), noting that the program establishes a data-driven, proactive framework to address growth and long-standing community needs while preserving agricultural land. He emphasized that the Comprehensive Plan calls for robust public and stakeholder engagement, which has directly shaped the program. Outreach included educational events, committee previews, public input sessions, surveys, and online forums through Engage Lexington, an in-person public forum, and meetings with a wide range of stakeholders, including planning officials, preservation advocates, builders, business representatives, and former council members involved in earlier growth management efforts.

Hal Baillie, Manager of Long-Range Planning, outlined the implementation timeline. Following Council action, the Planning Commission would incorporate the ordinance as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan and adopt it by August 1, 2026. The program is intended to move beyond recurring debates over Urban Service Area expansion by codifying long-standing practices into a transparent, research-based, and publicly accessible process grounded in official data sources and current development metrics. It also establishes a clear, orderly review structure involving all decision-making bodies.

Key revisions to the draft ordinance include expanded detail in the Growth Trends Report regarding required data and potential policy recommendations; clarification of the Planning Commission's role in promoting efficient, sustainable, and fiscally responsible growth within the Urban Service Area; a shortened timeframe and clarified procedures for vacant land review, including allowing parcels within the Urban Service Area to be considered for removal; strengthened preservation criteria and added public meeting requirements for land application review; provisions allowing initiation of zone changes for applications ready to proceed and meeting residential needs; and removal of the requirement to identify a specific company for special economic development needs.

During the discussion, members asked how land availability within the Urban Service Area would be evaluated, particularly for surface parking lots and infill sites currently in use. Baillie explained that such questions are addressed through policy analysis in the Growth Trends Report rather than parcel-by-parcel classification, and that sites permitted under the zoning ordinance are not considered vacant. Instead, the report may recommend strategies—such as zoning reforms, transit investments, or funding mechanisms—to encourage more intensive use over time, with implementation decisions resting with the Council. Staff also clarified that the program does not involve contacting all landowners about willingness to infill and that only parcels meeting the ordinance's definition of vacant land are subject to specific review, including potential removal in limited circumstances.

Additional questions addressed incentives for infill, the shortened timeline for vacant land reviews, and the definition of “significant economic impact.” Baillie noted that the ordinance intentionally avoids fixed thresholds, leaving determinations to elected officials and allowing future guidance through Growth Trends Reports. The 250-acre cap on special economic development sites was described as reflecting community concerns about scale and historical precedent, while limiting eligibility to certain industrial zones was intended to prioritize high-job-creation uses. Discussion also touched on neighborhood stability, rural activity centers, and the Planning Commission’s role in zoning actions. Baillie emphasized that the Growth Trends Report will track neighborhood stabilization indicators—such as income, housing, demographic change, and ownership patterns—to inform policy decisions, with staff providing analysis and recommendations and the Council retaining decision-making authority.

The ordinance requires a Growth Trends Report every five years, beginning one year after adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, creating an ongoing mechanism to reassess infill, redevelopment, and stabilization policies.

A motion by Wu to approve the draft ordinance of the preservation and growth management program, as presented at today's committee meeting, to move to the full council, seconded by Lynch, passed without dissent.

Chair Sheehan noted that the committee report will be presented at the Council Work Session, following the next General Government & Planning (GGP) Committee meeting on January 20, 2026.

V. ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE (Sheehan)

A motion by LeGris to remove Acquire Investor-Owned or Other Properties from the committee, seconded by Reynolds, passed without dissent.

A motion by LeGris to remove the Public Input Subcommittee from committee, seconded by Sevigny, passed without dissent.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 p.m. by Chair Sheehan.