



CITY OF HARRISONBURG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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December 29, 2025

**TO THE MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA**

SUBJECT: *Consider a request from Honest Meats LLC to amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow meat processing and storage by special use permit in M-1*

**EXTRACT FROM THE DRAFT MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING
COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON:** December 10, 2025

Chair Baugh read the request and asked staff to review.

Mr. Blanks said in September 10, 2025, staff met with Honest Meats LLC (applicant) representatives to discuss future expansion to the T&E Meats facility located at 256 Charles Street. A portion of this facility operates a slaughterhouse for domesticated livestock and is a nonconforming use.

Article E. - Nonconforming Structures and Uses of the Zoning Ordinance prohibits the enlargement or expansion of nonconforming uses. After reviewing the details of the proposed expansion with the applicant, staff concluded that the new proposal would not violate Article E. However, the applicant expressed interest in finding a way to permit the slaughterhouse use in the M-1 General Industrial District to remove their nonconforming status and provide a route for future improvements that are not restricted by Article E.

Staff worked with the applicant to create a new definition for “Meat processing and storage facility,” as shown below:

Meat processing and storage facility: A building used for the slaughter and processing of game or domestic animals. May include temporary storage of animals outside the principal building and onsite storage facilities for distribution of processed meats. Does not include processing and storage of poultry and other fowl.

This definition separates facilities that slaughter and process domestic animals and game from poultry processing. Further discussion on the importance of that distinction is discussed later in this report. The definition will allow temporary storage of animals outside while waiting to be processed. The proposal would add a new subsection (18) within Section 10-3-97. - Uses

permitted by special use permit in the M-1 General Industrial District to permit, meat processing and storage facilities only by special use permit (SUP).

Staff believes that Planning Commission and City Council should consider meat processing and storage facility operations on a case-by-case basis so that the location and potential undesirable impacts can be evaluated and considered. During the special use permit (SUP) process, staff, Planning Commission, and City Council could consider and attach conditions to address matters of concern such as, but not limited to:

- Location relative to adjacent and nearby uses, zoning districts, and (future) Land Use Guide designations,
- Facility size (i.e. footprint, building scale),
- Temporary outdoor storage of animals,
- Hours of operation, and
- Noise.

While crafting the definition for meat processing and storage facilities, it became apparent the proposed amendment needed to address poultry processing and storage. Harrisonburg's first ZO in 1939 separated poultry processing from other types of meat processing and slaughterhouses. While slaughterhouses were expressly prohibited as a use, poultry processing and storage was allowed. In the 1939 ZO, Section 7, B-2 Business, Manufacturing and Industrial District Uses stated:

In any B-2 District, no lot, building or structure shall be used and no building or structure shall be erected which is intended or designed to be used, in whole or in part, for any of the following specified purposes:

- (1) Abattoir or slaughter house, except for poultry and incidental to a retail store; stockyard; starch; glucose or dextrine manufacture; horn processing, except from cleaned shells; the curing, tanning, dressing or storing of raw or green salted hides or skins.

The ZO has changed significantly since then and poultry processing is not explicitly mentioned anymore. It had been a long-standing interpretation of the ZO that poultry processing is allowed by right under Section 10-3-96(1) which states:

Industrial operations for the manufacturing, processing, storage or treatment of products which are not customarily found in retail centers. It is intended that the industrial use shall not endanger surrounding uses or create severe pollution problems.

To clarify that a poultry processing and storage facility is not a subcategory of a meat processing and storage facility, the proposal includes a new definition for “Poultry Processing and Storage Facility” as shown below:

Poultry processing and storage facility: A building used for the slaughter and processing of poultry or fowl. May include temporary storage of poultry outside the principal building and onsite storage facilities for distribution of processed poultry.

The proposal includes the addition of subsection (22) within Section 10-3-96. - Uses permitted by right in the M-1 General Industrial District to allow poultry processing and storage facilities by right in the M-1 district. This would codify the existing interpretation and remove the possibility of making existing poultry processing facilities nonconforming by requiring a SUP.

Conclusion

The proposed amendments will provide slaughterhouse operations with a path to operate within the City as conforming use and clarify existing interpretations regarding poultry processing operations. Staff recommends approval of the amendment as proposed.

Chair Baugh asked if there any questions for staff.

Vice Chair Porter asked what would be the implications for existing nonconforming uses if this is not changed?

Mr. Blanks said Article E basically prohibits nonconforming uses from expanding at all. What that would really mean is that, we will take the slaughterhouse as the example, they would not be able to expand the physical operations of the slaughterhouse. So, the amount of area in that operation that is dedicated to the slaughterhouse is all they can do. They can continue to maintain it as long as they do not stop it for a period of longer than two years. If they were to expand it then it would be considered immediately void, and they would have to cease the operation of the slaughterhouse, and it would have to revert to a by right industrial M-1 use. That is true for all nonconforming uses for previous applications, we are looking at that house near this location on Charles Street where that was another example of a nonconforming use that was expanded and then as soon as it expands it (the nonconformance) is presumed to be lost immediately.

Vice Chair Porter said in this particular case, the applicant would have to come before us with a special use permit request.

Mr. Blanks said yes, all this is doing is amending the Zoning Ordinance to give them the option to pursue a special use permit that can then make them be conforming. Right now, this particular use, they have no way of ever leaving nonconforming status. The ordinance would need to be amended to allow them to try to do so.

Vice Chair Porter asked this may be an unfair question but how many other businesses currently operating in the City would be impacted by this change?

Mr. Blanks said I am not sure there is another one. This is T&E Meats. Honest Meats LLC own this facility. I am not aware of another facility that would be affected by this particular ordinance change. There are several poultry processing facilities that...it does not really change anything much for them other than making it clear that they can continue to do what they are doing. At this time, I am only aware of the T&E Meats facility.

Ms. Dang said if there are other slaughterhouses in the City, they are either illegal or we would have to do a lot of thorough research with them to determine that they are nonconforming.

Mr. Blanks said the T&E Meats facility has been a well-documented use over the years.

Commissioner Jezior asked would this special use permit allow for a new facility to open or is this only for expansion?

Mr. Blanks said an applicant could bring a request for a new facility, at which point it would be up to the Planning Commission to make a recommendation and City Council to approve if they would like a new facility to be added.

Chair Baugh said which right now you cannot.

Mr. Blanks said right now you cannot.

Councilmember Dent said I knew of T&E Meats, but I had no idea they had actual slaughterhouse operations there. One thing I am kind of curious about is the outdoor storage of animals. That could be interesting for a special use permit for noise and how many animals.

Mr. Blanks said at the moment, the way that we wanted to present this is, as well as in conjunction with the applicant discussing with them, it sounds like that will vary dramatically from operation to operation depending on what type of animals they are slaughtering, how many get processed, when they are being processed. That is something that would have to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. We would be looking at pens, potentially covered or uncovered, that would be somewhere on site to be able to house whatever animals are waiting to be processed. It will be something that will have to get evaluated and discussed.

Commissioner Seitz said I am repeating what I think you just answered already, so things like visual screening, security, covering, all of those types of things would be stipulated and addressed through the special use permit process.

Mr. Blanks said it is something that could be considered and you would have the authority to recommend conditions, and City Council would have the ability to attach them, regarding restrictions on how that operation is occurring since it is a special use permit.

Councilmember Dent said I also commend the clarity of separating out poultry from other domestic animals. The poultry industry is the backbone of the Valley really and even operating ongoing. It is good to get the Virginia Poultry Federation President, Hobey Bauhan's, approval.

Mr. Blanks said he was happy to see that this proposes to clarify what is currently an interpretation.

Mr. Fletcher said, Commissioner Seitz, if we end up in the future with a special use permit where someone does want to have a slaughterhouse and the Planning Commission or City Council does not want any outdoor storage of animals, but they are proposing it, you can add a condition to that that they do not have any.

Mr. Blanks said, to Mr. Fletcher's point, the way the definition was structured says that they may have outdoor storage of animals and that could still be subject to restriction by a special use permit condition.

Commissioner Seitz said given the culture of the area, creating the pathway for some place like T&E Meats to be able to do business makes sense. I think it is a well-crafted ordinance.

Chair Baugh asked if there were any more questions for staff. Hearing none, he invited the applicant or applicant's representative to speak to their request.

Todd Rhea, attorney with Clark & Bradshaw and applicant's representative, came forward to speak to the request. I have been working with Mr. Blanks, and the applicant Matthew Heavener, who runs the operation for T&E, is here this evening as well. It was well explained by staff and in my zoning justification letter request, we are just seeking to amend the ordinance to allow a long-standing operation, like T&E Meats, that has operated in the County and now the City for almost 100 years to have path forward to continue their operation in a responsibly regulated way through the City. Right now, that opportunity does not exist because the definition does not exist for some of the things they do on site within the City's Zoning Ordinance. It is only within the industrial district, so it is a very limited district use. We looked at other jurisdictions in the Valley and western Virginia and many other cities and counties to provide for a similar type use by special use permit in their industrial district. This is analogous to what is permitted in other jurisdictions. As the Planning Commission has pointed out this, does not permit it as a use by right. T&E would have to come back with a crafted special use permit application reviewed by staff and going through the public hearing process for appropriate restrictions and conditions associated with that request. It is a very valuable business in the community. They process a lot of the organic and locally grown grass-fed beef, such as Polyface Farms-type folks supply there. The City of Harrisonburg, while an urban area, is surrounded by Rockingham County which produces 20 percent of Virginia's annual agricultural output. We are an agricultural hub, and it makes sense. We believe in working with staff to request that the ordinance be amended to provide that opportunity and path forward to allow a business like T&E to get out of nonconforming use status. Thank you all very much.

Chair Baugh asked if there were any questions for the applicant's representative. Hearing none, he opened the public hearing and invited anyone in the room or on the phone wishing to speak to the request. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and opened the matter for discussion.

Vice Chair Porter said I would just like to say that it is not lost on me that we just decided a matter on a property that is almost adjacent to this property. We just talked about the two rental properties

that could be created in the property that is fairly close to where this currently exists. I would be inclined to ask a lot harder questions about an expansion and a special use permit discussion because of the fact that we just talked about this increase in potential residential density going on around this area here. That is a different discussion for a different day, but I will tell you that if this was an ordinance change to allow this expansion by right, I am not sure I would be voting for it this evening. Just in light of what we just talked about, which is the fact that we would like to encourage residential development in that area. With that being said, I think the merits of that will be discussed when that time comes. I do have some concerns about expansion of that property if the character of that neighborhood changes. I think anybody that lived in that area and as someone who grew up in a ranching community out west and understands what it is like to be near a feed lot, and I understand the slaughterhouse process because it was part of my family's business. It is not a pleasant thing to have next door. This property seems to have been managed extremely well. I have not heard a lot of complaints about the work that T&E has done for years. It is not lost on me that this is something that is already in place and it has been functioning for an extended period of time. If the character of the neighborhood changes, I think it is going to lend to a much deeper discussion.

Councilmember Dent said that is one of the beauties of the special use permit. It is one of the tools we can use to impose conditions, such as no animals outside or whatever we choose to do.

Commissioner Kettler said I move to approve the Zoning Ordinance amendment as present by staff.

Commissioner Seitz seconded the motion.

Chair Baugh called for a roll call vote.

Commissioner Seitz	Aye
Commissioner Jezior	Aye
Councilmember Dent	Aye
Commissioner Kettler	Aye
Vice Chair Porter	Aye
Chair Baugh	Aye

The motion to recommend approval of the Zoning Ordinance Amendment passed (6-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on January 13, 2026.