

Zoning Commission Meeting Minutes – August 8, 2025

The Muscatine County Zoning Commission held a Public Hearing at the Environmental Learning Center on Friday, August 8, 2025 starting at 10:30 a.m.

Present: Brad Akers (Vice Chair), Laura Curtis Kramer, Martha Peterson, and Carol Schlueter

Absent: Tom Harper (Chair)

Staff Present: Eric Furnas, Morgan Othmer, Jake Boucher, and Brandon Hatcher

Others present for this meeting included: Will from Liferaft, Brent Herrold, Courtney Herrold, Braydon Herrold, Josh Binneboese, Bryan Horesowsky, Chris Hasken, Emily Bass, Kim Campbell, Brian Campbell, Mike Smock, Emily Geertz, Janelle Spies, Phil Wiese

- **Approval of the July 11, 2025 meeting minutes.**
 - A motion was made by Carol Schlueter to approve the July 11, 2025 meeting minutes and was seconded by Martha Peterson.
 - Aye's: Brad Akers, Laura Curtis Kramer, Martha Peterson, and Carol Schlueter
 - Opposed: None
 - Motion approved.

- **Agenda Item #01 – White Mountain Subdivision**
 - There was no representative present for this agenda item. Eric recommended the Zoning Commission table the request due to the change in meeting location.

 - A motion was made by Carol Schlueter to table the request and was seconded by Martha Peterson.
 - Aye's: Brad Akers, Laura Curtis Kramer, Martha Peterson, and Carol Schlueter
 - Opposed: None
 - Motion approved.

- **Agenda Item #02 – LRBC 1 LLC/Herrold Rezoning**
 - Will from Liferaft spoke about the rezoning request. He explained that the parcels are located next to Highway 6 and Wendling Quarries, where there is already a significant amount of truck traffic. Liferaft is looking to place a biochar facility on the parcel to the west. The larger parcel would be used by Mr. Herrold for a composting operation with the intention of blending the biochar into the compost. This would cause the composting operation to expand in size and reach the level of industrial activity.

- Next, Will spoke about biochar. The residents he spoke to, who live close to the proposed site, had expressed concerns about an increase in odor. He explained that it is an odorless product, and the biochar would even help reduce the smell created by the compost. To make the biochar, Liferaft would primarily use wood waste that would be obtained from the local municipality as well as surrounding counties and agricultural byproducts such as corn stalks.
- Will explained why the proposed location was selected. The adjacent compost facility would allow the biochar to be immediately blended with compost. The existing highway infrastructure, many local farms for material supply, and the electrical infrastructure can supply the power needed for the facility.
- Will spoke about how the new facility would create 50 jobs.
- He then spoke about the noise and emissions that would come from the facility. The facility would be smokeless except for a brief time when it is started. They would work with the DNR for any required permitting. The machinery would generate noise at about 75 decibels.
- Emily Geertz asked if the CSR rating was being considered. Staff explained that the CSR rating is a part of the LESA (Land Evaluation Site Assessment), a tool that is listed in the Comprehensive Plan. The LESA provides a score for proposed rezoning that considers many factors including the CSR of the site and the CSR of surrounding properties. The LESA generates a score between 0-300 with 300 suggesting the land should be reserved for agricultural use (not be rezoned). The LESA for this request scored at 191.
- Emily asked how the product would be sold. Will answered that the intention is to sell the product to the adjacent compost facility. There's also a potential for expansion to use the biochar at hog farms. The overall goal is to provide the product to the local farming community within a 50-mile radius.
- Eric explained that the rezoning is needed for both parties – for Liferaft's biochar facility and for Herrold's composting operation. The Industrial zoning is needed due to the growing size of the composting operation and to allow the biochar facility. Eric also clarified that in addition to the rezoning, both companies would have to be approved for a Special Use Permit. He then explained that if the property is rezoned to I-2, the only permitted uses are those that are allowed in the I-1 Light Industrial District. Any other use would require a Special Use Permit.
- Phil Wiese spoke about the work that Will and his company put into addressing any neighbor concerns and building relationships in the community. They contacted all property owners within 750 feet of the proposed site.
- Carol Schlueter asked if it would be considered spot zoning if the rezoning was approved. Eric answered that there are not currently any contiguous I-2 zoned properties. The application is for a total of 75 acres and that is consistent with guidance in the Comprehensive Plan to rezone areas large enough to allow for expansion of similar types of uses. In this case, compatibility with surrounding land

uses should be considered. Although Wendling Quarries is not zoned Industrial (they are operating under a Special Use Permit), the mining operation is an industrial-like use.

- Carol then asked if this property was designated in the Comprehensive Plan for Industrial growth. Eric answered that the Future Land Use Map does not show expected development in the area. The map indicates areas that would be ideal for development, but they are not the only areas where development can occur. Roads and infrastructure should be considered near areas of development. In this case, the properties have frontage to a state Highway.
 - Next, Eric spoke about some of the economic and environmental impacts of the facility. The facility would help with the increasing agricultural waste and storm damage waste. There's a high cost for local compost facilities to manage all the trees and tree limbs after large storms. Recycling these products into something that could provide relief to local compost facilities and benefit agriculture is a positive thing.
 - A motion was made by Carol Schlueter to close the public hearing at 11:32 a.m. and was seconded by Laura Curtis Kramer.
 - Aye's: Brad Akers, Laura Curtis Kramer, Martha Peterson, and Carol Schlueter
 - Opposed: None
 - Motion approved.
 - A motion was made by Martha Peterson to approve the request to rezone Parcel #03-08-300-029 (2321 Hwy 6, Atalissa) and Parcel #03-08-300-030 from the existing A-1 Agricultural District to I-2 Heavy Industrial District. Laura Curtis Kramer seconded the motion.
 - Aye's: Brad Akers, Laura Curtis Kramer, Martha Peterson
 - Opposed: Carol Schlueter
 - Motion approved.
- Meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

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