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Planners endorse Discovery Museum's move to park

By Suzanne E. Wilder
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — The Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum is one step closer to having a new home.

On Tuesday, the city's Planning Commission recommended that the museum, currently housed on the Loudoun Street Mall, be allowed to build a 26,000-square-foot facility in Jim Barnett Park.

The City Council approved that move in 2004, but it must grant a conditional-use permit for the building.

Museum officials have said the estimated cost for the building is about \$10 million.

City officials will approve site plans for the museum at an undetermined date.

In other action:

The commissioners gave the city's Planning Department the authority to approve a planned office and retail space at 650 Cedar Creek Grade, a T.G.I. Friday's restaurant at 111 E. Tevis St., an office building at 900 S. Pleasant Valley Road, and a commercial center at 2608 and 2620 Papermill Road.

The Papermill Road commercial center will include a restaurant and two retail spaces that have not been identified, said city Planning Director Timothy A. Youmans.

Molden Real Estate Corp. won the commission's endorsement to build two mixed-use buildings at 2270 and 2310 Valor Drive.

The brick buildings would hold retail or office space on the first floor and apartments on the second and third floors. The structures required special permission because of the combination of retail and residential space.

The combined space for the two separate complexes would be 21,354 square feet of retail

and 38,400 square feet of residential.

The City Council must give final approval for the project.

The city's definitions for boarding houses, rooming houses, and tourist homes will likely change, if the City Council approves recommendations from the Planning Commission.

Zoning Administrator Vincent Diem suggested the changes, based on overlapping and unclear definitions in the current City Code. For example, a boarding house is defined as "a building where, for compensation, lodging and meals are provided for at least five and up to 14 persons."

The code would change to exclude hotels and bed and breakfasts, restrict the number of people to a maximum of nine, and a stipulation that the owner or operator must reside on the premises. The new definition would also limit the facilities to "transient" lodging, in which people can live for 30 consecutive days.

The amendments would also eliminate the definitions for rooming house and tourist home, and instead make them synonyms for boarding house.

The Planning Commission will introduce rezoning standards for the central part of Valley Avenue, from Cedar Creek Grade through a point slightly north of Bellview Avenue.

The standards are part of the city's corridor enhancement rezoning, which regulates features such as signs, lighting, and fencing, as well as building materials and architectural details including roof pitch and porches.

The standards were created for the city's commercial thoroughfares such as Cedar Creek Grade, Valley Avenue, and Pleasant Valley Road.

The rezoning for Valley Avenue will be part of the commission's agenda in January and February.

Attending the meeting in Rouss City Hall were Chairman Susan G. Masters, Nate L. Adams III, David Shore, Daniel J. Troup, Philip Weber Jr., Kevin L. Talley, and John Willingham.