



City of Harrisonburg, Virginia

Department of Planning & Community Development

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Building Inspections
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July 1, 2019

TO THE MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

SUBJECT: Public hearing to consider a request from Harrisonburg City Public Schools to rezone a +/- 60-acre site from R-5C, High Density Residential District Conditional to B-2, General Business District. The site is adjacent to I-81 and is located between Boxwood Court and Kaylor Park Drive. The site is addressed as 2868 South Main Street, 40 Boxwood Court, and Boxwood Court and can be found on tax maps 2-C-1, 2-D-0, 2-D-6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON: June 12, 2019

Vice Chair Colman read the request and asked staff to review.

Ms. Dang said that she would review the first two items on the agenda, items 4.a. and 4.b. together. They are both related to the location of the Harrisonburg City Public Schools proposed new high school, located off of East Kaylor Park Drive. It is a 60-acre site adjacent to I-81. I recommend that one public hearing be opened for both items. The votes, however, would be taken separately for each item. The first item is to determine if the public facility is in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan as provided in the Virginia Code section 15.2-2232. The second public hearing item is a request to rezone the 60-acre property from R-5C High Density Residential Conditional to B-2, General Business District.

The Comprehensive Plan designates this area as Governmental/Quasi-Governmental. These lands include properties owned or leased by the City of Harrisonburg, the Commonwealth of Virginia, the federal government, and other governmental/quasi-governmental organizations. Examples of entities included in this category are City Hall, City administrative and support facilities, Harrisonburg City Public Schools, James Madison University, Rockingham County Administrative Offices, Rockingham County Public Schools, and the Massanutten Regional Library. Properties within this designation may already include uses supplied by the entities mentioned or are planned to be used by such public entities for any type of uses necessary for their services. Some Governmental/Quasi-Governmental uses, such as James Madison University, other state agencies, and the federal government are not subject to some of the City's land use regulations. City parks are included in the Conservation, Recreation, and Open Space Category. Furthermore, it should be understood that properties that are owned or leased by the City, which may not be designated as Governmental/Quasi-Governmental by the Land Use Guide, may be developed with public uses, as defined by the Zoning Ordinance, to operate and provide services supplied by the City in any zoning district, which as of the approval of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan, is every zoning district in the City.

The following land uses are located on and adjacent to the property:

Site: Undeveloped parcels, zoned R-5C

North: Self-storage units, zoned M-1

East: Across Interstate 81, Ramblewood Park, zoned R-1; and a manufacturing facility, zoned M-1

South: East Kaylor Park Drive and undeveloped parcels, zoned B-2

West: Undeveloped parcels, automobile dealership, offices, and commercial uses, zoned B-2

Last summer, City Council and the School Board jointly announced the purchase of +/- 60 acres of land for the next high school. The land is adjacent to I-81 between Boxwood Court and East Kaylor Park Drive. With the hope of having the new high school open by Fall 2023, Harrisonburg City Public Schools (HCPS) continues to work with engineers and architects regarding the engineered layout and design of the new building. As part of the vetting process for this new public facility, the site requires a review by the Planning Commission (PC) to determine if the facility is in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, as a separate request, the City is requesting a rezoning of the property from R-5C, High Density Residential District to B-2, General Business District.

City staff has been working with HCPS regarding site design matters. A traffic impact analysis (TIA) study is currently underway. Typically, a TIA is completed prior to accepting and reviewing rezoning applications. However, staff is comfortable reviewing the rezoning request given that the City and HCPS will be working closely on the new high school project.

Presently, as illustrated on the Proposed New Harrisonburg High School Concept Plan – dated May 31, 2019, a new public street is proposed to run along the western boundary of the site to connect East Kaylor Park Drive to relocated Boxwood Court across from Pointe Drive, offering two routes to access the school site from South Main Street. City staff and HCPS staff are working on entrance layouts and routes into the school site to keep buses and parents dropping-off and picking-up students separated.

The Concept Plan illustrates the proposed location of the new high school building, parking areas, and recreational fields. It should be noted that prior to approval of the engineered comprehensive site plan, Planning Commission must review and approve the number of off-street parking spaces desired for the site. Per Section 10-3-25(12) of the Zoning Ordinance (ZO), “proposed off-street parking spaces shall be programmed by the applicable school authorities as necessary to meet state standards for use and consideration of site locations, then submitted to the planning commission for comprehensive site plan review.”

The Department of Public Utilities has noted that while the demands for water and sanitary sewer services of the proposed school would be substantially different from those generated by the current zoning, it is their preliminary opinion that the existing utilities would supply the needed demand. A more detailed review is currently underway.

15.2-2232 Review

City Code Section 10-1-6 stipulates that “if a public facility subject to Section 15.2-2232 of the Code of Virginia is not already shown on the comprehensive plan, the planning commission shall determine whether the location, character and extent of such public facility is in substantial accord with the comprehensive plan as provided by Section 15.2-2232 of the Code of Virginia and the terms and conditions set forth herein, and may be amended from time to time.” A copy of Section 15.2-2232 is attached.

As a reminder, the Code of Virginia Section 15.2-2232, among other things, states that when a locality has adopted a comprehensive plan, “it shall control the general or approximate location, character and extent of each feature shown on the plan.” Public buildings or public structures, among others, are listed by the Code as features that unless already shown on the plan “shall not be constructed, established, or authorized, unless and until the general location or approximate location, character, and extent thereof has

been submitted to and approved by the commission as being substantially in accord with the adopted comprehensive plan or part thereof.”

As previously stated, the Comprehensive Plan’s Land Use Guide designates this property as Governmental/Quasi-Governmental, a designation that was established with the 2018 Comprehensive Plan update. When the 2018 Comprehensive Plan update process began in early 2017, this +/- 60-acre site was owned by James Madison University who had purchased the property in 2014. In Fall 2017, after several Comprehensive Plan advisory committee meetings, the property was shown on the draft Land Use Guide map as Governmental/Quasi-Governmental. This was presented during the Fall 2017 public workshops and public comment period. The draft Land Use Guide map continued to show the property as being recommended as Governmental/Quasi-Governmental and plans to locate the new high school at this site were known when the Comprehensive Plan was adopted in November 2018.

All the sites adjacent to this property, on the west side of Interstate 81 are designated and planned for commercial uses. A request is also being made to rezone the site to B-2, General Business District, where educational uses are permitted by right.

Staff finds the proposed new high school site’s general location, character, and extent thereof is in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan and recommends the Commission communicate the same findings to City Council.

Vice Chair Colman asked if there were any questions for staff.

Commissioner Finnegan said that although it is a conceptual site plan, not one that is proffered, I am curious as to why the parking lot is massed in the front, as opposed to the back closer to the interstate.

Ms. Dang said that she is not able to answer that question.

Commissioner Romero said that one of the arguments is that the administrative offices are going to be at the front of the building, so the parking is located there to allow people to see who is coming in and out. The location of the parking lot in the front makes it easier for administrative staff to acknowledge the visitors that are coming into the building.

Commissioner Whitten said that she was concerned with the effect of noise from the interstate.

Commissioner Romero said that acoustic studies are being conducted.

Commissioner Whitten said that in early discussions regarding the school, the athletic fields would not be included. I am curious as to why they are here.

Commissioner Romero said that he does not have an answer. There is a lot of discussion that will continue regarding the entire facility, the entire campus.

Commissioner Finnegan said that he was at a presentation at Thomas Harrison Middle School, three weeks ago, about this from the architects. It appears that there are many things that are undecided. I do not know if there will be a need to bus students to and from the current high school on Garbers Church Road for curriculum or other reasons. Has the staff spoken with the school staff regarding the midday traffic and transportation issues? Is there going to be a TIA for that?

Ms. Dang said no, the TIA studies only look at the peak hour demand. The biggest impact would be in the morning hours. It does not look at the traffic impact for the rest of the day. If there was programming generating traffic during the day, it would not be included in the TIA; but could be part of the conversation between City staff and the school administrators. To my knowledge there have not been any decisions made regarding the programming or how it would be split between both schools.

Commissioner Romero said that there would be a meeting in the next few days, that will be fairly lengthy, of the design committee that will be making those decision. That will allow us to know what direction we will be heading in. At this point, there are a lot of unknowns.

Commissioner Finnegan said that if only morning and evening peak hours are considered, they will also create peak hours when school lets out. It would be a different kind of peak hour, but traffic would be created entering and exiting the school.

Ms. Dang said that “peak hours” means the peak hour of the traffic system, not of the use throughout the day. The morning hours of the school match the peak hours of the South Main Street traffic.

Hearing no further questions or discussion regarding the review, Ms. Dang continued and discussed the rezoning request

Rezoning Request (R-5C to B-2)

The site is currently zoned R-5C, High Density Residential District Conditional. A public hearing on this zoning was held by City Council on June 22, 2010 and the rezoning became effective on July 14, 2010. A copy of the proffered conditions and the plan of development is attached for reference. The site also received a special use permit (SUP) at the same time that allows each residential building within the plan of development to exceed twelve units per building, as shown on the plan of development, per Section 10-3-55.4(1) of the ZO. The SUP remains valid until July 1, 2020. In brief, the site was approved for a density of 466 dwelling units and the proposed plan anticipated a mix of one, two, and four-bedroom units.

The details of this development are very specific for the housing development as proposed in 2010 and would not allow the construction of a high school at this site. For example, the first proffer states state that roadway, parking, and building configurations within the development shall be in substantial conformance to the provided plan of development.

Earlier this year, HCPSs sought city staff’s advice and accepted staff’s recommendation to rezone the site to the B-2, General Business District. This rezoning would remove all the proffers associated with the R-5C zoning designation that was approved in 2010. A B-2 zoning designation would match existing surrounding Commercial land use designations as shown in the Comprehensive Plan’s Land Use Guide. Rezoning to B-2 would also allow the proposed use (high school) as a by right use per Section 10-3-95(5) of the B-2 district regulations. Educational uses are not listed as a use permitted by right or by SUP within the R-5 district. Additionally, rezoning to B-2 would provide more flexibility with setback and height regulations, as compared to other zoning districts where educational uses are allowed.

City staff recommends approval of the rezoning request from R-5C to B-2.

Vice Chair Colman asked if there were any questions for staff. Hearing none, he opened the public hearing for both the 2232 review and for the rezoning request and asked if there was anyone wishing to speak to the request. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and opened the matter for discussion.

Commissioner Finks said that he is concerned about the location because strategy 7.2.2 of the Comprehensive Plan states that consideration should be given to make schools accessible to pedestrian and bicycle traffic. I understand the limited options in finding 60 acres of land to purchase for a high school. I believe the fact that the Bluestone Trail will pass through there will help, but I do worry that it will be difficult for bicyclists and pedestrians to reach this school. The location will have to be accessed by buses or cars. That will not preclude us from saying that this does go along with the Comprehensive Plan, but I do want to note what we included as a strategy in the Comprehensive Plan. In the future, I

hope that when we are looking at properties that do not require 60 acres for future schools that we are able to put new schools in areas that are more accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists.

Commissioner Finnegan said that he shares the concern with the walkability to the school. There is a neighborhood on the other side of South Main Street, behind what is called the “motor mile,” that is residential. What is the possibility of building a pedestrian walkway over South Main Street at some point in the future? The area could become denser. In the area, there are several large parking lots with no cars in them. Some of the businesses have closed. The way that area of town currently looks, with car dealerships and empty parking lots, it could, in 20 years, look very different. I hope it does look very different.

Vice Chair Colman said that this is related with how we review, revise or change our Comprehensive Plan. Right now, the use and the need are there, but as time moves on, with a school there perhaps it will become more residential. I support the idea that, ideally, we would have a school within a neighborhood that is accessible to pedestrians, and not next to a busy road. The flip side of that is that for a school that is going to produce so much traffic it is good to have a road that will be able to handle it. There are pros and cons to the location. We should consider both conditions, both situations, when we consider a school in the future. We should be conscious of those factors. We are limited by how much property is available for a school of this size.

Commissioner Finnegan said that we do have an emergency crowding situation in Harrisonburg High School. Under those circumstances, the fact the City cannot annex into the County, the fact that there are very limited options, I would be in favor of this request.

Commissioner Finks said he has heard that people are concerned about traffic in the area during certain parts of the day. It made me think about the traffic study for City, where the blocking points were and where the traffic is almost completely in red such Port Republic Road, Reservoir Street, and West Market Street, areas that are heavily trafficked. Of all the areas that have heavy traffic, South Main Street is not as bad as some of the others.

Commissioner Whitten asked if there were bicycle lanes or sidewalks on South Main Street.

Ms. Dang said that there not any on that section of South Main Street.

Mr. Fletcher said that staff reviewed a number of sites. There were advantages and disadvantages to the different sites. The points you are making were made during that process and were communicated to the City Manager’s office to share with the School Board, not just regarding the site preparation, but the surrounding facilities as well.

Vice Chair Colman said that the City should take on building sidewalks on South Main Street to the school. It would improve walkability and access.

Commissioner Finnegan moved to recommend approval of the rezoning request.

Commissioner Finks seconded the motion.

All members voted in favor of recommending approval of the rezoning request.

Commissioner Finks moved to send a positive recommendation to City Council that the public facility is in substantial accord with the Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Finnegan seconded the motion.

All members voted in favor of the recommendation. The recommendation for approval of the rezoning request and the Planning Commission’s findings regarding the 15.2-2232 review will move forward to City Council on July 9, 2019.

Respectfully Submitted,

Alison Banks

Alison Banks
Senior Planner