



# CITY OF HARRISONBURG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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July 31, 2023

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

**SUBJECT:** *Consider a request from Ceasar LLC for a special use permit to allow religious, educational, charitable, or benevolent institutional uses at 1151 and 1157 South High Street*

**EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING HELD ON: July 12, 2023**

Chair Finnegan read the request and asked staff to review. Note that Vice Chair Byrd joined the meeting during the presentation.

Ms. Rupkey said the applicant is requesting a special use permit (SUP) per Section 10-3-97(9) of the Zoning Ordinance (ZO) to allow religious, educational, charitable, or benevolent institutional uses which do not provide housing facilities in the M-1, General Industrial District. The +/- 2.12-acre property is addressed as 1153 and 1157 South High Street and is identified as tax map parcel 20-B-2.

The Manufactory Collective is envisioned as a shared space for multiple tenants, providing access to shared facilities and equipment to support their business ventures. Additionally, the Manufactory Collective has tenants that want to offer community-oriented classes to facilitate skills development. One prospective tenant intends to conduct pottery classes open to the public, while another intends to teach children, primarily aged nine to 13, 3D printing skills and career development. Although vocational schools are permitted by-right within the M-1 district, staff determined the specified age range does not align with vocational education, which typically includes organized educational programs directly preparing individuals to enter career fields requiring specialized training and often targeting post-secondary education.

*Land Use*

The Comprehensive Plan designates the property as Limited Commercial and states that:

These areas are suitable for commercial and professional office development but in a less intensive approach than the Commercial designation. These areas need careful controls to ensure compatibility with adjacent land uses. The maintenance of functional and aesthetic integrity should be emphasized in review of applications for development and

redevelopment and should address such matters as: control of access; landscaping and buffering; parking; setback; signage; and building mass, height, and orientation. It is important that development within Limited Commercial areas does not incrementally increase in intensity to become similar to the Commercial designation. Efforts should be made to maintain the intent as described above.

Staff believes that incorporating educational uses into the site aligns with the goals outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. Light commercial uses typically exclude heavy retail and industrial activities, and education is considered a use that staff deems appropriate for Limited Commercial areas.

The applicant is aware that parking, parking lot landscaping, and other zoning and other code requirements will be addressed during the building permit phase.

#### *Transportation and Traffic*

During review, staff had concerns about the entrance on the southern end of the property. This entrance to the property does not meet the Design and Construction Standards Manual (DCSM) standard for a commercial entrance. Among other standards, commercial entrances are required to be a minimum of 30 feet in width. Staff was concerned about the possibility of vehicles queuing in the right-of-way along South High Street. To address these issues the applicant intends to establish a one-way entrance at the southernmost entrance, directing vehicles to circulate around the rear of the property and to exit from the northernmost entrance. The entrance in the center of the property will allow both ingress and egress movements. See Exhibit A. Staff recommends conditioning the approval of the SUP by requiring the property owner to install entry and exit signs before the operations pertaining to the SUP begin.

Know that there is an existing easement on the adjacent property to the north (identified as tax map parcel 20-B-4A) that grants access for the subject property. (Reference deed book 1190 page 374).

#### *Public Water and Sanitary Sewer*

Staff has no concerns regarding water and sanitary sewer service for the proposed development.

#### *Recommendation*

Staff recommends approval of the SUP with the following conditions:

1. The special use permit shall only be applicable for the educational uses as presented in the application or a substantially similar operation.
2. Before the operations pertaining to the special use permit begin, signs indicating one-way entrances and exits shall be installed along South High Street in appropriate locations.
3. If in the opinion of the Planning Commission or City Council, the use becomes a nuisance, the special use permit can be recalled for further review, which could lead to the need for additional conditions, restrictions, or the revocation of the permit.

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

Debbie Erwin, applicant for this request, came forward to speak to this request. She said my day job is as the executive director of the Shenandoah Community Capital Fund. So, my entire lines work is helping entrepreneurs start small scale business. Nate over there is a mechanical and aerospace engineer who can help these entrepreneurs with the redesign of their products. This whole entire idea came to light as I have been working with entrepreneurs over the past seven years with SCCF as we have found that there is a lot of constraints when trying to get their prototype ready to scale. As we have been working with entrepreneurs we have realized if we can create a coworking style thing similar to what you see with Harrisonburg Innovation Hub and Student Innovation Hub but for manufacturers can we start really leaning into the leading industry within the Shenandoah Valley of light manufacturing. So, with that we have been working on this project for the past year. It is under construction currently and so we are hoping with this special use permit we can really create an environment for creativity and innovation to produce more products and economic vibrancy for Harrisonburg and the surrounding area.

Chair Finnegan asked if there were any questions for the applicant.

Commissioner Alsindi said do you believe that the place provides the proper environment for learning there given that it not vocation, so it is more of a learning specific to a certain age of applicants and students? Being on the street over there, in terms of the calmness and quietness nothing that distracts and interrupts the education process.

Ms. Erwin said the current education request that we have under the special use permit is particularly within one area of the building. You will see anchor spot 104 I believe it is on there and that is one reserved classroom. It is already blocked off with doors and things like that. The main entrance for that parking lot is around back which makes it easy for parents to drop off for the camps that this particular tenant is wanting to leverage it for. Not only is that educational environment there, but it is surrounded by more quiet innovation spaces which are open work spaces. The actual machine shop where your louder sounds are going to be along with your other pieces of equipment are actually around the corner in between two cement walls on a concrete slab. We have made sure for noise we are going to have to do some panels around the building, but his space is enclosed for his one training area to make it easy for those nine to 13 year-olds to really dig in to additive and subtractive manufacturing.

Chair Finnegan asked if there were any more questions for the applicant. Hearing none, he asked if there was anyone in the room or on the phone wishing to speak to the request.

Vice Mayor Dent said to me, it partially fills the giant hole left behind when Larkin Arts was closed downtown. What a wonderful space that was for arts and creativity. In fact, I know one of the people in it. The one who is creating the pottery studio and they did have us do the Downtown at Larkin Arts. This is a much more spacious and much broader perspective in trying to get businesses off of the ground so that is welcomed as well as kind of a manufacturing hub. What I wonder about a little bit, I guess I could have asked the applicant this, is the connection with JMU. I saw that there was some collaboration. There is the JMU makers space. I am seeing the applicant nodding, so yes. Overall, I think this is a great addition to the City. Now as I understand the special use permit is really just required because of the age of the children they want to have classes for.

Commissioner Baugh said and the nature. I mean the pottery could be for adults but that is not vocational.

Vice Mayor Dent said okay. Educational, artistic whatever. If staff has figured out what will support what they are going to do there, then I am in support of it.

Chair Finnegan said any other thoughts on this? I would agree with that. I think these types of spaces particularly when you see more and more office spaces potentially being vacant. We need to find ways to repurpose certain spaces and find ways to support new businesses, small businesses, people giving...It enriches the community and I think helps the economic development in the community. I would be in support of this. Any other thoughts? Motions?

Commissioner Washington said it does seem like a very creative use of space and then location wise you have a variety of uses around it. It looks like potentially walkable, easier to get to for folks in the neighborhood as well as people getting to the location.

Commissioner Baugh said I will go ahead and add to it. I know Zoning Ordinance amendment stuff is further down the road then we think would be ideal. Of course, emphasis has been residential not many industrial, but I can sort of remember the first time I heard of what I will call sort of a similar type of request. We actually did lose, this business decided not to locate in Harrisonburg. We had the flexibility. I think the underlying point is that for some of these industrial/commercial types of categories that traditionally our Zoning Ordinance covers it quite well. We sort of defined them and they were in their own little boxes and more and more we see these sorts of more innovative and flexible efforts and suddenly you find that in a world where you wanted to look at things as surely industrial or surely commercial. We cannot teach the class, or we cannot cook the stuff in the back, but we need to do because there is a food component even though that is not really what we are doing. I think there is a need to have this type of flexibility. I will go ahead and move approval of the special use permit request with the conditions as presented by staff.

Vice Mayor Dent seconded the motion.

Chair Finnegan called for a roll call vote.

Commissioner Armstrong	Aye
Commissioner Baugh	Aye
Vice Chair Byrd	Aye
Vice Mayor Dent	Aye
Commissioner Alsindi	Aye
Commissioner Washington	Aye
Chair Finnegan	Aye

The motion to recommend approval of the special use permit passed (7-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on August 8, 2023.