

Pamela S. Ulmer

From: noreply@harrisonburgva.gov on behalf of City of Harrisonburg, VA
<noreply@harrisonburgva.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, September 23, 2025 6:49 PM
To: Michael E. Parks; Pamela S. Ulmer
Subject: Webform submission from: Agenda Comment Form

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Submitted on Tue, 09/23/2025 - 18:48

Submitted values are:

Name

Sara Leichty

Type of Meeting

Harrisonburg City Council

Date of Upcoming Meeting

2025-09-23

Agenda Item Number

7c - The Link

Comment

I'm commenting tonight with feedback and questions regarding the Link proposal. I know you are taking a pause at the moment to collect information and consider options, although I'm not sure how you plan to structure and receive public input to you, council, separate from the developer. Receiving public input is a very different process than supporting a mediation that the developer organizes, both collects and dispenses information about, and pays for. That assumes the public feels that the best and only option is the current plan. True public input has absolutely no involvement with a single developer at the moment. I cannot believe that you as a city council working in the best interest of our community, and we as concerned citizens who want the best for our community, are boxed into only two alternatives for this landmark space: bad or worse. I hope we can all have a much bigger vision for how we can use this area and leave a much longer and more impactful mark on our community for years to come.

I think the city is presented with really exciting possibilities for this land. Ones that could create a place for equal public use, community building and gathering, and of honoring our area's history. You asked us to come up with alternatives, with options for this space, and we are. One major difference is time line: we are all local folks who love our community, and have other jobs contributing to that community. The developer has had your ear exclusively for the last 1.5 years (along with the fact that this is their full time job), so naturally as you are receiving one sided input, that is likely what will sway you. (This is why pharmaceutical companies can no longer give advertising gear and gifts to physicians, it sways unbiased decision making. Their lobbyists can be quite convincing too.) It is only in the last few months that the broader community has been aware and are working to give feedback. We are fitting that in the small spaces between the many other demands on our time, as unlike the developer, this is not our primary

job. But we are excited about some of the possibilities to explore with you. And unlike the developer, our motivation for this small yet critical piece of our downtown landscape is motivated by long term vision for what is best for our entire community, not by what is best for the developers pocketbook.

What is the space where we can give you - city council - our alternative ideas for the use of this critical gateway to our downtown? The developer has been allowed lengthy presentations to you as a group; countless individual and smaller group interactions....are we afforded that same opportunity? What if we were given the same amount of access to sharing vision that the developer has had?

We have some great ideas that are coalescing, that hold so much opportunity and future investment in our broader community. What is the platform where we are given the time and space to present and discuss them with you?

Would you like to be contacted by city staff?

Yes

If you would like to be contacted, please provide preferred contact information

sara.leichty@gmail.com

540-421-7929

Opposition to Rezoning Application for 435, 445, 457, 473, 483 & 495 South Main Street and 282, 288, 294 & 298 South Liberty St (The Link proposal)

September 5, 2025

Members of the City Council, Mr. Fletcher and Ms. Dang
City of Harrisonburg
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Dear Harrisonburg City Council, Mr. Fletcher and Ms. Dang:

I am writing to share my perspective regarding the proposed rezoning of the parcels located at 473 S. Main Street from R-3 (Medium Density Residential) to B-1C (Central Business District) to facilitate the development of The Link.

I served as a Planning Commissioner from April 2024 through July 2025 and voted in favor of the rezoning request at the July 9 Commission meeting, recognizing both the pressing demand for housing and the pivotal role that catalytic developments can play in shaping growing communities. As a downtown resident, I believe that cities thrive when development strengthens the connections between public spaces, activity hubs, and corridors that support local businesses and advance sustainable economic development strategies.

However, upon further reflection, I have reversed my stance on the rezoning request and proposal as currently presented and stand in opposition for three reasons:

- 1) ***Insufficient community input and engagement*** for a development of this magnitude;
- 2) ***Up to 40% of the apartments are to be four-bedrooms that will continually turn over*** when the need for permanent housing for Harrisonburg residents is severe;
- 3) ***Lack of alignment and context*** with the rich cultural history; architectural integrity; and character, cohesion and scale of our downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, as well as the craftsmanship and built heritage reflective of the Shenandoah Valley.

Further, I believe, the proposal inadequately addresses traffic and parking concerns and could discourage residents from coming downtown. The development dominates the landscape in mass and scale as it stands in the southern gateway to our city and City Hall—an area that should convey openness and welcome to all.

Additionally, extending Paul Street to accommodate increased density will not sufficiently address the traffic and safety impacts generated by the development. While the extension may improve circulation around Liberty Street, it doesn't consider the effects on existing Paul Street and Old Town residents. Neighbors report that students already park along Paul Street, which also is a heavily used shortcut between campus and downtown. Given the street's narrow width, traffic-calming bump-outs, and on-street parking, it is not designed to absorb additional trips. Also, charging premiums for resident parking spaces (where rents will be some of the highest in the city) is likely to push more vehicles onto surrounding residential streets rather than reduce demand for parking.

Part of this conversation should also acknowledge the vast amount of underutilized parking already available in downtown Harrisonburg. For example, the upper levels of existing city decks—such as the deck at Bruce and Liberty near Denton’s and the deck behind Blessed Sacrament Church—remain consistently underused. A more strategic approach might consider how to better integrate and manage these existing assets before adding new parking demand that further strains neighborhood streets.

Despite the undeniable need for housing and infrastructure that encourages more sustainable, non-auto forms of transportation and the desire to link the JMU campus to downtown, the city and its residents must balance the need for housing and amenities to accommodate long-term residents against the backdrop of a more temporary or transient student population.

I don’t think it is a reasonable assumption that residents of Downtown or Old Town would live without a vehicle at this point in time. While investments in infrastructure can improve walkability and access to amenities, downtown does not currently offer the full range of goods and services needed for daily life. Residents will continue to rely on cars for essential trips—to grocery stores, pharmacies, the mall, campus and other destinations.

Overall, in my view, the project’s current design lacks sensitivity to the local context that would make it compatible with the broader goals of preserving the city’s identity and supporting the long-term vibrancy of our downtown. As previously mentioned, it also raises significant traffic, parking, and public safety issues, highlighting tensions between public investment and private development.

I grew up on Paul and Franklin Streets and recently moved back to Harrisonburg after living out-of-state for 30 years. I think that as we move forward with urban development, we must balance growth with careful attention to our city’s historical roots and those who call it home while also considering that Harrisonburg is a destination place in the heart of the Valley. We must also find ways to be relentlessly intentional as a city and community in engaging not only JMU leadership but also EMU in discussions around community growth—from the urban core to the edges of the city.

I respectfully urge you to consider these perspectives as you evaluate this proposal and future development projects and pressures. This is a unique piece of real estate that deserves a larger community conversation.

Sincerely,

Kate Nardi
MS, Urban and Regional Planning

The Foundry
225-128 Old S. High Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22801
katenardi13@gmail.com
608-575-4178

To:
Mayor Deanna R. Reed
Vice Mayor Dany Fleming
Council Member Laura Dent

Council Member Monica Robinson
Council Member Nasser Alsaadun

Pamela S. Ulmer

From: Thanh Dang
Sent: Friday, August 22, 2025 8:21 AM
To: Pamela S. Ulmer; Adam Fletcher; Ande Banks; Amy E. Snider
Subject: Fw: revised input for Lindsay FH property rezoning

This message has already been shared with City Council. FYI.

Thanh Dang, AICP | Deputy Director of Community Development
(540) 432-7700 | Thanh.Dang@HarrisonburgVA.gov

From: Rob Alexander <robwalex@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, August 21, 2025 7:59 PM
To: Thanh Dang <Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov>
Subject: revised input for Lindsay FH property rezoning

WARNING: External email. Be cautious when clicking on links or opening attachments.

Thanh:

The following was sent to each Council Member, but I was instructed to also send these thoughts to you for inclusion in the broader public comment file. Thanks!

Council Members:

I hope that this email finds you well and enjoying the nice weather while we all adjust to schools being back in session.

I am writing to update my public comment regarding the rezoning request for the Lindsay Funeral Home property.

I greatly enjoyed attending the public hearing on this rezoning request as it allowed me to listen to my neighbors and community members and to think about this decision from multiple perspectives different than my own. After hearing these perspectives and talking with several people who shared them, I now have the following input:

1. This property needs to be rezoned to B-1c. It is clear from both evidence and the public hearing that a walkable, more sustainable and livable downtown Harrisonburg that grows economically while minimizing suburban sprawl and the car traffic that accompanies it requires this property to have high density housing built on it. By rezoning to B-1c and removing parking requirements, we are able to

maximize the use of this land to house the young professionals who showed up at the public hearing talking about how the lack of walkable housing limits small business development and growth. The fact that this rezoning is consistent with the Comp Plan, the Environmental Action Plan, and the Downtown 2040 plan, all developed with robust public input and approved or adopted by City Council cements my support for it. But ...

2. The Link as it is currently proposed is not the right development to occupy this B-1c rezoned property. Several comments at the public hearing stood out to me as to why this current proposal is not what we want, including:

- *The inclusion of 4br/4ba units that are marketed to university students.* For this to fulfill the need for mid to high-end housing for young professionals working in our downtown, what is constructed there should be limited to studios or two bedroom units. Students may still choose to live there, but it would not attract the usual revolving door of in-complex problems that developments that 4 br/4ba currently have. Also, this is not the place for a swimming pool or club house.
- *The minimal inclusion of commercial/retail space.* 2000 sq ft of commercial space is insufficient to make this an attractive amenity for residents living in walking distance to south downtown and would not 'reactivate' this portion of downtown, as suggested in the Downtown 2040 Plan. Old Town neighbors should have access to multiple businesses that meet their needs, not just another coffee shop. Having higher proportions of commercial to residential is part of a strong town approach and of improving both economic growth as well as walkability.
- *The business model of the developer of building and selling their (largely student-focused) properties within five years.* I found this research finding presented at the public hearing very interesting and concerning. We want builder/investors in our downtown to be committed to staying for the long haul so they can more meaningfully contribute to the community and grow/adapt with us.
- *The business model of the developer of being rental only.* The ability for residents to purchase a condominium like how I believe happens in parts of Urban Exchange creates greater buy-in of the building residents in their own living space as well as in the neighborhood in which they are embedded.

I do believe that Old Town traffic impacts would be negligible and treatable with the right development. I also believe that the aesthetics of design can be addressed to better conform to the brick/stone design standards of our best buildings. However, the four points I thought more carefully about listed above after the public hearing has altered my opinion.

Please ensure that this property becomes B-1c when the proposed development that best meets our sustainability, housing, economic, and aesthetic needs is presented. The Link as it is currently designed and likely to be managed for the long term is not that proposal.

Many thanks for your deliberation, your interest in examining evidence

Sincerely,

Rob Alexander

977 S. Dogwood Dr.

Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Dear Deanna,

I'm writing to you to let you know what I feel about the B-1C situation. As you know, I am against it, especially since I live in Old Town and what would happen in a negative sense.

As Deanna said at the Council meeting, more affordable housing for low income people is what our town needs.

My prayer concerning all of the council members is my favorite prayer, which goes,

"The happiest Christians I know give everything to God and He will do what is Best and Right."

I shall use this prayer for the right answer from all the council members but especially Danny and Deanna because I know you all.

In Christ's Love

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ellen S. Shuman".

TO CITY COUNCIL; REF: LINK-LINDSEY COMPLEX.
FROM: LIFETIME 90 YEAR OLD RESIDENT.

PLEASE VOTE NO ON ZONING REQUEST.
THIS IS NOT A REGULAR APARTMENT COMPLEX.
IT IS AN OFF-CAMPUS COMPLEX FOR
JMU STUDENTS WITH AN UGLY
INCONVENIENT PARKING DECK. IF YOU HAVE
USED A PARKING DECK, YOU KNOW THEY
ARE TIME CONSUMING. COLLEGE STUDENTS
ARE ALWAYS IN A HURRY, SO YOU GET
THE POINT! THEY WILL USE THE BAPTIST
CHURCH PARKING LOT, THE CITY HALL PARKING
LOT, AND THE TURNER-FARMERS PARKING
LOT.

THIS IS A VERY ATTRACTIVE AREA OF
THE CITY AND OLD TOWN WITH THREE
CHURCHES, A BEAUTIFUL FELIX LUNGE,
AND OTHER BEAUTIFUL TWO STORY
STRUCTURES AS PROFESSIONAL OFFICES.

NUMBERS: 265 APARTMENTS

40 PERCENT - 4 BEDROOM APTS. = 106 UNITS =
424 STUDENT

25 PERCENT - 1 B.R. YUPPIE APTS. = 66 UNITS =
66 RESIDENT.

35 PERCENT - OTHER - 93 UNITS - 93 OR MORE RESIDENT
NEEDED - PARKING FOR 583 RESIDENTS.

P.S. IF YOU THINK COLLEGE STUDENTS
DON'T HAVE VEHICLES, DRIVE OUT
PORT REPUBLIC ROAD AND SEE
HUGE PARKING LOTS AT STUDENT
HOUSING. ALSO HEAVY TRAFFIC
DURING SCHOOL SESSION.

THIS IS A WOLF IN SHEEPS CLOTHING
TRYING TO PULL THE WOOL OVER
YOUR EYES! VOTE NO!

A CONCERNED CITIZEN

P.S. #2: THE MOST URGENT NEED IS
A TURN LANE ON PORT REPUBLIC
ROAD BETWEEN DEVDN LANE
& FOREST HILLS DRIVE, THE
LAND IS STILL VACANT ON NORTH

P.S. #3: THE LEAST NEEDED PROJECT IS
A BICYCLE LANE DOWN THE MIDDLE
OF LIBERTY ST., WHICH IS ALSO US 11
SOUTH.