

CITY OF HARRISONBURG



July 8, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting

Title

Consider a request to rezone and a special use permit at 704 North Liberty Street — Nyrma Soffel, Community Development

Summary

Project name	N/A
Address/Location	704 North Liberty Street
Tax Map Parcels	40-N-1 and 2
Total Land Area	+/- 13,495.23 square feet
Property Owner	Jose Antonio Lopez Montiel
Owner's Representative	Colman Engineering
Present Zoning	R-2, Residential District
Proposed Zoning	R-8C, Small Lot Residential District Conditional
Proposed Special Use Permit	To reduce required side yard setbacks per Section 10-3-59.4(11)
Planning Commission	July 8, 2026 (Public Hearing)
City Council	Anticipated August 11, 2026 (First Reading/Public Hearing) Anticipated August 25, 2026 (Second Reading)

Recommendation

Option 1. Recommend approval of the rezoning with the recommended rejection to a portion of Proffer #1 and for the special use permit with the recommended condition.

Context & Analysis

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

Site: Single-family detached dwelling, zoned R-2

North: Single-family detached dwelling, zoned R-2

East: Across undeveloped alley, parking lot, zoned M-1

South: Across West Washington Street, vacant lot, zoned R-2 and residential uses, zoned M-1

West: Across North Liberty Street, single-family detached and duplex dwellings, zoned R-2

The applicant is requesting to rezone a +/- 13,495-square-foot property from R-2, Residential District to R-8C, Small Lot Residential District Conditional and is simultaneously applying for a

special use permit (SUP) per Section 10-3-59.4(11) to allow a reduction in required side yard setbacks in the R-8 district. The property is addressed as 704 North Liberty Street and is identified as tax map parcel 40-N-1 and 2. If approved, the applicant plans to subdivide the property into four lots with the plan to retain the existing single-family dwelling, build a duplex along the North Liberty Street frontage, and to construct a new single-family detached dwelling along the West Washington Street frontage.

Rezoning & Proffers

The applicant has offered the following proffers (written verbatim):

1. We proffer a right-of-way along the front of the three properties facing North Liberty Street, for the City to construct a sidewalk in the future. The right-of-way will extend 7.5 ft from the existing back of curb into the properties, as shown on the Rezoning Exhibit, and will be dedicated at minor subdivision. In addition, a 4 ft temporary grading easement beyond the proposed right-of-way will be provided for the City to have sufficient space to install the proposed sidewalk.
2. We proffer a portion of the property to be dedicated as right-of-way along West Washington Street to accommodate the existing City-built sidewalk, as shown on the Rezoning Exhibit.
3. We proffer to provide one shared entrance with a maximum total width of 24 feet to serve the duplex along North Liberty Street.

The conceptual site layout is not proffered.

In Proffer #1, the applicant proposes to dedicate right-of-way and a temporary grading easement along the North Liberty Street frontage to allow for the future construction of a sidewalk by the City. Staff supports the dedication of right-of-way and the temporary grading easement; however, staff recommends rejection of the statement “for the City to construct a sidewalk in the future.” The statement implies that the City, rather than the applicant, would construct the sidewalk and creates ambiguity regarding the Subdivision Ordinance (SO) requirements. If the property is subdivided as the applicant proposes, the SO would require sidewalk construction along North Liberty Street unless a variance is granted by City Council. Removing the statement would preserve the intended right-of-way dedication while avoiding conflict with the SO.

If the applicant does not want to construct the sidewalk, they may request a variance from the requirements of the SO. To this end, the applicant has already submitted a request for a Subdivision Ordinance (SO) variance to not construct the sidewalk, which at this time is anticipated to be presented for review during the August Planning Commission meeting.

Proffer #2 dedicates public right-of-way for the existing sidewalk along West Washington Street.

Proffer #3 requires that the duplex share one entrance, thereby reducing the number of potential entrances on North Liberty Street.

Special Use Permit

The applicant is requesting a SUP to allow reduced side yard setbacks. In the R-8 district, single-family detached and duplex dwellings that are two-stories require a minimum side yard setback of 7-feet and three-story structures require a minimum side yard setback of 10-feet. With an approved SUP, required minimum side yard setbacks can be reduced provided that the buildings are either sprinklered or that any exterior walls facing the property line with a reduced side yard setback are constructed with a minimum 1-hour fire-resistant assembly. If the exterior walls facing the property line with the reduced setback are constructed with a minimum 1-hour fire-resistant assembly, then any openings in those walls must be located only on the first floor, must have a minimum 1-hour fire rating, and must be fixed and inoperable. The applicant is proposing 5-foot side yard setbacks for all four proposed future parcels.

If the applicant were to subdivide in a different way or construct single-family detached or duplex dwellings in a different layout or combination, then, if approved, the SUP to allow reduced side yard setbacks would also apply.

Land Use

The Comprehensive Plan designates this site as Neighborhood Residential and states:

These areas are typically older residential neighborhoods, which contain a mixture of densities and a mixture of housing types, but should have more single-family detached homes than other types of housing. This type of land use highlights those neighborhoods in which existing conditions dictate the need for careful consideration of the types and densities of future residential development. Infill development and redevelopment must be designed so as to be compatible with the desired character of the neighborhood.

The surrounding properties include a mix of housing types. Staff believes the proposed infill development, consisting of one duplex and one single-family detached dwelling, conforms with the Land Use Guide designation and is compatible with the existing neighborhood.

Transportation and Traffic

The Determination of Need for a Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) form (“TIA determination form”) for the proposed rezoning is attached. The TIA determination form indicates that the project would not generate 100 or more new peak hour trips, which is the threshold for staff to require a TIA. Therefore, a TIA was not required for the rezoning request.

Public Water and Sanitary Sewer

Staff does not anticipate issues regarding water service for the proposed development. The applicant has been advised that they will be responsible for completing a study to confirm water capacity as part of the engineered comprehensive site plan process. Any public system improvements required to meet the increased demands resulting from the project will be the responsibility of the developer.

With regard to sanitary sewer infrastructure, there is currently no public sanitary sewer main available along North Liberty Street. For this project, the applicant will be responsible for

constructing an extension of the sanitary sewer main to serve this development. At this time, the applicant plans to extend sanitary sewer from West Washington Street to serve the duplex units.

Housing

The City's Comprehensive Housing Assessment and Market Study (Housing Study) places the subject property within Market Type D, which notes that "[m]arket type D has lower market activity as well as lower access to amenities. This could be because the areas are stable residential neighborhoods or because the area is less developed and therefore has fewer sales and fewer amenities. Strategies that would be appropriate in the latter case include concurrent development of the housing and economic opportunities through mixed-use developments to build commerce and housing centers across the City."

Although the site has limited access to amenities and green space for future residents, the addition of three new dwelling units supports the findings of the Housing Study by contributing to the housing supply.

Public Schools

The City contracted with the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service to complete a report titled "Population and School Enrollment Projections for the City of Harrisonburg" (April 2025). The report can be found at the following link: [https://harrisonburgva.gov/sites/default/files/city-manager/HarrisonburgSchoolEnrollment 2025-04-30 Final.pdf](https://harrisonburgva.gov/sites/default/files/city-manager/HarrisonburgSchoolEnrollment%2025-04-30%20Final.pdf). This report provides overall student enrollment projections through 2034 as well as estimated student generation by housing type for each elementary school attendance zone.

Based on the Weldon Cooper Center report's calculations, this development's proposed three new dwelling units are estimated to generate one K-12 student at full build-out. According to the School Board's current attendance boundaries, Waterman Elementary School, Thomas Harrison Middle School, and Harrisonburg High School would serve the students residing in this development.

Conclusion

The applicant's request is compatible with the Neighborhood Residential land use designation, and the addition of three new dwelling units supports the recommendations of the Housing Study for infill development. Staff recommends approval of the rezoning request; however, staff also recommends that Planning Commission reject the statement "for the City to construct a sidewalk in the future" in Proffer #1.

Staff also recommends approval of the SUP, but only with the following condition:

- The side yard setbacks may be reduced to not less than five feet.

Options

1. Recommend approval of the rezoning with the recommended rejection to a portion of Proffer #1 and for the special use permit with the recommended condition.
2. Recommend approval of the rezoning as submitted and special use permit with the recommended condition.

3. Recommend approval of the rezoning and special use permit as submitted by the applicant.
4. Recommend approval of the rezoning and special use permit with other conditions.
5. Recommend approval of the rezoning and denial of the special use permit.
6. Recommend denial of the rezoning and special use permit.

Attachments

- Site maps
- Applicant's supporting documents