



CITY OF HARRISONBURG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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March 25, 2025

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

SUBJECT: *Consider a request from James A. Herr to rezone 532 Hawkins Street*

**EXTRACT FROM THE DRAFT MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING
COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON: March 12, 2025**

Chair Baugh read the request and asked staff to review.

Ms. Soffel said the applicant is proposing to rezone a +/- 9,178 square foot parcel from R-3, Medium Density Residential District to R-5C, High Density Residential District Conditional. The property is addressed as 532 Hawkins Street and is identified as tax map parcel 27-L-22. If approved, the applicant plans to construct four townhouse-style, two-level multi-family dwelling units with two to three bedrooms each.

Proffers

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

1. Dwelling units may be occupied by a single family or no more than three (3) unrelated persons.
2. A minimum of one and one half (1.5) parking spaces per unit shall be provided.

The conceptual site layout is not proffered.

The R-5 district allows dwellings to be occupied by a family or not more than four persons. Proffer #1 reduces the allowable occupancy of dwelling units to either a family or not more than three persons. The minimum off-street parking requirements of Section 10-3-25 (7) allows for reduced parking when occupancy is restricted in specific districts. If the applicant had not proffered a reduced occupancy, they would have been required to provide up to 3.5 parking spaces per unit. Since they limited the occupancy, only one parking space per unit would be required by the ZO; however, as indicated in proffer #2, the applicant has proffered a minimum of 1.5 parking spaces per unit.

Land Use

The Comprehensive Plan designates this site as Medium Density Residential and states:

These areas have been developed or are planned for development of a variety of housing types such as single-family detached, single-family attached (duplexes and

townhomes), and in special circumstances, multi-family dwellings (apartments). Depending on the specific site characteristics, densities in these areas should be around 15 dwelling units per acre. Non-residential uses may also be appropriate.

Given the mix of housing types within this area of the City, staff believes that the four proposed townhouse-style apartment units would be in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan's Land Use Guide.

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 indicated 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.

Immediately to the west of the subject property is an undeveloped public alley. The applicant is planning to reconstruct and widen the entrance to the alley and improve it to provide access to a proposed parking lot to the rear of the building. The applicant is also conceptually demonstrating the construction of a private sidewalk extending along the side of the alley between the public sidewalk along Hawkins Street and the private parking lot. While the applicant is proposing to improve the alley, they are not requesting to close it and thus it would remain open for the public to use.

Public Water and Sanitary Sewer

While staff does not anticipate issues regarding water or sanitary sewer service availability for the proposed development, the applicant has been advised that they will be responsible for completing a study of the water and sanitary sewer capacity prior to submittal of an engineered comprehensive site plan. Any public system improvements required to meet the increased demands resulting from the project will be the responsibility of the developer.

Housing Study

The City's Comprehensive Housing Assessment and Market Study (Housing Study) places the subject property within Market Type C. Along with other details of this market type, it is the smallest but fastest growing market type in the City. Among other characterizations, Market Type C has a large number of university students. The Housing Study states "[l]ike Market Type A, Market Type C has above median overall access to amenities such as public transit within walking distance, full-service grocery stores, and multiple parks and recreation facilities." It goes on to say that "Market Type C has above median access to amenities yet is the most affordable market type in the City. The creation and preservation of affordable housing and construction of middle-income housing would be appropriate here as there are already amenities in place that would make these areas attractive locations for housing..." The Housing Study also notes that "[h]aving an adequate supply of smaller apartments in Market Types A and C is important because these block groups have higher scores for access to amenities such as jobs, parks, full-service grocery stores, and public transit."

When considering the need for providing more housing in the City, providing multi-family units at this location can be a positive result for this area of the City and for those individuals who want to reside in the City.

Public Schools

Staff from Harrisonburg City Public Schools (HCPS) noted that based on their student generation calculations, the proposed four residential units is estimated to result in four additional students. Based on the School Board's currently adopted attendance boundaries, Spotswood Elementary School, Skyline Middle School, and Rocktown High School would serve the students residing in this development. HCPS staff also noted that currently four of the six elementary schools exceed effective capacity.

For total student population projections, the City of Harrisonburg and HCPS both use the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service's projections. These projections are updated annually and are available at: <https://www.coopercenter.org/virginia-school-data>.

Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of the rezoning request, as presented.

Chair Baugh asked if there were any questions for staff. Hearing none, he invited the applicant or applicant's representative to speak to their request.

Gil Colman and James Herr, the applicant and the applicant's representative, came forward to speak to the request. Mr. Colman said I think what is interesting about it, as you saw on that exhibit, is we are trying to maximize the use of that property in many ways. It is one of the ways we have discussed many times with the City. How can we infill in the City in a way that is constructive and a way that provides, in our case, more affordable housing. This is something that we are proposing here that provides potential housing for three families. I want to say that the property itself is zoned R-3 which would allow for multifamily, however the density is what was limiting for us. Given the density of R-3 we could not have three units. I think it was just maybe two. That is why we are pursuing the rezoning to be able to accommodate two more units there. There were some questions also about the parking lot being in the back. That is on purpose. Having the parking lot in the back brings the units to the front and keeps all of the cars in the back. Having been on Planning Commission and all, that is something that we always look for and here we are achieving that. That is also thanks to the Fire Department and Public Works in terms of using the alley as the access to the parking lot. It is a public alley it is public access which will benefit us but also the neighbors and anybody developing behind us or to the side. Hopefully it is a win-win for everybody. We are thinking that we would like to put a playground here also because of the use of the units for families that are likely with young kids. It is a very tight site. We are working with something very tight and very difficult to accommodate, but we are hopeful that we can make it work. Any questions for us?

Vice Chair Finnegan said I had a question about the alley, would you be paving that or would it that be gravel? Right now is it just grass?

Mr. Colman said correct, it is undeveloped, it is grass.

Vice Chair Finnegan said what that alley that is shown on the left on that image, what sort of treatment would you be doing to that alley?

Mr. Colman said one of the discussions that we had with the Fire Department was where they would require us to pave it. There are requirements that we can build it in such a way that could

support the 80,000 pounds which is the fire engine [weight] to get back in there. Whether we pave it or not, at this point I do not think there is a commitment to pave it yet, but it is something that we may do. It is not a large alley so maybe there is a possibility. We have not really spoken in terms of whether we are going to have that paved or not. Right now, we do not know.

Vice Chair Finnegan said I live in a neighborhood with a lot of gravel and dirt alleys and so after a lot of car use it will rut them out.

Mr. Colman said I think in this case because of the requirement of the Fire Department it is going to have to be pretty well packed and maybe less likely to create ruts. Mainly because the ruts occur because you use loose gravel and that stuff starts spreading out once you are driving on it. Given the requirements here, I would think we would have something much sturdier than that. Perhaps it will be paved. Maybe the cost of the whole site dictates whether it gets paved or not.

Commissioner Porter said have you engaged in conversation with your neighbor to the west regarding this?

Mr. Herr said yes, some are here tonight and some of them may speak when invited. The second property just to the north is owned by a group of folks who said that if this moves forward they would be happy to work with us in any way that they could. This driveway would be constructed with a base that would be prepped for pavement. It will be a pretty solid compacted base.

Vice Chair Finnegan said I will just add that I appreciate that the parking is being put out of the way as opposed to fronting on the street. I think there is just far too much of that in Harrisonburg and I like the idea of putting the parking behind.

Mr. Colman said I think it also works in terms of if we do put a playground or if there are kids there all that is in back. For the playground purposes it is next to cars, but the cars are not going to be driving by there they are just going to be parked. Also having the sidewalks in the front, there are sidewalks already there. So it is easy to walk towards downtown or other areas. That was certainly something that we thought was fitting and it worked well for us also. As I mentioned before, it works better to have the parking in the back than in the front because of the setbacks.

Commissioner Nardi said do you have a sense of what the rental rates will be?

Mr. Herr said if this project were to move forward, this property would be sold to Bridge of Hope who provides housing for typically single women, single mothers. Right now, they have 12 families that they care for and their challenge is finding housing when they need it. I think we can offer this at an affordable rate that would allow them ownership. This is a national organization. I think there were two other places in the country that have their own units. This would be a big boost for this local organization.

Chair Baugh opened the public hearing and asked if there was anyone in the room or on the phone wishing to speak to the request.

Patricia Sayer, a resident at 182 Reservoir Street, came forward to speak to the request. She said Jim has come to us and talked to us about the different things that are possible. We have told him if we can work together somehow, I am in agreeance for this to go through. I think it would be a good thing to raise the neighborhood through there. There is a lot of on street parking on through there. I have lived there all my life; I grew up there. I think we are okay, and I think we can work with Jim to make this work out.

Chair Baugh asked if there was anyone in the room or on the phone wishing to speak to the request. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing and opened the matter for discussion.

Vice Chair Finnegan said I think this is a good use. This is a good example of zoning infill with thoughtful treatment of parking not in the front but in the back. I certainly support the mission of Bridge of Hope.

Commissioner Porter said I would definitely speak to the issue at hand here which is affordable housing and also an organization like Bridge of Hope. I am a nonprofit director at Mercy House and I am very familiar with Bridge of Hope. I believe that they would be outstanding stewards of this property should they acquire it. I think that it would be exactly the sort of thing that neighborhood would want to have anchor it. I assure you I believe that they would be good neighbors. When I saw the property yesterday my first concern was for you, so I am glad you guys have had a good conversation. I would strongly encourage the commission to consider this just based on multiple merits.

Commissioner Nardi said I would agree with both statements. We are increasing the number of units available and we want to do that. The density and use of the site and again the parking in the back and a benefit to the community.

Commissioner Porter said I would like to make a motion to accept the request.

Vice Chair Finnegan seconded the motion.

Chair Baugh called for a roll call vote.

Commissioner Nardi	Aye
Vice Chair Finnegan	Aye
Commissioner Washington	Aye
Commissioner Porter	Aye
Chair Baugh	Aye

The motion to recommend approval of the rezoning request passed (5-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on April 8, 2025.