



CITY OF HARRISONBURG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

409 SOUTH MAIN STREET, HARRISONBURG, VA 22801

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To: Eric Campbell, City Manager
From: Adam Fletcher, Director – Department of Community Development and Harrisonburg Planning Commission
Date: March 9, 2021 (Regular Meeting)
Re: Preliminary Plat – SM Valley Mall, LLC (Subdivision Ordinance Variances to Sections 10-2-43 and 10-2-61(c))

Summary:

Consider a request from SM Valley Mall, LLC to preliminarily subdivide a +/- 38.77-acre parcel into three lots consisting of a +/- 0.78-acre lot, and a +/- 0.75-acre lot, both fronting on East Market Street and a third lot consisting of the residual +/- 37.24 acres. The request includes variance requests from the Subdivision Ordinance for deviation from public general utility easement requirements and to not construct sidewalks. The property is located at 1915, 1925, 1945, and 2005 East Market Street and is identified as tax map parcel 78-C-3.

Staff and Planning Commission (7-0) recommended to approve the Preliminary Plat with requested variances.

Background:

The Comprehensive Plan designates this site as Commercial. Commercial uses include retail, office, professional service functions, restaurants, and lodging uses. Commercial areas should offer connecting streets, biking and walking facilities, and public transit services. Interparcel access and connections are essential to maintaining traffic safety and flow along arterials. Parking should be located to the sides or rear of buildings.

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

- Site:** Retail shopping center, zoned B-2
- North:** Across University Boulevard, business and retail/commercial uses, zoned B-2
- East:** Across East Market Street, business and retail/commercial uses, zoned B-2
- South:** Business and retail/commercial uses, zoned B-2; Warehouse and sales use, zoned M-1
- West:** Business and retail/commercial uses, zoned B-2

Key Issues:

The applicant is requesting to preliminarily subdivide one parcel into three lots consisting of a +/- 0.78-acre lot (Wells Fargo) a +/- 0.75-acre lot (Popeye's), and a residual lot consisting of +/- 37.24 acres (Valley Mall). The first two lots will have frontage on East Market Street, and the third lot will have frontage along East Market Street and University Boulevard. The application includes variance requests from the Subdivision Ordinance for deviation from public general utility easement requirements and to not construct sidewalk along University Boulevard. If approved, the applicant intends to sell the two smaller lots and retain ownership of the residual Valley Mall parcel.

The subject property is an existing retail shopping center with public water and sanitary sewer currently serving the site. The mall building is served by a 10-inch private water line that surrounds the entire building. The proposed two "new" lots are served by a 12-inch public water main which runs along the length of the property frontage parallel to East Market Street. An existing 8-inch public sanitary sewer main runs along the northern property boundary within the University Boulevard right-of-way and serves the existing site through a series of private sanitary sewer easements. With regard to stormwater management, the site is developed with existing stormwater facilities.

As part of the preliminary plat, the applicant is requesting variances to Sections 10-2-43 and 10-2-61(c) of the Subdivision Ordinance. Section 10-2-43 requires a 10-foot wide public general utility easement along front lot lines and any lot adjacent to public right-of-way and requires at least a 10-foot wide public general utility easement centered on the sides or rear of lot lines. The applicant has stated that the land being subdivided is developed and all buildings are currently served by necessary utilities and easements. Therefore, new public general utility easements along interior and exterior lot lines are not needed. The applicant is proposing a variable width public general utility easement (labeled on the preliminary plat as a "permanent joint-use utility easement") to extend the entire length of the property frontage along University Boulevard. Also, the applicant is proposing to dedicate a variable width utility easement along the entire frontage of East Market Street for the three proposed parcels. This easement will be at least 10-feet from the center of any public sanitary sewer or water lines, and 5-feet from the center of any other utilities (electric, cable, phone, etc.). Location of the proposed variable width utility easement will be delineated on the final plat once all the utilities are located. The title of the easement will be determined once it is known what utilities are there.

Section 10-2-61(c) of the Subdivision Ordinance requires sidewalk be constructed and, where necessary, right-of-way be dedicated when a property that is being subdivided fronts on an existing street and adjacent property on either side has an existing sidewalk. The residual Valley Mall parcel has +/- 700 feet of street frontage along University Boulevard and no sidewalk. The adjacent property, identified as tax map parcel 78-C-4, has sidewalk; therefore, construction of sidewalk and right-of-way dedication, if necessary, is required. The applicant has stated that construction of the sidewalk would impose a significant unplanned expense at a time when Valley Mall sales and income have decreased due to the pandemic. Also, there are existing utilities in the path of the sidewalk that would require relocation, adding significantly to construction costs.

Strategy 13.1.5 of the Comprehensive Plan encourages measures to expand the network of pedestrian infrastructure (sidewalks and shared use paths) so that streets will have pedestrian accommodations on both sides of the street and staff supports sidewalk construction throughout the City. Currently, the City has a fully funded project for sidewalk construction within this area which includes the Valley Mall frontage along University Boulevard. The project is funded by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) with funds becoming available in 2023. The project includes sidewalk along University Boulevard and Evelyn Byrd Avenue with an estimated completion date around 2026-2027. Although staff

does not agree with the applicant's reasoning for the variance to Section 10-2-61(c), staff supports the variance because the sidewalk construction funds are already secured. The applicant has agreed to dedicate a variable width (12 to 15-ft.) public sidewalk easement along the University Boulevard street frontage. This will allow construction of the new sidewalk without the need for the City to obtain right-of-way and will also allow for relocation of utility junction boxes outside of the sidewalk area and into the new easement.

The buildings on the proposed new lots (Wells Fargo and Popeye's) meet current setback regulations for the B-2 zoning district. Staff has discussed with the applicant that off-street parking and parking lot landscaping requirements must be met for each of the new lots. The applicant has stated they intend to create a shared parking agreement between Valley Mall and the new lots. This will resolve any parking or landscaping deficiencies and the applicant is aware that the shared parking agreement will need to be in place prior to approval of the final plat.

Additionally, located on the subject property is a non-conforming billboard sign. When a property has non-conforming signage and the property owner desires to subdivide the property, the subdivision could impact existing signs and necessitate changes to them (i.e. reduced square footages or removal.) Staff originally believed the existing non-conforming billboard sign would need to be removed due to the proposed subdivision. Upon further investigation, it was determined that the proposed subdivision will not negatively impact their allotted signage. However, the applicant should be aware that if they desire to create outparcels along University Boulevard, signage could be negatively impacted.

Staff recommends approval of the preliminary plat and variances as requested.

Environmental Impact:

N/A

Fiscal Impact:

N/A

Prior Actions:

N/A

Alternatives:

- (a) Approve the preliminary plat and variances as requested;
- (b) Approve the preliminary plat and variances with conditions; or
- (c) Deny the request.

Community Engagement:

As required by the Subdivision Ordinance, a sign was posted giving public notice to the request for a variance to deviate from the standards of the Subdivision Ordinance.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends alternative (a) approval of the preliminary plat and variances as requested.

Attachments:

- 1. Extract from Planning Commission

2. Site maps
3. Application and supporting documents
4. Preliminary plat

Review:

Planning Commission (7-0) recommended alternative (a) approval of the preliminary plat and variances as requested.