



CITY OF HARRISONBURG COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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January 29, 2026

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

SUBJECT: *Consider a request from Craig D. And Sue W. Smith for a special use permit at 660 Walnut Lane*

**EXTRACT FROM THE DRAFT MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG PLANNING
COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON: January 14, 2026**

Chair Baugh read the request and asked staff to review.

Commissioner Seitz said I do not have the official language in front of me, but I must recuse myself from this. Our firm LDDBlueline Inc. is working for Matchbox Realty preparing the permit drawings for this project.

Commissioner Seitz left Council Chambers.

Chair Baugh said one of the reasons I am a bit of stickler for that is that attorneys get stuck. There is no attorney-client privilege for him. There is for attorneys, and I guess in theory the answer is you should not say anything unless you absolutely know you have affirmative permission. Sometimes the thing I read might sound cryptic it is not meant to be evasive it is meant to stay on the right side of the rules.

Ms. Rupkey said the subject property is +/- 16,400 square feet and addressed as 660 Walnut Lane. In 2023, the subject property had been posted unfit for human habitation due to unsanitary conditions, and zoning staff determined the single-family detached dwelling was over-occupied with up to 15 unrelated individuals residing in the unit. The property owner believed they had the nonconforming ability to have 10 unrelated individuals within the structure. However, even if the property owner had been able to demonstrate that the property once had nonconforming occupancy, the property had exceeded 10 unrelated individuals living within the structure, which meant that any nonconforming occupancy status it might have had was terminated and became unlawful per the regulations of Section 10-3-21 (a). In addition to the occupancy violation, zoning staff issued a notice of violation for an illegal fraternity use.

After losing the ability to have higher occupancy within the structure as explained above, the applicant applied for a special use permit to allow for a boarding and rooming house on the property, which, if approved, would have granted the ability to have up to 10 persons within the structure. While the property was (and still is) designated Mixed Use by the Comprehensive Plan's Land Use Guide, at that time, given the known irresponsible upkeep of the building and the reported Police Department calls for service associated with the property, staff did not believe it was in the best interest of the community or the long-term plans for the surrounding area to approve a boarding and rooming house at this location. Staff recommended denial of the boarding and rooming house SUP. Ultimately, Planning Commission recommended denial of the request 5-2 and City Council unanimously denied the application in January 2024.

The current request is for a SUP to allow the existing single-family detached dwelling to be converted into multiple-family units. The size of the property would allow the structure to be converted into five dwelling units. However, at this time, the applicant plans to provide four, three-bedroom units. The structure has a basement with a kitchen that will be removed, and the space will be used for utilities and storage.

Land Use

The Comprehensive Plan designates this site as Mixed Use and states:

The Mixed Use category includes both existing and proposed areas for mixed use. Mixed Use areas shown on the Land Use Guide map are intended to combine residential and non-residential uses in neighborhoods, where the different uses are finely mixed instead of separated. Mixed Use can take the form of a single building, a single parcel, a city block, or entire neighborhoods. Quality architectural design features and strategic placement of green spaces for large scale developments will ensure development compatibility of a mixed use neighborhood with the surrounding area. These areas are prime candidates for “live-work” and traditional neighborhood developments (TND). Live-work developments combine residential and commercial uses allowing people to both live and work in the same area. The scale and massing of buildings is an important consideration when developing in Mixed Use areas. Commercial uses would be expected to have an intensity equivalent to a Floor Area Ratio of at least 0.4, although the City does not measure commercial intensity in that way.

Downtown is an existing area that exhibits and is planned to continue to contain a mix of land uses. The downtown Mixed Use area often has no maximum residential density, however, development should take into consideration the services and resources that are available (such as off-street parking) and plan accordingly. Residential density in Mixed Use areas outside of downtown should be around 24 dwelling units per acre, and all types of residential units are permitted: single-family detached, single-family attached (duplexes and townhomes), and multi-family buildings. Large scale developments, which include multi-family buildings are encouraged to include single-family detached and/or attached dwellings.

The proposed conversion of the existing single-family dwelling into four, three-bedroom apartment units is consistent with the types of uses anticipated by the Mixed Use designation of the Comprehensive Plan.

Parking Lot

A multiple-family building in the R-3 district is required to have 2.5 parking spaces for each 3-bedroom dwelling. Four, three-bedroom units require 10 off-street parking spaces. The site currently includes parallel and angled parking spaces with 14 delineated parking spaces. However, the parking layout does not meet the Design and Construction Standards Manual's (DCSM) dimensional sizing requirements for parking spaces and travelways. Since the applicant is proposing a change of use on the site, they must modify the parking lot to meet DCSM requirements.

The applicant has provided a parking plan that shows the removal of parallel parking spaces, two-way traffic within the parking lot, nine 90-degree parking spaces, and use of two parking spaces on the parcel addressed as 635 South Main Street. In the provided parking plan, the applicant is not showing required accessible parking spaces. They would likely need to remove one of the proposed 90-degree parking spaces in order to accommodate accessible parking space requirements. If the SUP is approved, a parking layout meeting the DCSM requirements must be provided along with a copy of the executed shared parking agreement prior to issuance of a building permit and modification to the parking lot must be completed prior to issuance of a certificate of occupancy. The existing structure at 635 South Main Street is being remodeled into a duplex and would be required to provide one off-street parking space per unit; therefore, it has excess parking spaces to share with 660 Walnut Lane.

Transportation and Traffic

A traffic impact analysis (TIA) was not required for the SUP request.

Public Water and Sanitary Sewer

Staff has no concerns with the requested SUP regarding water and sewer matters.

Housing Study

The City's Comprehensive Housing Assessment and Market Study (Housing Study) has this property in a Census block group that is classified as "No Data" according to market types. This block group did not have any housing sales data at the time of the study. The Housing Study identified that there is strong demand for expanding rental housing inventory at the lowest and highest income spectrum because the number of households in the lowest and highest income groups significantly exceed the number of housing units available for and affordable to them.

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 Projects 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. 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 calculation, this development's proposed four residential units are estimated to generate two K-12 students at full build-out. According to the School Board's current attendance boundaries, Keister Elementary School, Thomas Harrison Middle School, and Harrisonburg High School would serve the students residing in this development.

Conclusion

Staff finds that the proposed SUP for apartments is consistent with the Mixed Use designation in the Comprehensive Plan. Staff recommends approval of the SUP request as submitted by the applicant. While the applicant plans to have four, three-bedroom dwelling units, staff is comfortable with the possibility that the property owner provides the maximum number of multiple-family dwelling units allowed in the R-3 district, which is five dwelling units, and/or increase the number of bedrooms in each multiple-family unit. Note that increasing the number of units and/or bedrooms would also increase the required number of parking spaces.

Chair Baugh invited the applicant or applicant's representative to speak to their request.

Weston Bayes, applicant's representative with Matchbox Realty, came forward to speak to the request. He said we are excited about the project. We took over control and management of this property in June of 2024. Since then, really our goal is to make it a place where we can beautify what it is there and then also support density and align ourselves with the Comprehensive Plan going forward. So, the thought around this is this is a 6,400 square foot structure. There are four people living in it right now. It is very challenging for them, it has baseboard heat. When we are in February they are paying a \$1,600 heating bill. In order to relieve some of the stress of dealing with some of those things the thought is to have these four different units. Create ownership around those four units. Ensure that it is not just four people living in a large 6,400 square foot house. It would be 12 people living there – which addresses a lot of safety and security concerns that we have on the day-to-day basis of who is kind of in what part of the house and what is being monitored. Our main goal here is the house itself is really beautiful as it stands and is just kind of an interesting piece of history. This house used to sit where historic Cantrell [Avenue] was extended and it was ultimately moved to the location it is now in the 1970s. We really want to preserve some of that character. What we are doing here is bringing a building up to fire and building codes by investing a sprinkler system for the building to ensure that we are meeting any safety occupancy issues. Really why we think this is a good thing is that it matches the density goal for the Comprehensive Plan in what would be this mixed use area. The safety and security, I think we are excited about what is happening with Liberty Street and feel like that plan would really align with ensuring walkability and safety for the residents that live back there. As well as maintaining the property from a standpoint of making sure we can invest back into the property in a way that is responsible and ensures the longevity of the property. With that I am happy to take any questions. I also did want to thank Meg and the team for their help with this process and the pre [application] meeting, I appreciate that you guys do that. That was helpful for me to hear from the different heads of departments.

Councilmember Dent said this is another déjà vu all over again. I remember when it came out as a boarding house and we just said no. You are right, it is a shame to have only four people knocking around in this huge house, so this is a great solution. We knew this is what we would recommend. We could not exactly say “do this” to the owners, but it would take some reconstruction or maybe it is already somewhat in a layout of apartments.

Mr. Bayes said it is in a layout of the apartments. Right now, when you walk in and there is a common stairwell and then there are two doors that enter the units and then on all four units there

is a kind of a kitchen area. We would be doing fire doors for each unit to create the separation. There is really not much happening internally.

Councilmember Dent said the sprinklers that is a key thing for a multifamily. I was looking at the layouts and these places are huge. How do the units work? Two living rooms and two kitchens or are these two sperate units.

Mr. Bayes said do you mind if I come up?

Councilmember Dent said sure.

At this time, Mr. Bayes walked up to the dais and reviewed images of the building layout that were provided in the application materials with Councilmember Dent, and then Mr. Bayes returned to the podium.

Chair Baugh said I will note for the people observing that what we have in our packets are diagrams for the two floors. Ideally, we would like to have you [referring to Mr. Bayes] at the podium. If I have thought of a way to accomplish what you just accomplished and do that I would have suggested that. If any of the Commission members want to look at this in more detail and cannot sort it out this way just speak up. It is really looking at these drawings and trying to make sure...Councilmember Dent wanted to make sure she was looking at them and understanding what went where. Basically, four units.

Mr. Bayes said I think also to speak to Councilmembers Dent's comment about kind of the last time this came up as a boardinghouse. We [Matchbox] were not necessarily involved in that piece and one of the reasons that I think this is kind of gotten to the place it is that we are willing to make the investment of the sprinkler systems. Putting in \$85,000 to make this something that is safe and people feel good about those units.

Vice Chair Porter said can I ask if the existing residents are students? Do you anticipate that this would likely be student housing?

Mr. Bayes said the four residents that we have are currently students. I would anticipate that future [residents] would be students. I think in that area just the proximity to James Madison University (JMU) those houses on that whole piece have historically passed down from students from year to year from just knowing that JMU is right there.

Vice Chair Porter said just in terms of managing the property, what assurances can we have that we are not going to get a reconfigured version of what was already there previously when we had fifteen nonrelated students living there? We just divided the units up and if you put the same folks back in the same place. Obviously, the sprinkler system is a tremendous upgrade but in terms of ensuring this does not become overcrowded if there is no violation of lease terms, I assume you all would be managing and monitoring that.

Mr. Bayes said absolutely. I think an additional plus is that Matchbox, as a whole, has a management interest but there is also a financial interest from an ownership position. What our

policies and procedures that we have put in place from a management standpoint, obviously there is going to be things that happen, but our goal is to be able to be proactive on those things rather than reactive. Right now, for this property specifically, we do interior and exterior inspections on a very frequent basis to ensure that anything that is happening on the property we know about. I personally jumped in on the residential inspections this winter to help with the winter inspections. I was in there making sure the heat was on and the windows were closed. We are very hands on and especially with this property I think the goal is to make sure that it is not a nuisance and that we are being responsible stewards of it.

Vice Chair Porter said how would the leases be configured? Is it going to be any rent by the bedroom in this or this going to be a primary lease holder or a set of leaseholders per unit that share a common lease?

Mr. Bayes said if we had the four units there would be a lease for each unit with the three tenants on that lease. They would be responsible for their bedroom from a standpoint of whatever happens in there. They are saying okay I am in bedroom one, I am bedroom two, and I am in bedroom three, but they are all on the lease together. Which again I think it helps create ownership as a whole pride of ownership of the property and making sure that it is being cared for.

Chair Baugh asked if there were any more questions for the applicant. Hearing none, he opened the public hearing and invited anyone in the room or on the phone wishing to speak to the request.

Roberta McCorkle, a resident at 95 Campbell Street, came forward to speak to the request. She said I am so thankful to Matchbox for this model. I can only hope that this can be replicated again and again and again so that these houses, that are well built and historic, can be repurposed, can be invested in, and can provide homes. Whether it be for students or faculty members it is so much more compatible for that strip of land for the people who live there. If you see the school buses come in the morning and you think about little children who have to be disturbed at night by cattiewalling and calls for police service and certainly this is a much better model for that area. It is just exciting for that investment of the infrastructure to think that this repurposed home can keep going on. Behind my property is Campbell Court. Campbell Court was built in 1940 and has been occupied continuously. It is also a Matchbox property. I myself lived there when I relinquished my home to my family briefly during Covid. The people who live downtown in these properties they do not have all the bells and whistles, but it is a community of old people, young people, people are newly arrived, people who have lived here forever. I just have to say there is a lot of criticism of people who are landlords. It is tough being a landlord and it is going to get tougher. The costs of renovations are skyrocketing. This is an exciting project and I think if more neighbors were aware of this they would say the same thing. Thank you very much.

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.

Commissioner Jezior said I think it is a great use of the property there and I agree with what you want to do there.

Councilmember Dent I was astounded to learn that this whole building was moved when they built what is now MLK [Martin Luther King Jr. Way].

Commissioner Kettler said I have had friends live in units like this where it was one large single family historic home and repurposed to allow multiple different units. I agree it is a great use of a property. It allows for more investment in it and you can keep the building which is great. It is just a cool place to live.

Vice Chair Porter said I also greatly appreciate the fact that we are taking something that is potentially a nuisance to the community and moved it forward and it is going to be managed in a much more responsible manner. I really appreciate the fact that these are being leased by the bedroom. It does open the potential for a family to possibly rent one of these units if they so chose. I realize that its proximity to JMU will make it likely that it could be students and I respect that. The fact is because leases are configured such as they are they would be more likely that there could be a possibility that someone other than students could rent this space. Where if it was leased by the bedroom, which I find problematic, it could potentially preclude another type of tenant from coming into that space. I also appreciate the fact that there is going to be good oversight.

Commissioner Kettler said I did have one question for staff. I am not as familiar with the Design and Construction Standards Manual for parking layout. I have read it and I am not entirely sure if I understand it still. If you could just explain why those fourteen spaces do not meet those requirements.

Ms. Rupkey said the existing spaces that are there today, the width and length of the parking spaces do not meet the standards that are needed. The distance between the angled parking spots to the existing parallel parking spots that are there does not allow for two-way traffic with the amount of space that is there and then there is also a fire lane that goes through that area.

Commissioner Kettler said basically if someone is trying to re-maneuver and try to get out they would be blocking a fire truck on that last part.

Ms. Rupkey said the fire lane is where the existing parking spaces end and where the parallel spaces are there is not enough room for maneuvering two-way traffic at this time. Then the fire lane was just an aspect in there that the parking spaces may have encroached into that fire lane.

Mr. Fletcher said the Design and Construction Standards Manual requires a certain dimension for certain types of parking. What they are showing on the screen here is 90-degree parking so if standard parking spaces are 9'x18', nine feet wide, eighteen feet long. When you have a two-way travel lane you need 20 feet of width behind that area. This area, the way it is built today, does not accommodate those dimensional standards so they will have to figure out a way to make that work. They may have to go out there and sort of dig up some land and put in some new spaces.

Ms. Dang said in this case I believe they anticipate that they would be able to use the existing pavement and just restripe what they need and then borrow the spaces from 635 [South Main Street]. They could also expand the parking lot by taking up existing grassy area and putting new spaces.

Ms. Rupkey said in this proposed parking plan they have removed the parallel parking spaces so it allows for more back out space for cars to provide two-way traffic.

Commissioner Kettler said any potential future change in minimum parking requirements would be a totally separate issue from the DCSM standards those would still apply where parking does exist.

Ms. Rupkey said correct.

Mr. Fletcher said the way we are moving forward, yes.

Councilmember Dent said the agreement for the borrowed parking spaces around the corner... I came in on Grattan Street to Walnut Street but then I saw that there is essentially a right in/right out off of MLK [Martin Luther King Jr. Way]. That is relatively accessible to that house as well.

Commissioner Alsindi said Mr. Fletcher just a follow up question, the idea is to make the parking wider now?

Mr. Fletcher said from the measurements they just need to ensure when they go through the change of use and when they go through the building permit process they will have to give us a more detailed parking plan and they will have to confirm for us that they are meeting the Design and Construction Standards Manual for the dimensional requirements. If they are not, then they would have to redesign the space or just make it wider to meet those standards.

Commissioner Alsindi said I do not know how relevant it is what I am saying here is, but this just came to my mind that cars in old times were bigger than now making parking lots wider. Nowadays cars are becoming smaller even.

Councilmember Dent said there are big trucks too.

Councilmember Alsindi said yes definitely.

Councilmember Dent said the key problem is the parallel parking behind these which blocks the space so they need the extra two.

Vice Chair Porter said I just wanted to confirm, if they chose to expand this further reconfigure and add another unit or add additional bedrooms or subdivide bedrooms, this would have to come back before us?

Ms. Rupkey said the parking plan would be evaluated within our zoning department. Our zoning team would review it when they are doing building permits.

Councilmember Dent said I move that we approve the request for special use permit at 660 Walnut Lane as presented by staff.

Commissioner Alsindi seconded the motion.

Chair Baugh said I think I support this. It is a challenging property. I think one of the issues that they addressed really well was our issues. Maybe it is as direct as they get what we hinted before, but I do not really think I was thinking about that level of specificity. It is just the way that building could have been used. When you have forced people to live in there it seems like a pretty inefficient use of space. What we proposed before it seemed to be the type of place that was going to have some of the concerns that the Vice Chair was talking about. I think it had 20 people in it to our knowledge before and it was sort of laid out in a way that was going to be accommodating to that. I think all of this is a step in the right direction. It's housing is consistent with what is in the neighborhood. I plan on supporting this.

Commissioner Kettler said I agree. The only other comment that I would add is that I do think the parking minimums in this are overly restrictive. If we are talking about a family and they have four kids they may well not need two and a half parking spaces. This prescribes something that may not necessarily meet those needs. That is no issue of this plan. This is a great plan.

Chair Baugh said I knew of a situation, not in this jurisdiction, that there was a time when I knew a lot less about land use and how government offices work but I sort of guessed right. The short version was a landlord needed some more parking spaces, so he just went out one day and paid somebody to restripe the lot to make all the spaces smaller. Then they started ticketing people with larger vehicles for not parking within the confines of the space. There is that sort of potential that we ought to be open to looking at them as it is right now. In a nutshell the issue is yeah they have parking spaces they are not big enough based on the rules.

Commissioner Kettler said the DCSM standards, has the sizes for a standard parking space changed significantly over time?

Mr. Fletcher said it is very standard like everywhere. You can do compact spaces. It could be 8'x17'. We allow 25% of required parking to be compact spaces. You have to designate them and then sign them appropriately so that people know that they are compact spaces. Design criteria for travel lane widths are relatively standard. There is some flexibility that we have been able to offer at certain sites across the City where if we know it is an in and out or a smaller space in the past our City Engineer has allowed for provisions for flexible arrangements to allow reduced travel lane widths. The best example I can provide and is an example that I hear people complain most about, in hindsight we should have looked at it a little differently is, James Madison Square along Port Republic Road where the Starbucks is located. That particular parking lot was given some flexible arrangements by the City Engineer to allow for reduced travel widths. If anyone has traveled out in that space and tried to pull in and park you will recognize that some of those turning angles are rather tight. At times when you try to park in a parking spot you might have to do a three point turn to get in and out of certain spaces. Almost every time I go there I think about that. Not that we did anything wrong I am just giving an example.

Chair Baugh called for a roll call vote.

Commissioner Jezior Aye

Councilmember Dent	Aye
Commissioner Alsindi	Aye
Commissioner Kettler	Aye
Vice Chair Porter	Aye
Chair Baugh	Aye

The motion to recommend approval of the special use permit passed (6-0). The recommendation will move forward to City Council on February 10, 2026.

At this time, Commissioner Seitz returned to the meeting.