



January 14, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting

Title

Consider a request for a Special Use Permit at 660 Walnut Lane — Meg Rupkey, Community Development

Summary

Project name	N/A
Address/Location	660 Walnut Lane
Tax Map Parcels	25-L-8A
Total Land Area	+/- 16,486 square feet
Property Owner	Craig D. Smith and Sue W. Smith
Owner's Representative	Matchbox Reality
Present Zoning	R-3, Medium Density Residential District
Special Use Permit Request	Sec. 10-3-48.4. (6) to allow for a multifamily building
Planning Commission	January 14, 2026 (Public Hearing)
City Council	Anticipated February 10, 2026 (Public Hearing)

Recommendation

Option 1. Recommend approval of the special use permit request as submitted by the applicant.

Context & Analysis

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

Site: Single-family detached dwelling, zoned R-3

North: Multifamily dwelling, zoned R-3

East: Single-family detached dwellings, zoned R-3

South: Across Martin Luther King Jr. Way, house of worship and residential uses, zoned R-3

West: Across Walnut Lane, multifamily dwellings, zoned R-3

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.

Options

1. Recommend approval of the special use permit request as submitted by the applicant.
2. Recommend approval of the special use permit with conditions(s).
3. Recommend denial of the special use permit.

Attachments

- Site maps
- Application and supporting documents