

Dear Councilmembers and Planning Commissioners,

I write in favor of the rezoning request for “The Link Apartments” on the property currently predominately occupied by the Lindsay Funeral Home. I favor the proposal because:

- 1) it provides for the needs of students without disrupting the larger community,
- 2) it can serve as a force multiplier for walkability and downtown businesses, and
- 3) it provides flexibility in further south downtown parking changes.

Needed and Nondisruptive Student Housing

For better or worse, student housing strongly impacts the relationship between JMU and the City. JMU’s relative lack of on-campus housing also pushes students into Old Town, creating conflicts there. Other student housing exists farther away, with infrequent public transportation, and roads hostile to walking or biking. On the other hand, downtown Harrisonburg could hardly exist in its current form without large numbers of students shopping at downtown businesses and packing Billy Jacks every night.

While not exclusively a student development, this proposal appears poised to provide needed student housing without contributing to problems caused by student housing elsewhere. Being about ¼ mile from JMU, it seems likely that many students will not use a car, or will do so less frequently. Neighborhood disruptions seem far less likely: it’s hard to have too wild a party a three-minute drive away from the police department.

Walkability and Downtown Businesses

A large residential development in this area can serve as a catalyst for the kind of growth we actually want to see. Anyone who has walked between Hotel Madison and City Hall knows what I’m talking about. Drivers feel comfortable driving at high speeds along this stretch, often not slowing down until they approach Bruce Street. A large residential population here can knit together the most walkable parts of downtown and the most walkable parts of JMU.

Large additional residential development is also necessary for fueling local small businesses downtown. As more residents live downtown, a greater variety of businesses services become viable. Acre-for-acre, these businesses pay far more in tax revenue than any of the big box stores. Dollar-for-dollar, these businesses reinvest in the community at a far higher rate. This is the growth we need.

Parking

Previous student developments frequently overestimate how much parking is actually necessary. I don’t recall the exact address, but there was a previous student development

last year that built on some of its old parking space since it was so underutilized. My understanding is that the applicant intends to separate the cost of rent from the cost of parking, giving more reason for students to ditch their car, and keep that money for a night out. It also has the effect of not forcing non-drivers to subsidize parking for their neighbors. I remain somewhat concerned that the applicant will build far more parking than needed, but this would present an opportunity to the city.

Should this trend of underutilized student parking hold, excess parking space could allow for flexibility to redevelop the water street parking deck and parking on the north side of the Turner Pavilion.

Downtown 2040 reflects the need for more dense housing downtown. This proposal begins to fulfill this need, while also mitigating issues caused by JMU's continued car-centric development. I am excited for this project, and hope to see it come to fruition.

Sincerely,
Kenneth Kettler

Re: The Link

From Kate Nardi <katnardi13@gmail.com>
Date Wed 7/23/2025 12:43 PM
To Adam Fletcher <Adam.Fletcher@harrisonburgva.gov>
Cc Thanh Dang <Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov>

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Hi Adam,

Please share in rezoning packet provided to City Council.

Thank you.

On Wed, Jul 23, 2025 at 11:20 AM Adam Fletcher <Adam.Fletcher@harrisonburgva.gov> wrote:

Hi Kate,

Are you planning to share these comments with City Council or should we include these emails in the rezoning packet that is provided to City Council?

Thanks,
Adam

From: Kate Nardi <katnardi13@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, July 22, 2025 4:56 PM
To: Adam Fletcher <Adam.Fletcher@harrisonburgva.gov>; Thanh Dang <Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov>
Subject: The Link

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Hi Adam + Thanh,

I was on Paul Street today. As I'm sure you're aware, there are bump outs to slow traffic. I had to wait at the bottom of the street for another car to get through due to cars parked on the street. I'm

not convinced the developer and rep have reasonably taken into account safety and practicality. The true impacts of traffic, safety, and legitimate neighbor concern with proposed extension of Paul. It makes perfect sense that Old Town residents (and others) are seriously concerned about increased traffic given what I experienced today. The notion that people won't pay extra for parking is absurd. 40% of units dedicated to student housing is blind because those apartments can't be rented to others. Blind faith. The architectural integrity of our downtown/city is in jeopardy and the only thing the developer rep had to say was, "we're not Staunton." If a project came along that respected the area, sight lines, scale, residents and the downtown district having National Register of Historic Places designation, I might have a more favorable opinion. I don't expect answers from you but this is important to me as I grew up in Old Town--on Paul and Franklin Streets. I cherish the neighborhood and downtown. I regret approving this project.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Kate Nardi** <katenardi13@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Jul 18, 2025 at 6:14 PM

Subject: Re: The Link

To: Adam Fletcher <Adam.Fletcher@harrisonburgva.gov>

CC: Thanh Dang <Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov>

Hello Adam,

Thank you for your reply. Today got away. I'm hearing a lot from the community about the project and saw the recent news clip.

I'm not convinced the applicant and representative did their due diligence with the community at large and near neighborhoods in seeking meaningful input on a project of this scale.

On Fri, Jul 18, 2025 at 12:01 PM Adam Fletcher <Adam.Fletcher@harrisonburgva.gov> wrote:

Kate,

Thanh will not be able to meet today, but I can make time later this afternoon. You can either give me a call at 540-432-7700 or you can let me know of a time that you want to stop in later and I can try to make myself available.

Thanks,

Adam

From: Kate Nardi <katenardi13@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, July 17, 2025 10:20 PM

To: Thanh Dang <Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov>; Adam Fletcher <Adam.Fletcher@harrisonburgva.gov>

Subject: The Link

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Hi Thanh and Adam,

I'd like to please talk in person about The Link. I could walk down to your office as soon as tomorrow (Friday) or when you can be available. Thanks Kate

Opposition to Rezoning Application for 473 S. Main Street

July 18, 2025

Mr. Adam Fletcher, Members of the Planning Commission & Members of the City Council
Director of Planning and Community Development
City of Harrisonburg
Harrisonburg, VA

Dear Harrisonburg City Council, Mr. Fletcher, Members of the Planning Commission,

I am writing to respectfully voice my strong opposition to the proposed rezoning of the parcels located at 473 S. Main Street from R-3 (Medium Density Residential) to B-1C (Central Business District with proffered conditions) for the purpose of constructing a large-scale student-oriented housing development.

While I recognize the importance of thoughtful development and revitalization, this project represents more of the same short-sighted pattern that has too often led Harrisonburg to trade away its identity for temporary economic promises. As a resident and stakeholder in the future of this community, I believe it is time we draw a clear line between growth that honors our city and growth that overrides it.

Harrisonburg has a documented history of demolishing its own architectural and cultural assets in the name of progress. Once-graceful historic homes, civic buildings, and cornerstones of downtown life have too often been razed with little thought to their irreplaceable value—erasing the very fabric that made this city distinct.

From historic structures on Main Street to longtime homes near Court Square, the city has repeatedly sacrificed its built heritage for development that often falls short of long-term value. With this proposal, we risk continuing that pattern. The development—six stories of student-targeted apartments—threatens not only the livability of this neighborhood but the soul of Harrisonburg's historic downtown.

Our city's Downtown Historic District – listed on the National Register of Historic Places – also includes adjacent streets and the Old Town Historic District. The size, scale, and design of the proposed apartment building does not honor the character or distinction of these nationally recognized areas within the heart of our city.

The proposed density—up to 265 units—leans heavily toward four-bedroom apartments leased by the room, a model clearly designed for students. These units skew the city's housing market by inflating per-room rental rates and crowding out options for families and long-term residents.

The building's height and massing—comparable to the Urban Exchange—would dominate the streetscape, obstruct sightlines, and overwhelm the scale of the surrounding area. Its presence would set a precedent that undermines the charm, walkability, and visual cohesion that define downtown Harrisonburg.

Despite assurances in the application, the development will burden infrastructure that is already stretched thin. The extension of Paul Street—which already acts as a shortcut through downtown—will worsen congestion and create safety risks in the nearby Old Town neighborhood.

The proposed parking garage is no solution. Students will continue to bring their cars—and they will avoid paid garage spaces by parking on nearby residential streets. This is not speculation; it is a long-standing frustration already voiced by neighbors. Without new parking enforcement, the result will be increased tension and reduced quality of life for residents.

In 2024, City Council approved the Build Our Park project plan, creating a vision for a community park just south of Turner Pavilion. The design reflects a commitment to local character, using regionally sourced materials and creating space for a permanent stage and shared public amenities.

Placing a six-story private development adjacent to this civic investment contradicts that intent. Rather than enhancing the park, the proposed building would overshadow it—physically, visually, and culturally. This is a space meant for everyone; it deserves better than a backdrop of oversized, high-turnover housing.

We've heard the talking points before—economic development, tax base expansion, and alignment with city goals. But in this case, those benefits do not outweigh the very real social, cultural, and environmental costs.

We don't oppose development. We oppose bad development. Harrisonburg has a chance to shift its approach—away from quick fixes and toward planning that reflects long-term, community-rooted values. This project is not our only option. We can and should demand something better.

Projects of this scale must not advance without deep and honest public engagement. Harrisonburg residents—those who live, work, and raise families here—deserve to have a say in shaping the city's future. This is one of those moments. The choices made now will reverberate for decades.

Let this be the moment we say: Harrisonburg's past is worth protecting. Its future is worth planning carefully. And its people are worth listening to.

Please deny this rezoning request and invite a new proposal—one that respects our scale, our neighborhoods, and our story.

Sincerely,

Kelley J. Hijjeh



1168 Westmoreland Dr.
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

kelleyhijjeh@gmail.com
540-421-6644

cc:

Mayor Deanna R. Reed
Vice Mayor Dany Fleming
Council Member Laura Dent
Council Member Monica Robinson
Council Member Nasser Alsaadun

"The Link" is destructive to historic downtown

From Philip Herrington <philip.m.herrington@gmail.com>

Date Mon 8/4/2025 8:55 AM

To Ande Banks <ande.banks@harrisonburgva.gov>; Adam Fletcher <Adam.Fletcher@harrisonburgva.gov>; Thanh Dang <Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov>

WARNING: External email. Be cautious when clicking on links or opening attachments.

Dear Mr. Banks (Ande), Mr. Fletcher, and Ms. Dang: I wanted to share with you my letter to the city council (below) arguing against the rezoning of the Lindsey Funeral Home property. I'd appreciate you forwarding this to members of the Planning Commission.

I am writing to express my strong objections to the rezoning of the Lindsey Funeral Home property for construction of the proposed "The Link" apartments. I am an associate professor of History at James Madison University, where my classes include HIST 493: Historic Preservation. Let me be clear: a vote to rezone the funeral home property to facilitate construction of "The Link" is a vote to destroy the Harrisonburg Downtown District listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and a vote against the economic prosperity of Harrisonburg.

Historic preservation is good for business. The name of "The Link" suggests the building will connect the university with downtown. Why do locals and non-locals go downtown? It is largely because of its historic character. The Mercantile Building and Magpie are two examples of thriving businesses whose developers recognized the aesthetic value and commercial potential of historic buildings. Both buildings are contributing resources in the NRHP Harrisonburg Downtown District.

A vote for "The Link" undermines future projects like the Mercantile Building and Magpie and the historic character of downtown Harrisonburg. Our downtown is very small—already greatly reduced in density by decades of ill-conceived, haphazard demolition—and it can only sustain so many losses before it effectively ceases to exist. The NRHP Harrisonburg Downtown District, which includes much of downtown, continues to undergo a "death by a thousand cuts," with the university and other actors demolishing significant numbers of buildings within it. Developments like "The Link" forever alter the character of downtown and discourage investment in historic structures. "The Link" will overshadow (literally and figuratively) surrounding buildings in the Historic District. Its design (in materials, appearance, and scale) is not only insensitive to surrounding structures but holds them in contempt. It encourages their destruction—and that of most of the district.

The problems presented by proposed developments like "The Link" could be solved if Harrisonburg had 1) a local ordinance that established local historic districts and mandated their maintenance and preservation and 2) design guidelines that ensured compatible, responsible design in the downtown area. Why are so many other Virginia cities—Charlottesville, Staunton, Winchester, Richmond, Roanoke, Blacksburg, Lexington, Lynchburg, and many more—Certified Local Governments (CLGs, meaning they have local preservation ordinances and otherwise support preservation through public policy) and Harrisonburg is not? These cities recognize that local preservation ordinances and design guidelines are good economic policy as they protect the historic buildings and character of these cities and set clear standards for new development.

The Lindsey Funeral Home is a structurally sound, well-constructed, beautifully designed building that enhances our downtown and has potential for rehabilitation. The 2005 nomination report for the Downtown Historic District lists the funeral home as “noncontributing” because it was not quite fifty years old when the report was written. It is certainly contributing now. Sadly, Harrisonburg’s current approach to its downtown disincentivizes rehabilitation in favor of poorly designed projects such as “The Link” that enrich the few and embrace a shortsighted, cookie-cutter vision of “growth.”

If you do not believe that “The Link” threatens the Harrisonburg Downtown Historic District, please consider the following example. Across the street from the possible site of “The Link” stands the Lurty-Alexander House, now the Elks Lodge. This mid-nineteenth century Italianate villa is one of the oldest buildings in Harrisonburg; it appears in the landscape painting of Harrisonburg created by Emma Lyon Bryan in 1867. The house is in the center of a 1.59-acre lot with an additional .67-acre lot behind. That is 2.26 acres; the Lindsey property is 2.75 acres. Ask yourself: what future does “The Link” promise for the Lurty-Alexander House? What leads you to believe that the demolition and degradation of our historic downtown ends with “The Link”? Why rehabilitate the Lurty-Alexander House—or any other downtown building—when millions of dollars are to be made in cheap new construction, with no local ordinances or design guidelines standing in the way?

Again, your vote to approve the rezoning is a vote to condemn our historic downtown. That is not hyperbole. The dire consequences of your yes vote are irrevocable. Please reject the rezoning, and please work in favor of enacting a local preservation ordinance in Harrisonburg. It is long overdue. Close your eyes and imagine downtown Harrisonburg in 25 years if a local preservation ordinance and design guidelines were in place. Now imagine the condition of “The Link” in 25 years.

Many thanks for your time and consideration.

Philip M. Herrington

Public Comment on Rezoning of 473 S Main

From Austin Sachs <austin.sachs@gmail.com>

Date Mon 8/4/2025 9:47 AM

To Thanh Dang <Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov>

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Thanh,

I would like the following comment submitted as public comment for the upcoming City Council item regarding the rezoning of 435-495 S Main.

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Dear City Council,

I am writing in support of the rezoning of 435-495 S Main from R-3 to B-1C. I currently live 6 blocks from this proposed rezoning and believe this would be a positive addition to our downtown neighborhood. Further, this project aligns with the Downtown 2040 plan to make downtown a true residential neighborhood and if we choose now to not follow our city's plan it will discourage all future investment as developers question if the city actually supports that plan.

I am fully in support this rezoning but will add these comments on how I wish this project was improved so the city and future developers can note things to consider on future downtown developments:

1. Height: I am in full support of this project being roughly 70 feet tall, but wish that it had proposed a higher height. While there are plenty of other underutilized parcels downtown to develop allowing great density without changing the height limit of downtown, as Harrisonburg grows we only have so many acres to develop especially as we want to preserve current greenspace and possibly expand future greenspace. I strongly believe that the downtown district height limit should be closer to 100 feet and 10 stories.
2. Parking: This project proposes too much private vehicle parking for the number of units proposed. Given the current excess parking downtown (though often in private lots) it seems unnecessary to add 400+ parking spaces, but only 90 resident bicycle spaces and 8 visitor bicycle spaces. I would encourage the city to work with developers to focus more on transit and bicycle transportation downtown. That being said with the parking being detached from unit rent rates I hope down the road this deck is shared with other future developments in the vicinity of this development.

Overall, this is a positive project for our downtown and I look forward to seeing the city council support it!

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-Thanks
Austin Sachs

New bldg 473 S Main

From Sam Nickels <samuelnickels@yahoo.com>

Date Mon 8/4/2025 10:46 AM

To Thanh Dang <Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov>

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Ms. Thanh Dang and City Council members, I write in support of the rezoning for the new building proposed at 473 South Main St. I believe this will increase housing supply and help us control housing prices and rental prices in Harrisonburg. I believe having more downtown living space that is high density will reduce the need for cars coming from out of town And their need for more parking spaces in town. I also trust this will encourage a more walkable and bikable downtown area as well as increased business for local restaurants and others. Thank you, Sam Nickels, City resident, 340 Maryland Ave., Harrisonburg, VA Virginia.