



CITY OF HARRISONBURG OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

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Memorandum

To: City Councilmembers
From: Ande Banks, City Manager
CC:
Date: August 6, 2025
Subject: Informational Update on Questions Raised By City Councilmembers Regarding the Link Rezoning

City Staff have received a number of questions from Councilmembers regarding the applicant's proposed housing development associated with the rezoning of the Lindsey Funeral Homes property. This memo seeks to address some key concerns that were raised, though not in any particular order. Staff remain available to answer additional questions that are not addressed here.

Student Housing throughout Harrisonburg

Councilmembers requested information about existing student housing inventory throughout the city. The estimated number of bedrooms available in developments that appear to house high proportions of students either on JMU campus, in Harrisonburg, or just beyond city limits is 22,031. This number does not imply all these bedrooms are occupied by students, nor does it represent a complete listing of all student housing. As a point of reference, JMU's Fall 2024 headcount was 22,879.

Approximately 586 student housing units have been approved for development since 2021, though none have started construction. Each of these units can have multiple bedrooms. Of the five approved developments, only one has had any activity within the last 12 months and this does not account for development that can occur by right.

Potential Impact on Fair Market Rents

Councilmembers wanted to know how the proposed mix of units in the development would impact the City's Fair Market Rent (FMR). FMRs are used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to determine payment standards for programs like the Housing Choice Voucher program. The common college housing practice of leasing four bedrooms in one unit is already artificially impacting the FMR for one-bedroom units. This is an oversight in the methodology that HUD uses to determine FMRs as they do not differentiate between student and non-student housing. The four-in-one model lowers the average rent for a one-

bedroom unit in the city, and by association, the FMR. As a result, an individual seeking housing assistance to obtain a one-bedroom apartment currently receives less than what we would expect is needed for a typical non-student unit. While the development as proposed will not alleviate this calculation discrepancy, it also will not make it substantively worse because of how widespread this housing type already is.

Downtown Business Response

Councilmembers, having heard extensively from residents, asked about the business response to the proposed development. Staff have not received enough comments from local businesses to provide a characterization. The applicant has not provided an economic impact analysis.

JMU's Perspective on Off-Campus Housing

Councilmembers asked about JMU's perspective on off-campus housing. President Schmidt has expressed a desire to work toward housing approximately half of students on campus over a 30-year planning horizon. This is in line with a broader trend across the country where universities see financial, graduation rate, and student experience benefits associated with adding on-campus housing. Staff have not received opinions on the proposed development from JMU.

JMU Campus Parking

Councilmembers wanted to know how campus parking would work for residents of the proposed development. The campus parking pass a student living at the proposed development will need to purchase is a Commuter Permit. Commuters can only park in C lots and in designated rows of parking decks on campus, with some exceptions. There are no reserved parking spaces, only access to lots. A map showing commuter parking lots and spaces within parking decks can be found [here](https://www.jmu.edu/parking/_files/parkingmap.pdf). (https://www.jmu.edu/parking/_files/parkingmap.pdf)