



July 9, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting

Title

Consider Rezoning at 435, 445, 457, 473, 483 & 495 South Main Street and 282, 288, 294 & 298 South Liberty Street — Thanh Dang, Community Development

Summary

Project name	The Link Apartments
Address/Location	435, 445, 457, 473, 483 & 495 South Main Street and 282, 288, 294 & 298 South Liberty Street
Tax Map Parcels	25-J-2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 15, 16, 17 and 18
Total Land Area	+/- 2.75-acres
Property Owner	Trenton Inc. and Bernard L C
Owner's Representative	Timberwolf Capital Partners LLC
Present Zoning	R-3, Medium Density Residential District
Proposed Zoning	B-1C, Central Business District Conditional
Planning Commission	July 9, 2025 (Public Hearing)
City Council	Anticipated August 12, 2025 (First Reading/Public Hearing) Anticipated August 26, 2025 (Second Reading)

Recommendation

Option 1. Recommend approval of the rezoning request.

Fiscal Impact

N/A

Context & Analysis

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

- Site: Lindsey Funeral Home and vacant office building, zoned R-3
- North: City Hall, Turner Pavilion, parking lots, zoned B-1
- East: Across South Main Street, commercial properties, zoned B-1C and B-2C
- South: Harrisonburg Baptist Church, zoned R-3
- West: Across South Liberty Street, residential uses, zoned R-3

The applicant is requesting to rezone a +/- 2.75-acre site consisting of 10 parcels from R-3, Medium Density Residential District to B-1C, Central Business District Conditional. If the request is approved, the applicant plans to construct a 6-story apartment building consisting of a maximum of 265-units and a minimum of 2,000-square feet of commercial space with a parking garage with a minimum of 400 off-street parking spaces.

Proffers

The applicant has organized their proffer statement into five sections:

- I. Development Standards
- II. Transportation Improvements
- III. Parking/Access Improvements
- IV. Amenities
- V. Implementation

Please refer to the attached file “Application and supporting documents,” which includes a document with the page heading titled “Rezoning Request Proffer Statement” for the entire proffer statement.

Proffers within *Section I. Development Standards* control the layout and design of structures on the property, including general layout and architectural features. Additionally, with recent applications to rezone property to B-1, staff has encouraged applicants to consider proffering to prohibit drive-through facilities and that no parking lot would be located between any building and public streets. Both drive-throughs and parking lots between any building and public streets would be prohibited through the details of Proffer I.a., which requires that the development is in substantial conformance with the Concept Plan.

Among other details, the applicant has proffered a maximum of 265 units (Proffer I.b.), that a minimum of 25% of the units will consist of studio or one-bedroom apartments (Proffer I.c.), and that a maximum of 40% of the units will consist of 4-bedroom apartments (Proffer I.d.). At this time, the exact bedroom count and unit type composition has not been determined.

The applicant has also proffered sustainability features including, but not limited to, rough-in measures to allow for future installation of solar panels (Proffer I.h.), a minimum of 10 electrical vehicle (EV) charging stations (Proffer III.c.), a minimum of 90 secure indoor bicycle parking spaces, and a minimum of eight exterior bicycle parking spaces (Proffer III.d.). With regard to the building’s appearance, the applicant provided proffered details associated with some architectural design details as well as exterior screening/decor features to the north facing wall of the parking garage.

Proffers related to the Downtown Park, Land Use, Transportation, and Parking are discussed in the following sections.

Downtown Park

Providing a downtown park in the area between the subject site and the Turner Pavilion (home to the Harrisonburg Farmers Market) has been discussed for a number of years. On September 24, 2024, City Council approved a conceptual plan for the park, which included a stage for performances. Later that year, on November 26th, City Council unanimously voted to accept a Downtown Park Donation Agreement, which was then executed between the City of Harrisonburg and Build Our Park's Board of Directors on December 10, 2024. The Agreement formally defines the process of constructing and operating the downtown park. Without getting into the details, general next steps for the park include fundraising, completing final design plans, and then securing a contractor for park construction.

With this rezoning request, Proffer III.e. includes commitments by the applicant to coordinate back-of-stage access and turnaround for the downtown park as generally shown on the Concept Plan and includes the dedication of an easement across the applicant's property to the park.

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.

Proffer I.b. states a maximum of 265 units on the +/- 2.75-acre property, putting the development at about 96 units per acre. For comparison, Urban Exchange, located at 238 East Water Street, is home to 194 apartments on +/- 2.63-acres, which is about 73 units per acre.

Staff believes that there is a high probability that college students would be interested in residing at this location. The applicant is planning for a mixture of 1-, 2-, and 4-bedroom apartments and has stated that the 4-bedroom units will be designed as 4-bedrooms/4-bathrooms. Staff encourages developers to provide a balanced mix of bedrooms per unit so that such buildings can serve a variety of needs. There can be disadvantages to providing too many 4-bedroom/4-bathroom units as they typically best serve college students and can be difficult to accommodate other users. However, staff also recognizes the advantages of providing student housing in close and walkable proximity (about ¼--mile) to the James Madison University campus as well as to the downtown area. Providing college housing in such locations can help reduce daily vehicle trips on City streets—especially Reservoir Street and Port Republic Road, off of which many college students currently reside and utilize.

With regard to non-residential uses, the applicant proffered a minimum of 2,000 square feet of commercial space to be on the southeast corner (Paul Street and South Main Street) of the building (Proffer I.e.). As a comparison with commercial spaces within Urban Exchange, Coffee Hound occupies about 1,600 square feet and Benny Sorrentino's occupies about 1,400 square feet. At this time, the proposed 6-story building is planned to be close to the maximum height allowed in the B-1 district of 75-feet, which also happens to be about the same height as Urban Exchange.

Staff believes that the proposed uses, with the submitted proffers, generally conforms with the Mixed Use area designation.

Additionally, the proposed development would support the Harrisonburg Downtown 2040 plan goal to "Grow Downtown as a Neighborhood." The development would further support the following two action items from the same plan:

- #16: Encourage mixed-use and residential development in key clusters (page 58) and
- #17: In the long-term, seek opportunities to add density and improve the urban design at key Downtown sites (page 58).

The Harrisonburg Downtown 2040 plan describes that "[w]hile the number of housing units and residents have grown Downtown, there is need for more housing to support local businesses." Additionally, the subject property is within a key cluster area for potential residential development identified as "South Downtown." The Harrisonburg Downtown 2040 plan is available at the following link: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/downtown-2040>.

Transportation and Traffic

A traffic impact analysis (TIA) was accepted by the Department of Public Works on March 31, 2025. TIA models “showed that both controlled delay and queueing increases minimally at all intersection movements within the study area, none of which were deemed to warrant mitigation to be borne by this development.” Additionally, the study noted that multiple movements within the study area have a level of service categorized as failing in the present day, even without the proposed development and that such movements may warrant further study by the City. These locations include: the westbound left-turn movement from East Grattan Street onto South Main Street, the westbound through movement from East Grace Street across the South Main Street intersection and then on the opposite side of the intersection the eastbound left-turn from West Grace Street onto South Main Street, and the westbound left-turn movement from Martin Luther King Jr. Way onto South Main Street.

The Department of Public Works will change the intersection of South Main Street, Liberty Street, and East Grattan Street as part of the Liberty Street project. The Liberty Street Project proposes to transform one lane (starting at Noll Drive at Kratzer Avenue, moving south on Liberty Street to South Main Street) into two-way separated bicycle lanes protected by a median separating the bike lanes from traffic and to make other improvements along the corridor. The project is anticipated to begin construction in 2027. Changes associated with the Liberty Street Project were assumed as part of the completed TIA for this project for the future conditions. More information on the Liberty Street Project is available at the following link: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/transportation-projects/#LibertyStreetProjectconstruction202728>.

The *Transportation Improvement* proffers II.a. and b. explain that the applicant would design and construct a public street extension of Paul Street between South Liberty Street and South Main Street, adding to the gridded street network encouraged by the Comprehensive Plan. The Paul Street extension would include sidewalks on both sides of the street. The applicant’s completion of proffers II.c. and d. would help improve the pedestrian experience with improved sidewalks along the development’s South Main Street and South Liberty Street frontages to match the width, material, and appearance of sidewalk fronting the adjacent City Hall and future downtown park properties. Sidewalks will also be provided from the development to the City Hall and future downtown park properties. These improvements will be complemented by pedestrian-scale lighting, street furniture, and landscaping (Proffers IV.b. and c.).

The applicant is aware that if the rezoning request is approved, they must submit a preliminary plat to dedicate public street right-of-way for the Paul Street extension and to request approval of any needed Subdivision Ordinance and Design & Construction Standards Manual (DCSM) variances. The applicant has identified on the Concept Plan that they intend to request a variance to Subdivision Ordinance Section 10-2-41 (a) to allow alternative street design for curb radii and

access (entrance) spacing on the Paul Street extension. The Concept Plan illustrates a street width that does not meet DCSM standards, and a variance will also need to be requested for this. Staff will further evaluate these and any other variances at the time they are requested.

Parking

The applicant has proffered to provide a minimum of 400 structured parking spaces on the property (Proffer III.a.) and that they would enter into a Parking Agreement consistent with the attached Memorandum of Understanding to reserve up to 65 parking spaces for municipal/public uses in the parking garage (Proffer III.b.).

A parking occupancy count completed in April 2019 as part of the most recent Downtown Parking Study (April 2020) indicated that the midday count period for the Municipal Lot (identified as ID# 44B in the Study and described as “Harrisonburg Farmers Market” had an 80% utilization rate (145 parking spaces occupied out of 181 parking spaces). Utilization rates reflect the ability of a motorist to find convenient and available parking within a particular area. It is a generally accepted principle that a supply of parking operates at optimum efficiency when peak occupancy is at 85% to 95% of capacity.

The Downtown Parking Study evaluated 17 potential developments that could impact parking dynamics in the near future. Within the study, Figure 21, Long Term Peak Hour (long term being described as 6-10 years from 2020), illustrated a peak hour demand with greater than 95% utilization for Block 43, which constituted the subject site. The proposal for 265 apartment units and 2,000 square feet of commercial use on the subject site was not known and studied in 2020. Staff believes the applicant’s proffer to provide a minimum of 400 parking spaces on the property will assist in mitigating parking pressures resulting from this development and the surrounding area.

More information on the Downtown Parking study is available at the following link: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/transportation-planning#DowntownParkingStudycompletedin2020>.

On-street parking on the South Main Street and South Liberty Street frontages of the subject site has a 10-hour time limit. The on-street parking on South Liberty Street will be removed by the City as part of the South Liberty Street Project. If the proposed development is constructed, staff recommends the City evaluate whether on-street parking on South Main Street should be converted to different time-limits.

Public Water and Sanitary Sewer

The applicant has been advised that they will be responsible for completing a study of the water and sanitary sewer capacity prior to submittal of an engineered comprehensive site plan. Any

public system improvements required to meet the increased demands resulting from the project will be the responsibility of the developer.

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 Projections 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, the proposed 265 apartment units are estimated to generate 88 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 believes rezoning the property to B-1C has more advantages than any disadvantages and it generally conforms with the City's Comprehensive Plan and the Harrisonburg Downtown 2040 plan.

Options

1. Recommend approval of the rezoning request.
2. Recommend denial of the rezoning request.

Attachments

- Site maps
- Application and supporting documents