

JAY AND CARMEN BARRON
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January 2, 2020

VIA EMAIL AND HAND DELIVERY

Harrisonburg Planning Commission
409 South Main Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22801
Attn: Alison Banks, Zoning Administrator (alison.banks@harrisonburgva.gov)

Re: Rezoning Request – 650 Keezletown Road (Juniper Hill Commons) (R-1 to R-7)

Dear Planning Commission Members:

We write concerning Harrisonburg Cohousing, LLC’s (the “Company”) request to rezone a 5.48 acre parcel at 650 Keezletown Road from R-1 (Single-family Residential District) to R-7 (Medium Density Mixed Residential Planned Community) and to develop, on what is now largely open green space, a “cohousing” community consisting of 9 buildings, 28 residential units, and parking lots sufficient for 56 spaces (the “Proposed Development”). We own and reside in a single-family home next door to, and on the westward side of, the Proposed Development, at 630 Keezletown Road. We are concerned that the Proposed Development will negatively impact adjacent property owners and the surrounding community and believe, as currently proposed, it is inconsistent with the City of Harrisonburg’s Comprehensive Plan and zoning ordinance.

We moved to Harrisonburg in 2016, in large part to be closer to our two granddaughters who live in Northern Virginia. We quickly fell in love with the place. As we all know, Harrisonburg offers the best of all worlds—a picturesque setting with gorgeous Blue Ridge views, a vibrant downtown and restaurant scene, and an active, engaged community. We particularly enjoy our little slice of heaven on Keezletown Road. We chose the property because it offered a rural setting in close proximity to shopping and other amenities. Much of the surrounding property is undeveloped farmland, and because our home sits on a rise, we have beautiful eastward and northward views of rolling hills peppered with cattle, deer, or other wildlife that pass through often. We can even see Massanutten Peak! Those views—and our property value—are now endangered by the Proposed Development, which calls for concentrated construction of numerous multi-story buildings and parking lots just a few feet from our property.¹ After first learning of the Proposed Development, we planted new trees in an attempt to protect the view and create privacy, but given the density of the planned construction and the

¹ The Company proposes to situate all 9 buildings and parking lots on the southern half of the 5.48 acre parcel located nearest our property. We note that the Company’s master plan proposes a maximum density of 8 dwelling units per acre. However, given that all 29 dwelling units will be located on ~two acres, the actual density would be closer to 15 units per acre.

fact that our home sits many feet higher than the site of the Proposed Development, we fear those efforts will be unsuccessful.

Although we stand to suffer the most direct impacts from the Proposed Development, many other nearby property owners will be similarly affected. We are concerned about the likely light pollution in the neighborhood from dozens of new lights (including possible lights over the parking lots proposed on the outside perimeter of the parcel),² as well as the additional noise that we believe will result from adding 50+ people (and their motor vehicles) to a small ~two-acre space. In addition, all neighbors will be impacted by likely increased traffic on Keezletown Road and at the intersection with Country Club Road. That four-way intersection, which has no stop light, is already busy, and we expect that the Proposed Development will make it worse.

We believe the Proposed Development is inconsistent with the City of Harrisonburg's long-term plan for the Keezletown Road area. As you know, in late 2018, the Planning Commission and City Council adopted an updated Comprehensive Plan that included a Land Use Guide that recommends a future, long-term (20+ year) plan for land use. The Land Use Guide comprises "the official land use policy of the Comprehensive Plan and is to be used as a guide in such matters as rezonings."³ Importantly, the Land Use Guide recommends that the site of the Proposed Development and surrounding area be used for "**low density**" residential housing, as opposed to the medium density cohousing community the Company proposes. This low density recommendation is consistent with the current R-1 zoning designation, matches the existing rural character of the area, and would ensure that any future development meshes with, and has minimal impact on, the existing community. We see no good reason at this juncture for the Planning Commission to re-consider the City's long-term plan, which was adopted a little more than a year ago.

Further, we do not believe that the Proposed Development meets applicable zoning requirements. For example, the zoning ordinance states that, with respect to R-7, multi-family development may be permitted only if the applicant:

has demonstrated that the proposed multifamily development's design is compatible with adjacent existing . . . single-family detached and attached residential development. Compatibility may be achieved through architectural design, site planning, landscaping and/or other measures that ensure that views from adjacent single-family detached and attached residential development and public streets are not dominated by large buildings, mechanical/electrical and utility equipment, service/refuse functions and parking lots or garages.

² We note that the Company's master plan does not specify the quantity or type of lighting that will be present, other than to state that it will seek to use downward-facing light fixtures.

³ Chapter 6 of Comprehensive Plan at 9.

Sec. 10-3-57.6(d) (emphasis added).

The Company's proposed master plan appears to ignore the impact of the planned multi-story, multi-family dwellings and numerous parking lots on the views from our home. The Company's plan would place three-story, stacked condominiums ~60 feet from our property line (Building #2), and three-story townhomes ~20 feet from our property line (Building #3). The Company also proposes stacking residential apartments on top of a common house near the location of an existing single-family detached dwelling (Building #1). This building would be positioned on a hill ~90 feet from our property line. Because of its higher elevation, we expect that building would be prominent and visible from nearly all points of our property (both outside and through windows in our home) and from passing traffic on Keezletown Road. The Company's plan would locate the tallest buildings nearest our property (Buildings #1, #2, and #3), while locating the more compact, two-story buildings on the opposite side of the property (Buildings #7 and #8).⁴ In addition, the Company plans to construct a large, 20-space parking lot within ~5 feet of our property line. The Company's rezoning narrative notes that parking areas will be placed on the "outskirts of the development," but those "outskirts" are essentially our backyard.

The City notes on its website that the purpose of zoning is to, among other things, "protect and conserve the value of buildings, and encourage the most appropriate use of the land." We do not believe the Proposed Development meets those goals, as it is counter to the City's long-term plan for low density residential development in the area, contrary to zoning regulations, and likely to diminish the value of adjacent properties. For these reasons, we are opposed to the Proposed Development.

However, should the Planning Commission be inclined to move forward with the Company's rezoning application, we respectfully request that, during the January 8, 2020 public hearing on this matter, the Planning Commission require the Company to address and respond to at least the following questions:

- Why would rezoning of the property for medium density development be appropriate when the City's Comprehensive Plan calls for long-term, low density development in the area? Did the Company consider alternative sites for the Proposed Development within areas of the City planned for medium density development?
- What steps has the Company taken to mitigate the impact of the Proposed Development on adjacent properties and single-family homes, including the Barron property?
 - Why are the tallest buildings proposed on the half of the parcel nearest the Barron's property line? Has the Company considered an alternative plan that

⁴ In fact, 20 of the 28 proposed residential units would be located on the western half of the parcel nearest our property.

would locate buildings farther from the Barron's property line, especially three-story buildings?

- What is the proposed height difference between Building #1 and the other proposed buildings—that is, taking into account the elevation of the land, by how many feet taller will Building #1 be than the other proposed buildings?
- The Company's master plan does not appear to include proposed height limitations for the new buildings. What height limitations is the Company proposing? What are the heights of each of the proposed buildings?
- The Company's master plan states that 6-foot opaque fencing will be used to separate parking spaces from exterior property lines. Will the Company agree to install a higher 8-foot fence? What materials does the Company intend to use for fencing? Is the Company willing to place an opaque fence along the entire boundary with the Barron property to serve as a visual barrier?⁵
- The Company's master plan proposes planting trees adjacent to Keezletown Road every 12.5 linear feet. Is the Company willing to agree to plant trees along the boundary with the Barron property at the same, or more frequent, intervals? Is the Company planning to keep (i.e., not cut down) existing trees within 3 feet of the boundary with the Barron property?
- The Company's rezoning narrative states that outdoor lighting will be directed downward but provides no other details. What types of lighting will be used? How many lights will be installed? Where will lights be installed? What steps is the Company taking to avoid light pollution toward neighboring properties, including the Barron property?
- What is the construction timeline for the Proposed Development?
- Is the Proposed Development fully funded? Is there a risk that construction would begin but not be completed in a timely fashion?

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We very much appreciate your consideration of our concerns with the Proposed Development and look forward to discussing these issues at the public hearing on January 8.

⁵ We believe that fencing along only a portion of the property line would look awkward and request that, if the Company's rezoning request is granted, it be required to place an 8-foot, opaque fence the entire length of the boundary with our property, using material mutually agreed to by us and the Company.

Very Truly Yours,

/s/ Carmen Barron

Carmen Barron

/s/ Jay Barron

Jay Barron

cc: Harrisonburg Cohousing, LLC (via U.S. Mail)