



March 17, 2023

VIA EMAIL

Rodney Poole, Esquire
Chair
Richmond Planning Commission, Room 511
900 E. Broad St.
Richmond, VA 23219 USA

Re: SUP Ordinance 2023-068 for 33600 Grove Avenue

This letter is in regard to the application to authorize the special use of the property known as 3600 Grove Avenue.

Scope: The applicant requests authorization for the special use of the property known as 3600 Grove Avenue, which is situated in a R-48 Multifamily Residential District, desires to use such property for the purpose of a multifamily dwelling containing up to 260 dwelling units and amenity spaces, with off-street parking, which use, among other things, is not currently allowed by sections 30-416.1, concerning permitted principal uses, 30-416.4(b), concerning lot area and width, 30-416.5(1), concerning front yards, 30-416.5(2)(b), concerning side and rear yards, 30-416.6, concerning usable open space, and 30-416.8, concerning height, of the Code of the City of Richmond (2020), as amended.

The MDA Zoning and Land Use Committee has met with the applicant, reviewed the plans, and provided a recommendation to oppose the SUP to the MDA Board of Directors. After review and consideration, the MDA Board of Directors voted to advise you that we:

Oppose this request, as presented in the attached city ordinance (see comments below)

The Museum District Board of Directors voted 10-3 to oppose the Special Use Permit request for the property at 3600 Grove Ave (Ordinance 2023-068). Key reasons for our opposition to the project include:

1. See attached emails between Museum District Association and Director Kevin Vonck.
2. Height and lack of set back and step backs – primarily concerned with height and setbacks on Thompson. We are not as concerned about height along the interstate.
3. The committee's biggest concern is the width of Thompson, and we have recommended on many occasions that this project be no more than 4 stories along Thompson.




- a. The committee welcomes density and increased inventory and points to the Richmond 300 master plan which recommends heights of 2-6 floors *dependent upon width of street and neighboring structures*.
4. We are also concerned about the increased traffic along this narrow stretch of Thompson that will come with 260 new dwellings. While city staff and others have said a project of this magnitude may help instigate improvements, a 4-story building would help reduce additional pressures and still be sizable enough to warrant improvements on Thompson.
5. Opposition to the project by concerned Museum District residents.
 - a. Out of 147 responses to the Museum District Association's SUP Neighborhood Feedback Form, 81% were opposed, citing density, height, and parking as their top 3 concerns.

Sincerely,

Janine Doyle
President, Museum District Association

Cc: Andreas Addison, 1st District City Councilman
Whitney Brown, 1st District City Council Liaison
Jonathan Brown, Senior Planner - Land Use Administration
Matthew Ebinger, Secretary- City Planning Commission
Jennifer Mullen, Roth Jackson

From: Karen Headley karen.headley@museumdistrict.org 

Subject: Re: 3600 Grove Ave

Date: February 28, 2023 at 4:35 PM

To: Vonck, Kevin J. - PDR Kevin.Vonck@rva.gov

Cc: Caley Crawford caley.crawford@museumdistrict.org, Karen Headley mdazoning@museumdistrict.org, Stephen Versen stephen.versen@museumdistrict.org, Addison, Andreas D. - City Council Andreas.Addison@rva.gov, Brown, Jonathan W. - PDR Jonathan.Brown@rva.gov, Brown, Whitney H. - City Council Office Whitney.Brown@rva.gov

KH

Director Vonck,

Thank you for your email response. We had asked for a meeting because we feel there is more discussion to be had regarding this project. We have outlined our responses and continued concerns below, but we do still request a meeting as we feel an in-person conversation would be more productive.

You mention that city staff feel the six (6)-story height of the building is appropriate for a parcel with a *Richmond 300* Future Land Use designation of Community Mixed-Use. The recommendation for Community Mixed-Use Buildings specifically states that height would range *from two to six stories, based on street widths and depending on the historic context and stepping down in height adjacent to residential areas, as necessary*. There are approximately 12 Community Mixed-Use designations in R300, and Thompson, where the “front” of this building is positioned, is one of the narrower streets of all these areas at approximately 36 feet wide. And it is an arguably busier traffic corridor than most of the others as it includes an interstate exit immediately adjacent to the property line. Six stories is the maximum recommendation for this designation, but that is contingent on the width of the street. Therefore, we continue to feel strongly that six-stories is too tall for Thompson – as recommended by R300.

Additionally, R300 states that *new buildings that are taller than historical buildings should step back from the build to line after matching the height of the predominant cornice line of the block*. While this new structure will be the only cornice line on this contiguous block, there are pre-existing structures across both Thompson and Grove that warrant step backs.

You also reference 2900 Kensington as a precedent and indicate there are no setbacks there; however, according to [ArcGIS](#) there is at least a 18 feet setback from the sidewalk on Kensington. If this is seen to be a comparable property, then a similar setback should be expected on Grove and/ or Thompson. Additionally, the sidewalk in front of 2900 Kensington is greater than 16 feet wide, yet the edge of the sidewalks around 3600 Grove are only 10 feet in total distance from the curb. Especially if the height of the building does not change, then greater setbacks off of the street (32+ feet as is at 2900 Kensington) is a very reasonable request based on the precedent property you have provided. Additionally, 2900 Kensington was a pre-existing structure converted into residential units, and it sits across from parking lots on either side. For a new build to go in that doesn't meet the same setbacks of this property is shirking the precedence it sets.

The MDA is supportive of growth to meet increased demand to live in our neighborhood. However, it needs to be consistent with the context that already

neighbourhood. However, it needs to be consistent with the context that already exists and in adherence with R300, which was so thoughtfully drafted with great effort and input. We appreciate that the developer has made improvements to the materials used and the façade, but these improvements do not address our requests for additional setbacks and reconsideration of height and/or stepbacks.

We appreciate all that you and your staff do to make Richmond a great place to live. And we would greatly appreciate the opportunity to continue this conversation in person.

Thank you!
Karen

Karen Headley
MDA Zoning & Land Use Committee Chair
MuseumDistrict.Org

On Wed, Feb 22, 2023 at 10:02 PM Vonck, Kevin J. - PDR <Kevin.Vonck@rva.gov> wrote:

Thank you for reaching out to me with your concerns. We evaluate each special use permit (SUP) application to make sure it: 1) aligns with the future land use designations in the City Master Plan (*Richmond 300*), and 2) does not negatively impact the community per criteria outlined in §30-1050.1 City Code. We have discussed this project extensively, both internally and with the developer, and I am supportive of introducing the ordinance with the current set of plans.

The six (6)-story height of the building is appropriate for a parcel with a *Richmond 300* Future Land Use designation of Community Mixed-Use. An upper-level setback may have been warranted if there was an established build-to and/or cornice line along the rest of the block. We pushed the developer to include more brick and break the façade into distinct intervals using setbacks and architectural elements to better fit with the patterns of the neighborhood and they have made many changes since the first iteration. As for precedent, Kensington Court (2900 Kensington) is a smaller, but taller, structure in the neighborhood without any setbacks. There are similar structures further east in the Fan District.

As our regional population continues to grow, so does demand to live in the City and this area. We should allow that growth to occur on sites that can reasonably accommodate it in order to ease pressures on other parts of the neighborhood. The overall number and density of units are appropriate for the parcel. The massing of the building will help visually (and to some extent audibly) buffer residential parcels to the east from the limited-access highway with significant vehicular traffic and a rail line down the middle.

The Fire Department is part of the team that reviews applications, and I was unaware of any concerns. With that, I will reach out to Chief Carter to make sure we are not missing something.

There will be further opportunity for comment with the City Planning Commission and City Council as this works through the legislative process. Thank you again for your comments.

\\ kjv



DEPARTMENT OF
**PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT
REVIEW**

Kevin J. Vonck, Ph.D.

Director

(o) 804-646-3741 (c) 804-292-4854

(e) kevin.vonck@rva.gov

(w) rva.gov/planning-development-review

(m) 900 E. Broad St., Room 511, Richmond, Va. 23219-1907

From: Caley Crawford <caley.crawford@museumdistrict.org>

Sent: Tuesday, 21 February, 2023 07:23

To: Karen Headley <mdazoning@museumdistrict.org>; Stephen Versen <stephen.versen@museumdistrict.org>; Vonck, Kevin J. - PDR <Kevin.Vonck@rva.gov>

Cc: Addison, Andreas D. - City Council <Andreas.Addison@rva.gov>; Brown, Jonathan W. - PDR <Jonathan.Brown@rva.gov>; Brown, Whitney H. - City Council Office <Whitney.Brown@rva.gov>

Subject: Re: 3600 Grove Ave

CAUTION: This message is from an external sender - Do not open attachments or click links unless you recognize the sender's address and know the content is safe.

Good morning Director Vonck -

Following up on the email below requesting a meeting with you to discuss 3600 Grove Ave.

Please let us know your availability.

Best -

Caley Crawford

Immediate Past President

Museum District Association

On Wed, Feb 15, 2023 at 2:36 PM Caley Crawford <caley.crawford@museumdistrict.org> wrote:

Director Vonck -

Stephen Versen and I met with Jonathan Brown this past Friday on the 3600 Grove Ave development and the pending SUP. We would like to meet with you to discuss the project and our concerns with it. We appreciate the recent updates the developer made to the plans; the MDA is still concerned, however, about the height and the overall traffic and pedestrian safety aspects. We are further concerned about how this project "fits" into our historic neighborhood, the size of the project compared to the multi-family properties in a three-four block radius (3 stories at the most), and about the developer's rejection of step-backs on the 5th and 6th floor, if they won't reduce the height.

On traffic and safety, has your office been in contact with RFD Station 18? Captain Armstrong has expressed some concerns to us about the development.

We have been informed that the SUP ordinance will be introduced February 27, and if possible, we would like to meet with you prior to the introduction of the ordinance.

Sincerely,

Caley Crawford

Immediate Past President

Museum District Association

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