



## CITY OF RICHMOND

### Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

**Ord. No. 2018-016:** To authorize the special use of the property known as 900 St. James Street for the purpose of a building with non-residential uses on the first floor and up to 12 dwelling units on the upper floors, upon certain terms and conditions.

---

**To:** City Planning Commission  
**From:** Land Use Administration  
**Date:** February 5, 2018

---

#### **PETITIONER**

Charles E. Ayers, Jr.

#### **LOCATION**

900 St. James Street

#### **PURPOSE**

To authorize the special use of the property known as 900 St. James Street for the purpose of a building with non-residential uses on the first floor and up to 12 dwelling units on the upper floors, upon certain terms and conditions.

#### **SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The proposed mixed-use development, containing first-floor nonresidential use and multi-family use above, is not permitted within the underlying R-53 Multi-family Residential District. A special use permit is therefore required.

The subject property comprises 33,851 SF, or .78 acres, of land improved with a four-story building constructed, per tax assessment records, in 1902 as a commercial building. The property is located in the Gilpin neighborhood of North Jackson Ward in the city's North Planning District.

The building, known as the Saint Luke Building, has significant historic value as referenced by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources Architectural Survey. A 1981 National Register of Historic Places Survey states:

*The Saint Luke Building houses the national headquarters of the independent order of Saint Luke, a benevolent society founded after the Civil War to provide guidance and financial aid to struggling freed slaves. Under the able leadership of Maggie L. Walker, the pioneering black business woman, philanthropist, and educator, the society prospered and maintained itself when similar institutions in other cities failed. From its beginning, the organization served to bridge the gap between slavery and freedom: easing the burdens of illness and death, encouraging savings and thrift, providing an outlet for inexpensive, but well made retail goods, and promoting Mrs. Walker's ideals for her race through a news weekly. The dignified headquarters, the oldest black affiliated office building in Richmond, was designed by John White and erected in 1903. It was remodeled*

*and enlarged between 1915 and 1920 under the direction of Virginia Union University professor Charles T. Russell. Mrs. Walker's office in the St. Luke Building is preserved as a memorial, maintained as she left it at her death in 1934. (Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Architectural Survey Form, p. 1, 2017)*

Staff finds that the proposed development would be an appropriate rehabilitation of an historic structure, would re-establish nonresidential use of a portion of the building, and would contribute to the revitalization of the community.

Staff further finds that the proposed development would not pose an undue burden on the availability of on-street parking due to the provision of off-street parking and interior and exterior bicycle storage.

Staff further finds that with the ordinance conditions the safeguards contained within the City Charter, relative to the granting of Special Use Permits, are met. Specifically, staff finds that the proposed use would not be detrimental to the general welfare of the community involved and would not create congestion in the streets in the area involved.

Therefore, staff recommends approval of the special use permit request.

---

---

## **FINDINGS OF FACT**

### **Site Description**

The subject property comprises 33,851 SF, or .78 acres, of land improved with a four-story building constructed, per tax assessment records, in 1902 as a commercial building. The property is located in the Gilpin neighborhood of North Jackson Ward in the city's North Planning District.

### **Proposed Use of the Property**

The applicant is proposing a mixed-use development containing non-residential uses on the first floor and up to 12 dwelling units on the upper floors, served by up to 37 off-street parking spaces, outdoor storage for no fewer than five bicycles, and internal secure storage for no fewer than nine bicycles for residents.

### **Master Plan**

The City of Richmond's Master Plan currently recommends Institutional land use for most of the property and Single Family (low density) land use for the remainder of the property. Primary Institutional uses include places of worship, private schools, universities, museums, hospitals and other care facilities. (Richmond Master Plan, p. 135). The primary uses for Single Family (low density) land use include single family detached dwellings at densities up to seven units per acre and residential support uses such as churches, parks, and recreational facilities (p. 133). The property is across St. James Street from, and could be considered an extension of, an area recommended by the Master Plan to support Neighborhood Commercial land uses.

## **Zoning and Ordinance Conditions**

The City's Zoning Ordinance designates this property as R-53 (Multi-family Residential).

The special use permit ordinance would impose additional conditions on the property, including:

3 (a) The Special Use of the Property shall be as a mixed-use building containing up to 12 dwelling units, substantially as shown on the Plans. The first floor of the building shall be a medical office use, office use, a day nursery use meeting the requirements of the underlying zoning, or uses permitted on corner lots in the R-63 Multifamily Urban Residential District by section 30-419.3 of the Code of the City of Richmond (2015), as amended. The second, third, and fourth floors of the Property shall contain up to four dwelling units per floor, substantially as shown on the Plans.

(b) Outdoor lighting shall be located, directed, or shielded so as not to shine directly on adjoining properties or create a traffic hazard by means of glare or similarity to or confusion with traffic signals, warning lights or lighting on emergency vehicles.

(c) All mechanical equipment serving the Property shall be located or screened so as not to be visible from any public right-of-way.

(d) Outdoor storage for no fewer than five bicycles shall be provided, substantially as shown on the Plans. Secure storage for no fewer than nine bicycles shall be provided within the building for use by the dwelling units, substantially as shown on the Plans.

(e) Up to 37 off-street parking spaces shall be provided on the Property, substantially as shown on the Plans.

(f) Signage on the Property shall be limited to (i) those signs permitted in all districts by section 30-505 of the Code of the City of Richmond (2015), as amended, (ii) those signs permitted in R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5, R-5A, R-6, R-7, and R-8 districts by section 30-506 of the Code of the City of Richmond (2015), as amended, (iii) wall signs, suspended signs and awning and canopy signs, provided that the aggregate area of all signs directed toward or intended to be viewed from any street frontage shall not exceed one square foot for each linear foot of building frontage along such street, or in any case 16 square feet, and projecting signs, provided that (a) no projecting sign shall exceed six square feet in area or be located within 25 feet of another projecting sign on the same building wall, (b) no projecting sign, other than a noncommercial flag, shall project greater than three feet from the face of the building or extend above the height of the wall to which it is attached, and (c) the area of the projecting signs shall be included in the calculation of maximum permitted aggregate area of all signs, and (iv) the existing "St Luke Building" signage shown on the Plans.

(g) A final landscape plan, including all site landscaping, buffers, fencing, walkways, and the fountain and historical marker, shall be approved by the Director of Planning and Development Review.

(h) The area to the west of the parking area identified as "open space" on sheet L1 of the Plans may be developed in the future, pursuant to the requirements of the underlying zoning.

4 (c) Facilities for the collection of refuse shall be provided in accordance with the requirements of the Director of Public Works. Such facilities shall be located or screened so as not to be visible from adjacent properties and public streets.

(e) The Owner shall make improvements within the public right-of-way, including the installation of tree wells and street trees along St. James Street and West Baker Street, the removal of an existing entrance and installation of granite curbing along West Baker Street, the installation of new entrances to St. James Street and West Baker Street, and the installation of a brick paver sidewalk along St. James Street and West Baker Street, substantially as shown on the Plans, which improvements may be completed in one or more phases as approved by the Director of Public Works.

### **Surrounding Area**

All surrounding properties are also in the R-53 district. Multi-family and vacant land uses predominate the vicinity, with some institutional, commercial, and office uses present as well.

### **Neighborhood Participation**

Staff has not received any letters of support or opposition regarding this application.

**Staff Contact:** Jonathan Brown, PDR, Land Use Administration, 804-646-5734