



## PRESERVATION VIRGINIA

**Westwood Tract Resolution  
Comments of Preservation Virginia  
Elizabeth Kostelny, CEO  
27 March 2018**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Westwood Tract. Since 1889, Preservation Virginia has been the voice for historic places across the Commonwealth. I am here as CEO and as a member of the neighborhood.

In 2016, Virginia's Most Endangered Historic Places included the Westwood Tract. An independent statewide committee of architectural historians, preservation professionals and economic development experts recognized the value of the Northside's historic districts and individual structures that trace Richmond's history from the Civil War to Civil Rights, from innovative street car suburbs and the establishment of the Seminary to urban renewal. Ginter, Sherwood and Laburnum Parks were designed with walkable tree lined streets, single family residences of varying proportions and styles with generous setbacks and open spaces—all neighborhood characteristics that are in demand today. Lewis Ginter lured Union Theological Seminary away from Hampden Sydney with a gift of land in 1898 and to complement the community he was establishing. The 1953 rezoning reinforced the intention of synergy. In 1968, on the journey to Washington, members of the People's March pitched tents were welcomed. In the shadow of the historic McGuire House, the Westwood Tract connects this history with neighbor's diversity of age, ethnicity, religion socioeconomic backgrounds and political views. Its open space welcomes people to recreate, to interact and to be part of Richmond's community.

The professionals who named the Westwood Tract to the Most Endangered List regarded the proposal from the Tennessee developer, Bristol as a serious threat to the integrity of the historic neighborhoods, the McGuire House, and other resources including Union Presbyterian Seminary's Campus. The panel raised alarms about the density, scale and unexceptional quality of proposed 301 rental units that will occupy just one Brook Road block. Contrast that density to the number of existing free standing homes 225 in Laburnum Park and 175 in Sherwood Park that spread over multiple blocks. The panel judged the plan out of step with best practices and economic analysis of what attracts residents to encourage stable communities.

With its private clubhouse, pool and gated access, the Canopy at Ginter Park seeks to set itself apart for the neighbors rather than be a part of the community and erode the inner connectivity that has set these historic neighborhoods apart for more than a century.

Nationally, enlightened developers leverage the unique character of historic neighborhoods, preserve and rehab buildings for new uses, retain greenspace. These proven approaches attract new and maintain existing residents and support the local economy. Alternatives exist. Sensitive, compatible development is the answer for the Westwood Tract. The City needs to examine these impacts before it is too late.