

Saunders, Richard L. - PDR

From: PDR Land Use Admin
Sent: Wednesday, April 6, 2022 2:33 PM
To: Saunders, Richard L. - PDR
Subject: FW: Special Use Permit ORD.2022-100

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, April 4, 2022 10:37 PM
To: PDR Land Use Admin <PDRLandUseAdmin@rva.gov>
Subject: Special Use Permit ORD.2022-100

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.

DATE: April 4, 2022

FROM: [REDACTED] Resident, City of Richmond

TO: Mr. Richard Saunders, Secretary to the Planning Commission
Members, City of Richmond Planning Commission
Members, City of Richmond City Council
Mayor Levar Stoney, Sponsor

Re: Special Permit Request of residentially-zoned property within the 5th District, known as 6 West 21st Street and 20 West 20th Street, for an unspecified commercial use and use as an "event space" and "community center."

Agenda Date: April 18, 2022 Ordinance 2022-100

I own a home in the vicinity of the property for which a special use permit has been requested, and have lived in my neighborhood since 1986 in this home. I have witnessed a considerable amount of improvements to formerly dilapidated and outdated older homes in this area, and have seen the rebirth of a formerly deteriorated portion of the city {Manchester} that is nearby. An influx of younger individuals and families {and the investments in this area that they have made} has been an encouraging sign that the City of Richmond may remain a viable and sustainable community.

As a former planning and zoning official with several Virginia communities, I achieved certification by the American Institute of Certified Planners {AICP}, and by the Virginia Association of Zoning Officials {VAZO, as a Certified Zoning Administrator}. I have long been critical of the City of Richmond's land use process, in that special use permits are consistently used in lieu of rezonings that are consistent with coherent comprehensive planning and zoning. The city's typical process, in my opinion,

constitutes arbitrary spot zoning. Spot zoning has been found to be illegal in many instances, and is considered to be inconsistent with good planning and zoning practices.

I happen to do business with a car repair shop that is located on the Hull Street commercial corridor in this area, and have on numerous occasions walked the streets of the subject area for the purpose of having my cars serviced. I have observed that there have been a good number of house renovations, and some new residential construction of good quality, along Clopton and other streets in this neighborhood. Hull Street is highly unattractive, but it is the location for many small commercial sites that offer decent employment to city residents, and provide useful services to this region. It should be the goal of city government to preserve these desirable land uses, to sustain and encourage them, and to thereby increase the tax base of the city so that it is possible to provide the necessary services of a city government.

One thing that is lacking in the subject area is a quality food market. The former site of a Siegel's Supermarket, at one time a community landmark, is quite close to the subject property. There are a number of undesirable uses in the vicinity, including run-down convenience stores from which cigarettes and alcoholic beverages are marketed, presumably to those who congregate around these businesses. A substantial number of properties have been removed from the tax roles through designation as religious or institutional uses, with at least seven small religious institutional uses in the immediate vicinity of the subject property. These may serve as community centers, suggesting that any need for such community meeting spaces has been met. It appears that several of these church and institutional properties serve as child care centers, which may serve an important purpose to neighborhood families, but which may also be problematic uses if not properly licensed and regulated to provide safe child care services. There is also a drug addiction residential treatment center {Good Samaritan Ministries} in the immediate vicinity of the proposed special use. Although drug addiction and substance abuse treatment and counseling facilities can provide a valuable service, a concentration of such facilities {and their clients} will often have a corrosive effect on a neighborhood. It is my opinion that such an undesirable concentration of such uses already exists within the immediate area, contributing to crime and public nuisances within the community.

I ask the Planning Commission to reject the proposed special use permit as being inconsistent with the comprehensive plan. In addition, the issuance of a special use permit would be inconsistent with existing residential zoning in the area. I wish to note that my experience as a zoning administrator included review of a large number of applications for special use permits, special exceptions, ABC license applications, and variances pertaining to "event venues." The last thing a struggling neighborhood or community needs is a facility that may be rented for private parties involving alcohol {and often guns and other weapons}, or effective use as a nightclub.

Please note that I do not know the person or persons making the application for the special use permit. My only economic stake in this matter is my ownership of my nearby residence, and my status as an overburdened taxpayer. Although I am an active member of a community association, I am not acting on behalf of that organization in providing comments. I belong to a number of community organizations, but am not representing them in this matter. Having myself acted as Secretary to Boards of Zoning Appeals, and as Secretary to Planning Commissions prior to my retirement, I appreciate the vital service that you provide to this community. I thank you for your attention to my comments. I will not be able to appear in person at the scheduled Planning Commission meeting on April 18, 2022, nor participate through electronic means.

Please do not publish my email address, telephone number, or home address in any meeting or hearing record or other public place.