



CITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

Ord. No. 2024-058: To authorize the special use of the property known as 207 West Franklin Street for the purpose of two multifamily dwellings containing an aggregate of up to 11 dwelling units, upon certain terms and conditions.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Land Use Administration
Date: March 19, 2024

PETITIONER

Nathan March - Johannas Design Group

LOCATION

207 West Franklin Street

PURPOSE

The applicant is proposing to convert an existing two-and-a-half story structure at 207 West Franklin Street into a multifamily development by renovating and adding an addition to the existing structure, as well as constructing a new, stand-alone carriage house to the rear. While the use is permitted in the RO-3 Residential Office District, some of the applicable standards, including required yards and land area coverage cannot be met. Therefore, a Special Use Permit is requested.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff finds that the proposed use, which is to include existing and new residential units, is aligned with the goals of the Downtown Mixed-Use Development Style, including the recommended Primary Uses.

Staff finds that the proposal aligns with Objectives 3.1 and 3.2 of Richmond 300, which call to “Preserve culturally, historically, and architecturally significant buildings, sites, structures, neighborhoods, cemeteries, and landscapes that contribute to Richmond's authenticity, and “Reduce the demolition of historical buildings,” respectively (p. 120-121).

More specifically, staff finds that the proposed adaptive reuse is supported by Objective 3.2a, which states: “Create flexibility in the Zoning Ordinance to encourage the adaptive reuse of historical buildings and deter demolition, such as allowing for compatible densities and uses in historical areas.” (p. 95) The proposal help achieve this objective by allowing for the adaptive reuse of an existing historic structure to allow for up to eight dwelling units, while also allowing the construction of a new carriage house containing up to three additional dwelling units.

Staff also finds that the proposal supports Objective 6.1 to “Increase the number of residents and jobs at Nodes, Priority Neighborhoods, and along enhanced transit corridors in a land development pattern that prioritizes multi-modal transportation options.” The subject property is located within the Monroe Ward Priority Growth Node and within two blocks of several GRTC bus routes, including the Pulse BRT line.

Staff finds that this proposal supports the vision of the Monroe Ward Priority Growth Node, which envisions that “Historic buildings are preserved and complemented by denser development on vacant lots that generate activity,” and “a critical mass of residents, shoppers, workers, and tourists who are attracted to the residential options, retail and restaurant destinations, jobs, and cultural attractions in Jackson Ward, the Arts District, and the Downtown Core.” (p. 28)

Staff finds that due to all findings summarized above, 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 property is located in the Monroe Ward neighborhood on West Franklin Street between North Madison and North Jefferson Streets. The property is currently an 8,917 square foot (0.205 acre) improved parcel of land, with a 3-story structure, known as the T. Seddon Bruce House, which was constructed ca. 1882-1185 and was most recently used for office space. The building has sat vacant for more than three years.

Proposed Use of the Property

Up to Eleven Multifamily Units within and Existing Building and a Newly Proposed Carriage House

Master Plan

The City’s Richmond 300 Master Plan designates a future land use for the subject property as Downtown Mixed Use, which is defined as the “Central business district of the Richmond region [which] features high-density development with office buildings, residential buildings, and a mix of complementary uses, including regional destinations in a highly-walkable urban environment.”

Development Style

Higher density pedestrian- and transit-oriented development encouraged on vacant or underutilized sites. Historic buildings are adapted for new uses. Future development should be urban in form and may be of larger scale than existing context. Plazas and setbacks create an engaging street life. Many buildings are vertically mixed-use. New developments continue or introduce a gridded street pattern to increase connectivity.

Ground Floor

Ground floor uses engage with and enliven the street. Monolithic walls are discouraged, while windows, doors, storefronts, and other features that allow transparency and interaction between building and street are encouraged. Active commercial ground floor uses required on street-oriented commercial frontages.

Mobility

Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access are prioritized and accommodated. Bike parking is provided. Driveway entrances are required to be off alleys whenever possible; new driveways are prohibited on priority and principal street frontages. Surface parking is prohibited as a principal use. Parking requirements are substantially less in these areas than other areas of the City and are largely eliminated.

Intensity

Buildings typically a minimum height of five stories.

Primary Use Retail/office/ personal service, multi-family residential, cultural, institutional, government, and open space.

Secondary Uses
Not applicable

The property is also located within the Monroe Ward Priority Growth Node. The vision for this Node within the Richmond 300 Master Plan is:

Monroe Ward is transformed from the detached parking garage of the Downtown Core into a significant residential and office mixed-use district between two of the region's greatest concentrations of activity—the VCU Monroe Park Campus and the Downtown Core. Historic buildings are preserved and complemented by denser development on vacant lots that generate activity. There is a critical mass of residents, shoppers, workers, and tourists who are attracted to the residential options, retail and restaurant destinations, jobs, and cultural attractions in Jackson Ward, the Arts District, and the Downtown Core. New pocket parks provide outdoor greenspace for Monroe Ward's residents, workers, and visitors, and are connected to other Downtown districts via greenways, bike lanes, and transit. (p. C-19)

The proposed density of the parcel is 11 units upon 0.205 acres, or approximately 54 units per acre.

Zoning and Ordinance Conditions

The current zoning for this property is RO-3 Residential Office District. The proposed use does not conform to the following sections of the Zoning Ordinance:

Sec. 30-428.6(2). – Side and Rear Yards.

- a. Side and rear yards for single-family and two-family dwellings and buildings accessory thereto shall be as required in the R-7 district and set forth in Section 30-413.6.
- b. Side and rear yards for newly constructed multifamily dwellings and buildings accessory thereto shall be not less than 15 feet in depth.
- c. Side and rear yards for uses and buildings other than single-family, two-family and multifamily dwellings and buildings accessory thereto shall be not less than ten feet in depth.

The side and rear yards for the existing structure, proposed addition, and new carriage house vary across the site. At its closest, these structures are within 3.8 feet of the east (side) property line and 1 foot of the south (rear) property line.

Sec. 30-428.8 – Land Area Coverage.

In the RO-3 Residential-Office District, portions of buildings over 35 feet in height shall occupy not more than 35 percent of land area.

Per the applicant, the total lot coverage of areas of the existing and proposed buildings exceeding 35 feet in height is 56%.

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

- The Special Use of the Property shall be as two multifamily dwellings containing an aggregate of up to 11 dwelling units, substantially as shown on the Plans.

- The height of the Special Use shall not exceed four stories, substantially as shown on the Plans.
- All building materials, elevations, and site improvements shall be substantially as shown on the Plans, subject to the applicable regulations of Chapter 30, Article IX, Division 4 of the Code of the City of Richmond (2020), as amended.
- All mechanical equipment serving the Property shall be located or screened so as not to be visible from any public right-of-way.

Surrounding Area

The surrounding area primarily consists of office and commercial uses, with some institutional uses in close proximity. The properties are within walking distance to Arts District, including the Arts District Pulse bus rapid transit station.

Neighborhood Participation

Staff notified the Downtown Neighborhood Association and nearby residents of the proposed Special Use Permit. Staff has not received any letters of support or opposition to this application.

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