



May 25, 2018

By Electronic Mail

Mr. Mark Olinger
Director, Planning and Development Review
City of Richmond
900 East Broad Street; Room 511
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Re: RZON-028101-2017; Westhampton School Site

Mr. Olinger:

The purpose of this letter is to respond to a request from you, Councilman Addison, and others, regarding Bon Secours' position on preserving the existing school buildings at the Westhampton School site.

Unfortunately Bon Secours was forced to announce, in December 2016, that it was not financially viable to relocate its nursing school to the Westhampton School site. At that time, Bon Secours also announced that it planned to demolish the existing school buildings to make room for a new medical office building.

After that announcement, Bon Secours heard loud and clear the reaction from elements of the community interested in preserving the school buildings. In response to those concerns, Bon Secours spent several months working with internal and external stakeholders to find a path forward that could lead to preservation.

On August 24, 2017, Bon Secours announced its plans to locate a new three-story medical office building behind the existing 1917 School building, on Libbie Avenue. Bon Secours also announced its plan to request that members of the development community submit creative proposals for the highest and best use for the Westhampton School footprint. Those interested were given broad parameters and told only that the plans must (1) complement the health care being provided on the St. Mary's Hospital campus, (2) help address the health needs of the community, and (3) be consistent with Bon Secours' faith-based values. Proposers were also told that preference would be given to any proposal that preserved at least the 1917 portion of the School.

At the August 24, 2017 meeting, and in countless meetings since that time, Bon Secours has consistently stated that it is unable to unequivocally commit to preserving the school buildings at this time. Bon Secours continues to evaluate the eleven proposals it has received for the redevelopment of the Westhampton School footprint, primarily for financial viability, and to ensure they comply with the parameters given the proposers.



The property is currently zoned R4, which allows two-story residential homes; the Westhampton School is grandfathered. Until the property is re-zoned to B7, and proposers are assured that the proposals they have submitted could actually be pursued on the property, the financial viability of the proposals cannot be fully vetted by Bon Secours.

We do not want to promise the community that we will preserve any of the school buildings before the development community and market tell us whether it is financially viable. Bon Secours made a mistake in December 2016 when it announced that the nursing school would be relocated to the site, and that the 1917 building would be preserved, before it fully understood the financial viability of that project. We do not want to make that mistake again.

However, if the zoning application is approved, Bon Secours' analysis of developers' proposals can proceed in a more thorough and expeditious manner, as some proposers will then be able to provide more in-depth design plans, and detailed financial information, required to fully vet the financial viability of those plans.

We believe that seeking the re-zoning and fully evaluating the proposals that we have received gives us the best chance to generate a plan that (1) preserves at least the 1917 building, (2) allows us to exceed the economic development thresholds established by the City and the Economic Development Authority, and (3) leads to a project that complements the health care being provided on the St. Mary's Hospital campus, helps address the health needs of the community, and is consistent with Bon Secours' faith-based values.

While there is not clear consensus among the community and stakeholders about whether the Westhampton School should be saved, Bon Secours desires to preserve at least the 1917 portion of the School because it is the right thing to do. The past eighteen months that have brought us to this point illustrate our desire to preserve, and we will preserve if it is financially viable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rhodes B. Ritenour". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

Rhodes B. Ritenour
Vice President, External and Regulatory Affairs