



# Oregon Hill

## Neighborhood Association

1 October 2021

Richard L. Saunders III  
Planner, Land Use Administration Division  
Secretary to the City Planning Commission  
Dept. of Planning & Development Review  
City of Richmond, VA  
Phone: 804-646-5648  
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Re: OHNA comments on SUP Application for 116 South Laurel Street, Richmond VA, Ord. No. 2021-262

Dear Mr. Saunders:

116 South Laurel Street (tax parcel W000-0293/020) is located on the west side of S. Laurel Street between Cary Street and Cumberland Street. The property is currently vacant, roughly 55 feet wide by 143.5 feet in depth, and contains approximately 7,865 square feet of lot area.

116 S. Laurel Street has a lot area of 7865 square feet and a width of 55 feet. The applicant proposes to divide the parcel into two lots, each of which will contain a lot area of 3,932.50 square feet and a width of 27.50 feet. The applicant proposed to construct two new, two-family detached dwellings on this site. Each of the dwellings will contain two three-bedroom units, with six bedrooms per dwelling, for a total of twelve bedrooms.

### **Existing Zoning**

The lot at 116 S. Laurel is:

- within the Oregon Hill Historic District (listed on the Va. Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places)
- within the R-7 Single- and Two-Family Urban Residential zoning designation
- within an important block, historically a key entrance to the neighborhood, within which there are three historic preservation easements held by the Commonwealth of Virginia, Board of Historic Resources
- located adjacent to 112 and 122 S. Laurel, two significant contributing structures to the Oregon Hill Historic District

### **Applicant's Proposal**

The proposed two two-family detached dwellings would be two stories in height and of a historically compatible design. The exterior would be clad in horizontal cementitious (Hardieplank) lap siding, and cementitious panels. At present, the proposed site is a single lot; the applicant proposed to divide it into two lots as a condition of the SUP. The proposed two, single-family detached dwellings, each containing two units of three bedrooms and two-and one-half bathrooms in each unit, would be located on two individual lots of record. The zoning ordinance currently restricts occupancy to three unrelated individuals. The zoning ordinance treats each duplex unit as a separate residence, and as such, this project complies with this requirement.

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The two two-family detached dwellings would each be approximately 21' 6" in. 8'- 6" in depth (plus an 8' porch) and contain approximately 3,354 square feet of finished floor area on two floors of living space in each of the two two-family detached dwellings. The first floor and second floors of each contain identical plans: an open kitchen, dining, and living area, two bedrooms with full bathrooms, and one bathroom with a half-bathroom and access to the adjacent full bathroom.

There are six bedrooms in each of the dwellings, for a total of twelve bedrooms.

The applicant proposes to provide twelve parking spaces, to be located behind the two dwellings, with five 8' wide (compact) spaces in two rows of six stacked spaces).

### **Impact**

The proposed project with two, two-family detached dwellings on a divided 116 South Laurel Street lot:

- As presented is architecturally compatible with the neighboring buildings on South Laurel Street.
- Does not meet the requirements of city code Sec. 30-413.5 for minimum lot size, which states: "For two-family detached dwellings, the minimum lot area is 4,400 square feet. The lot area at 116 S. Laurel is 3,600 sq. ft. (*Note: the zoning confirmation letter (30 September 2020) was written for two, single-family detached dwellings, which calls for "lots of not less than 3,600 square feet in area with a width of not less than 30 feet."*)"
- Does not meet the requirements of city code Sec. 30-413.5 for minimum lot width, which states "Two-family detached dwellings shall be located on lots ... with a width of not less than 42 feet." This project provides 27.5 feet.\*
- Meets the requirements of city code Sec. 30-413.6 for minimum yard setbacks, which states: "There shall be side yards of not less than 3 feet." The proposed setback between the new dwellings and S. Laurel Street will be less than 3 feet. Design drawings do not specify the proposed setback to the alley or sidewalk.
- Meets the requirements of city code Sec. 30-413.7 for maximum lot coverage, which states "Lot coverage shall not exceed 55%." Maximum lot coverage for 116 S. Laurel would be approximately 1,980 square feet. The proposed development would be about 1,677 sq. feet.
- Meets the requirements of city code Sec. 30-710.1 which specifies the minimum number of parking of spaces required for particular uses. The proposed development would provide twelve parking spaces behind the two buildings, with access from the alley. The spaces would be all compact (8') spaces, arranged in two rows of six. Four spaces are proposed to be retained for this development (which meets the minimum requirement), and eight spaces will be rented out. While we appreciate the provision of additional parking, we have concerns about the practicality of the proposed parking arrangement. *The City of Richmond Parking Ordinance, Article VII, "Off-Street Parking and Loading Requirements" Sec. 30-697.3 specifies:*
  - "Parking areas with five or more spaces may provide a maximum of 20 percent of spaces at compact dimensions, provided that such spaces shall be clearly marked as compact spaces." At present, all twelve spaces are presented at a compact width of 8'.

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\* Note: the lot width is one of the measures used by the City to allow the use of a duplex, which is a denser use than single family-use, but it prevents a by right doubling of density, which would incentivize demolition and replacement single-family dwellings and their replacement by duplexes.

- The parking layout provided does not meet any layout approved by the City; while there certainly are examples of informal parking being provided in an all stacked-space arrangement, this does not meet official guidelines.
- The ordinance also specifies: “All dead-end aisles providing access to parking spaces shall be provided with backup space of not less than five feet in depth at the end of such aisles.” No aisles are provided in this project.
- Meets the permitted number of three non-related occupants allowed under the R-7 zoning. A duplex is a recognized use, and each unit contains three bedrooms.

### **OHNA Actions**

The OHNA planning and zoning committee met with the applicant multiple times to discuss the project, and brought their recommendation to the 26 April 2021 monthly OHNA meeting. The applicants were present at that meeting, during which several minor architectural adjustments were agreed upon, such as the inclusion of a Richmond rail for the first floor porch. At that time OHNA recommended the following:

In exchange for placing a preservation easement over another development they are undertaking, the rehabilitation of 103 South Laurel Street (using state and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits), OHNA would support the SUP application for 116 South Laurel Street. This easement donation would mitigate the impact of the increased density of this project. Recognizing that the easement could not be placed until the federal holding period (five years) expired for the tax credits, the applicant agreed to make a written commitment to make the easement donation at that time, and that this commitment be acknowledged as a part of the SUP.

We recognize that this is a separate action from the SUP itself, which is why we asked for the commitment to be made in writing. The membership voted to support this motion.

The applicant, however, has not provided any written commitment to make the easement donation. On 28 September, the applicant replied to our request for a written commitment by acknowledging that he had promised to make the donation, but now no longer intended to do so. As a result, on 30 September, one neighbor who had previously supported the SUP, conditioned his support on the applicant following through on their commitment to OHNA.

In light of this, we ask that the Planning Commission continue the SUP to give the applicant additional time to follow up on their agreement with OHNA.

Sincerely,



Bryan Clark Green, President  
Oregon Hill Neighborhood Association

\*\*\*NOTE: Each location within the Oregon Hill neighborhood is unique, and will have its own unique requirements for development or redevelopment. Applications will be evaluated on an individual basis and in consideration of each property's specific needs. Applicants should not assume that the conditions applied to one proposal will be applicable to any subsequent proposal.\*\*\*\*