

WESTHAMPTON CITIZENS ASSOCIATION

July 13, 2025

By Email: [jonathan.brown@rva.gov](mailto:jonathan.brown@rva.gov)

Jonathan Brown

Senior Planner, Land Use Administration

City of Richmond Department of Planning & Development Review

900 East Broad Street, Room 511

Richmond, VA 23219

Re: Application for Special Use Permit for 3923 Grove Avenue

Dear Mr. Brown:

The Westhampton Citizens Association ("WCA") is submitting this letter in response to the captioned special use permit application to be considered by the Planning Commission at its meeting on July 15, 2025. We respectfully request that this letter be included in the Planning Commission's record for this SUP application and made available to members of the Planning Commission.

WCA opposes the issuance of the proposed SUP for the reasons set forth below.

The Existing Property. The property at 3923 Grove Avenue (the "Property") contains approximately 0.8 acre with an existing antebellum farmhouse. The Property is located in an R-5 Single Family Residential District. The current zoning ordinance as it applies to the R-5 district permits only one single family *detached* house on each lot and specifies a minimum lot size of 6,000 square feet, a minimum width of 50 feet, a minimum front yard of 25 feet, a minimum rear yard and side yard of 5 feet and a maximum lot coverage of 35%. The existing house on the Property, as well as houses in the Henry Place neighborhood adjoining the Property to the east and south, generally comply with those requirements.

The Property As Redeveloped. The proposed SUP will permit redevelopment of the Property in a manner that differs radically from the use and development permitted by R-5 zoning and will result in a drastic densification that significantly changes the character and style of the adjoining Henry Place neighborhood. The applicant proposes to construct 16 *attached* houses as well as preserving (for an undetermined period) the existing farmhouse, resulting in 17 residences on the Property. By contrast, if the Property were subdivided and fully developed under the current R-5 zoning, it would have at most four or five detached single-family homes.

The Neighborhood. The Property fronts on Grove Avenue to the north, adjoins the Henry Place neighborhood to the east and south, and adjoins the Malvern Manor apartments to the west. The Henry Place neighborhood extends from Grove Avenue to Cary Street Road and from Hamilton Street to Malvern Manor apartments. Like other areas of the West End, Henry Place was developed during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with modest single family, detached homes affordable to middle class families and the neighborhood has retained that residential character over the ensuing decades.

When residents purchase a home in a neighborhood of single family, detached homes, they reasonably expect the neighborhood to remain a neighborhood in which each lot contains only one detached single-family house, with front and rear yards located along tree-lined streets with limited vehicular traffic, adequate parking and other features suitable for raising families. Allowing redevelopment of the Property in accordance with the proposed SUP ignores that fact.

That the Property adjoins the Malvern Manor apartments to the west or that the Mt. Vernon Condominiums are located across Grove Avenue to the north does not provide any support for the applicant's request for the SUP. Malvern Manor, which was constructed in the 1940's, is surrounded by neighborhoods with predominantly single family detached homes (R-1 and R-5), including Kingcrest, Colonial Place and Windsor Farms among others. The Mt. Vernon Condominiums are located in an entirely separate zoning district (R-53). The mere existence of discrete areas of multifamily or condominium housing in the vicinity of the Property does not justify granting the right to redevelop intensely the Property in a long-standing single family neighborhood.

Affordable Housing. One of the goals of the Richmond 300 Master Plan and Zoning Code Refresh initiative is to encourage the construction of affordable housing. The applicant has indicated that the anticipated sales price for each unit will range from \$600,000 to \$800,000, a price point that hardly qualifies the proposed townhomes as "affordable" housing for prospective purchasers with income at or slightly above the median income in the Richmond area.

For example, a purchaser of a unit for \$600,000 who pays 20% down (\$120,000) and finances the remaining 80% would need to earn \$165,336 per year in order for the mortgage payments (at current rates), taxes and insurance not to exceed 30% of the purchaser's annual income. If the purchaser were only able to pay 10% down, the purchaser would need to earn an annual income of \$180,680. For the townhomes priced at \$800,000, the required annual income for those financed at 80% and 90% loan-to-value would be \$214,337 and \$234,838, respectively.

By contrast, the existing homes on the 3900 block of Sterling Street, which adjoins the southern boundary of the Property, are currently assessed from \$322,000 to \$455,000. The proposed redevelopment of the Property will likely result in gentrification of the Henry Place neighborhood, increased assessments and higher taxes for the current homeowners. Rather than providing affordable housing, the proposed redevelopment of the Property will result in reducing naturally occurring affordable housing that exists in Henry Place. For some long-time residents, the result might easily be displacement.

Traffic Congestion. The sixteen additional units are certain to create more traffic on the streets in Henry Place as compared to the one single family home presently on the Property that is accessed only from Grove Avenue.

Inadequate Parking. In addition, the proposed redevelopment of the Property will cause a severe shortage of parking spaces in the neighborhood. The homes in Henry Place generally do not have driveways or other off-street parking; instead, they depend upon on-street parking on relatively narrow streets. Although the SUP provides for some off-street parking, it also contemplates using on-street parking spaces, which are already in short supply.

Required Finding on Congestion. Section 30-1050.1 of the Zoning Ordinance provides that City Council may issue a special use permit authorizing the use of land that does not comply with the applicable zoning district regulations only if City Council finds that the proposed use will not, among other things, "[t]end to create congestion in streets, roads, alleys and other public ways and places in the area involved." The construction of 16 new housing units where only one house exists now will clearly generate additional automobile traffic and a need for parking spaces that the neighborhood cannot reasonably accommodate. Thus, the proposed redevelopment of the Property will do exactly what the Zoning Ordinance seeks to prevent whenever City Council is asked to approve a special use permit; namely, it will create congestion in the streets in the immediate neighborhood--congestion both in automobile traffic on the streets and congestion in parking spaces. Under such circumstances, the Zoning Ordinance does not allow the requested special use permit to be issued.

Neighborhood Voice Matters. Nowhere in the proposed SUP or Ordinance is the Henry Place neighborhood that adjoins the Property on two sides mentioned or recognized. Neighborhood participation is identified as "Staff notified the Westhampton Citizens Association of the proposed Special Use Permit." While we appreciate the notice, meaningful interaction and engagement with the neighborhood was not part of the process. Why? Because the City of Richmond's agencies and private developers prefer to chase an increased tax base and corporate profits, respectively, rather than hear and respond to resident concerns in advance of the applicable Planning Commission Meeting. The result is a "for" versus "against" argument. Compromise can be found, but only if dialogue is genuinely encouraged and facilitated. We hope that the Planning Commission will take careful account of the many voices represented in the agenda packet and who will appear in person.

Conclusion. For the foregoing reasons, Westhampton Citizens Association urges the Planning Commission not to recommend that the special use permit application for the Property be issued.

Very truly yours,



Patricia Merrill

President

cc: Councilman Andrew Breton  
Alyson Oliver  
Whitney Brown