



## CITY OF RICHMOND

### Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

**Ord. No. 2021-016:** To authorize the special use of the property known as 321 West Grace Street for the purpose of a mixed-use building containing up to 16 stories and up to 177 dwelling units, upon certain terms and conditions.

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**To:** City Planning Commission  
**From:** Land Use Administration  
**Date:** February 16, 2021

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#### **PETITIONER**

Preston Lloyd – Williams Mullen

#### **LOCATION**

321 West Grace Street

#### **PURPOSE**

To authorize the special use of the property known as 321 West Grace Street for the purpose of a mixed-use building containing up to 16 stories and up to 177 dwelling units, upon certain terms and conditions.

#### **SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION**

The request is to authorize the construction of a mixed-use building consisting of up to 177 dwelling units, with approximately 4,200 square feet of ground floor lobby/amenity space and approximately 1,800 square feet of commercial area on the ground floor, as well as a top floor amenity space and rooftop deck of approximately 4,400 square feet.

As proposed, the structure will encompass nearly all of the 20,748 square feet (0.476 acres) of lot area and cannot meet all feature requirements of the B-4 Central Business District. Also, the building will contain units which may be leased to more than three-unrelated persons. A special use permit is therefore required in order to authorize the implementation of the project as proposed.

Staff finds that the proposal to redevelop an unscreened parking lot with a mixed-use building is consistent with the recommendations of the Master Plan. Specifically, it aligns with the Master Plan's vision for the Downtown - Monroe Ward Priority Growth Node and would contain a mix of uses recommended for the Downtown Mixed-Use land use designation.

Staff finds the proposed development, specifically its design and architectural elements, addresses several of the strategies within Objective 4.1. The residential density provided by the project supports Objectives 6.1 and 14.5 by providing additional ridership opportunities for transit in the area. It would also contribute to the revitalization of the area.

Staff finds that the proposal is consistent with the intent of the B-4 Central Business District and would generally accomplish the Monroe Ward Plan of Development Overlay District's purpose to establish appropriate developments.

Staff further finds that the proposal would not pose an undue burden on the availability of on-street parking in the area.

Staff finds that with the ordinance conditions, 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 safety, health, morals and general welfare of the community and would not create congestion in the streets in the area involved

Therefore, staff recommends approval of this special use permit request.

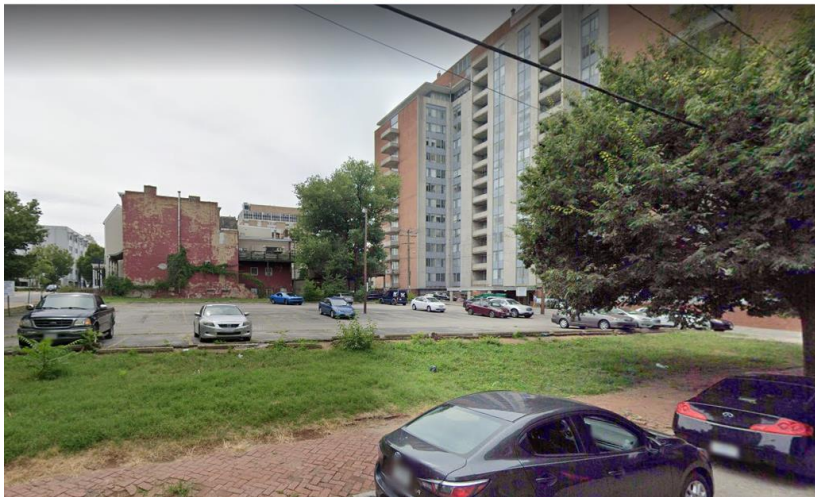
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## **FINDINGS OF FACT**

### **Site Description**

The subject property consists of a parcel totaling 20,748 SF (.476 acres) of land at the corner of North Monroe Street and West Grace Street. The property is improved with an unscreened surface parking lot.



### **Proposed Use of Property**

The proposed redevelopment of the property consists of a 16-story mixed-use building consisting of up to 177 dwelling units, with approximately 4,200 square feet of ground floor lobby/amenity space and approximately 1,800 square feet of commercial area on the ground floor, as well as a top floor amenity space and rooftop deck of approximately 4,400 square feet. The building will also contain 57 parking spaces and a bicycle storage room for 45 bicycles on the first two levels.

### **Richmond 300 Master Plan**

The subject property is designated for Downtown Mixed-Use and is also in the Downtown - Monroe Ward Priority Growth Node, according to the Richmond 300 Master Plan.

The Downtown Mixed-Use designation is described as: Central business district of the Richmond region 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 Plan further states that, in the Downtown Mixed-Use area, the architectural variety of historic and new construction creates visual interest and tells a compelling story about the evolution of Richmond's built environment. And, the most intense of all the land uses, downtown mixed-use features the tallest buildings in Richmond which are often alongside shorter, historic buildings that have been adapted and reused for new uses.

The vision for the Downtown - Monroe Ward Priority Growth Node is as follows: 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.

The subject property is called out on the Monroe Ward Conceptual Site Plan as a potential building site.

The Richmond 300 Master Plan designates the portion of Grace Street, along which the subject property is located, as a Major Mixed-Use Street.

Objective 4.1 of Richmond 300 states: Create and preserve high-quality, distinctive, and well-designed neighborhoods and Nodes throughout the city.

Objective 6.1 states: Increase the number of residents and jobs at Nodes and along enhanced transit corridors in a land development pattern that prioritizes multimodal transportation options.

Objective 14.5 of Richmond 300 states: Encourage more housing types throughout the city and greater density along enhanced transit corridors and at Nodes by amending the Zoning Ordinance.

### **Zoning & Ordinance Conditions**

The subject property is located in the B-4 Central Business District and is also part of the Monroe Ward Plan of Development Overlay District (POD-2). This section of Grace Street is designated as a priority street on the official zoning map.

The intent of the B-4 District, according to the zoning ordinance, is to define the urban center of the City of Richmond by promoting dense, transit-oriented development with greater building height than elsewhere in the region. The district regulations are intended to promote redevelopment, placemaking, and development of surface parking lots to create high-quality urban spaces. Such regulations are also intended to improve streetscape character and enhance public safety by encouraging an active pedestrian environment consistent with the mixed-use character of the district and by providing uniform setbacks, first floor commercial uses, and windows in building façades along street frontages.

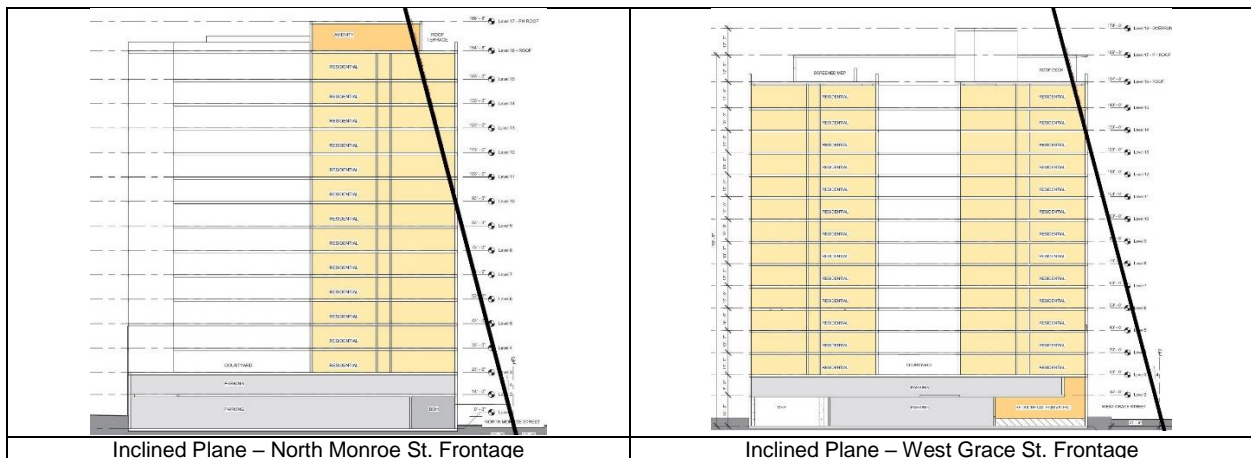
According to the zoning ordinance, plans of development in the Monroe Ward Plan of Development Overlay District shall be evaluated to determine if building design is in line with the following six form elements:

- a. *Hold the corner.* Buildings and spaces at intersections shall have active ground floors that wrap around the corner.
- b. *Entrances that face the street.* Main entrances to businesses and residences shall face the street to facilitate pedestrian activity.
- c. *Appropriate setbacks/stepbacks.* Commercial uses shall be closer to the street and residential uses shall be set back to facilitate privacy and to create a semi-public space. Stepbacks at upper stories shall honor existing form without overwhelming it.

- d. *Transparency.* Façade fenestration shall be visible from the street. This is especially important on the ground floor, where fenestration should occupy a higher percentage of the building face.
- e. *Façade articulation.* Long, monolithic façades shall be broken up and made more human-scale by varying the streetwall plane, height, colors, and materials.
- f. *Screened parking/services.* Attractive landscaping shall extend to the sidewalk to help maintain a streetwall and mitigate the disruption caused by surface parking lots and utilitarian services.

In the B-4 Central Business District the front yard setback is determined by matching the setback of adjacent buildings, but shall not exceed 10 feet. The adjacent structure has a setback greater than 10 feet, however the proposed development plan calls for zero foot setback. The proposal exceeds floor area ratio for the zoning district, and the ratio of useable open space.

There is no height limitation in the B-4 Central Business District. However, a building must not break an inclined plane originating at the centerline of each abutting street and extending over the lot at an inclination of one foot horizontal for each four feet vertical. The proposed building exceeds the inclined plane requirement along the North Monroe Street and West Grace Street frontages:



The applicant also asks relief from the zoning ordinance’s definition of a family. As stated in the zoning ordinance, no more than three unrelated persons shall inhabit a single dwelling unit. The proposal asks for authorization to allow up to four unrelated persons, and that each of these persons shall have their own rental contract.

Zoning Administration provided the following comments regarding the details of the proposed mixed-use development that do not comply with the current zoning regulations:

*Front yard – In the B-4 zoning district, where an existing building is located on one adjacent lot along the same street frontage, the front yard shall be the same as the front yard provided for such existing building, but in no case greater than ten feet. Where the front yard of such existing building is greater than ten feet, the front yard requirement shall be ten feet. A 10-foot front yard*

*setback is required along W Grace Street due to the existence of a building located at 307 W. Grace Street that is setback greater than 10 feet. A setback of zero feet (0') is proposed for the mixed-use development along W Grace Street.*

*FLOOR AREA RATIO: The floor area ratio shall not exceed 6.0, provided that additional floor area for non-dwelling uses shall be permitted as set forth in section 30-690. The proposed mixed-use building exceeds an FAR of 6.0. Floor area bonuses are only permitted for non-dwelling uses. [The proposed FAR is 7.2]*

*USABLE OPEN SPACE RATIO: A usable open space ratio of not less than 0.08 shall be provided for newly constructed buildings or portions thereof devoted to dwelling uses or shelters. This requirement is not met in the proposed plans [The proposed ratio is 0.05]*

*HEIGHT: There shall be no maximum height limit in the B-4 Central Business District, provided that no portion of a building shall penetrate an inclined plane originating at the centerline of each abutting street and extending over the lot at an inclination of one foot horizontal for each four feet vertical. The proposed building exceeds the inclined plane requirement along the W Grace Street and N Monroe Street frontages.*

*DEFINITION OF FAMILY: Not more than three unrelated persons or a combination of related and unrelated persons can live in a single-family dwelling. The proposed four bedrooms in the single-family dwelling and the indication of renting to college students could create a zoning violation. The single-family dwelling could only have three unrelated persons living there at any point in time. The potential of renting to four unrelated persons would require authorization through this Special Use Permit. Additionally, individuals will share a dwelling unit and there will be separate rental agreements for individual rooms. It is not considered a "dwelling unit" per the definition in the zoning ordinance. The SUP Ordinance will have to permit this configuration and use.*

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This special use permit ordinance would impose development conditions on the property, including:

- (a) The Special Use of the Property shall be as a mixed-use building containing up to 16 stories and up to 177 dwelling units that will individually house more than three unrelated persons, with amenities and commercial uses on the ground floor, substantially as shown on the Plans.
- (b) No fewer than 57 off-street parking spaces, of which no more than nine may be tandem off-street parking spaces, shall be provided for the Special Use.
- (c) All building materials, building colors, and site improvements shall be substantially as shown on the Plans.
- (d) The height of the Special Use shall not exceed 16 floors, substantially as shown on the Plans.

- (e) All mechanical equipment serving the Property shall be located or screened so as not to be visible from any public right-of-way.
- (f) Up to four unrelated persons or combination of related and unrelated persons may reside within individual dwelling units.
- (g) Interior doors to bedrooms within dwelling units may contain exterior locking mechanisms.
- (h) Leases of occupancy shall be 30 days or greater in length and may include separate rental agreements for different occupants of the same unit.
- (i) The portion of the ground floor of the building labeled "Retail/Retail Equivalent" (the "Ground Floor Retail") on sheet A.4 of the Plans shall be used exclusively for commercial uses permitted in the B-4 Central Business District. Notwithstanding the limitations in the preceding sentence, all or a portion of the Ground Floor Retail may be used for common amenity space or other use customarily incidental to a student housing development, upon a showing by the Owner to the Zoning Administrator that, for a period of not less than 12 months from the date of issuance of the final certificate of occupancy for the Special Use, all or a portion of the Ground Floor Retail has not been occupied by a commercial use and that all or a portion of the Ground Floor Retail has been made available for occupancy for the duration of such period at commercially reasonable rates. Satisfaction of the requirements of this subsection shall be evidenced by a certificate of zoning compliance for the Property issued by the Zoning Administrator.
- (j) The eastern façade of the building, to the extent permitted by the Virginia Statewide Building Code, shall include windows substantially as shown on sheet A16 of the Plans or, in the alternative, substantially as shown on sheet A15 of the Plans.
- (k) The Owner shall make improvements within the right-of-way, including improvements to the alley, the installation of nine new street trees, the installation of a sidewalk ramp at the corner of West Grace Street and North Monroe Street, and sidewalk repair along West Grace Street and North Monroe Street.

### **Affordability**

The units are intended to be rented out at market rate.

### **Surrounding Area**

The property is located in the B-4 Central Business District, as are surrounding parcels to the north, east, and west. A mix of commercial, residential, office, and institutional land uses are present in this area. To the south, across the alley on property located in the RO-3 Residential Office Zoning District, is a 14-story multi-family apartment building containing 234 dwelling units.

### **Neighborhood Participation**

Staff notified the Downtown Neighborhood Association and adjacent residents and property owners of the proposal. No notifications of opposition or support have been received.

### **Staff Contact**

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