



CITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

Ord. No. 2022-051: To authorize the special use of the property known as 417 Libbie Avenue for the purpose of a multifamily dwelling containing up to 26 dwelling units and off-street parking, upon certain terms and conditions.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Land Use Administration
Date: March 21, 2022

PETITIONER

Bruce Tyler, Baskervill

LOCATION

417 Libbie Avenue

PURPOSE

To authorize the special use of the property known as 417 Libbie Avenue for the purpose of a multifamily dwelling containing up to 26 dwelling units and off-street parking, upon certain terms and conditions.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The applicant wishes to construct a twenty-six (26) dwelling multi-family building, within an RO-1 Residential-Office Zoning District. Such a use is a permitted use in this district, however, the proposed building would not meet certain feature requirements, including lot area and width, front yards, side and rear yards, usable open space, and height requirements. A Special Use Permit is therefore required.

Staff finds that the proposed use is a permitted use within the underlying zoning of the subject property and that the proposed use is generally consistent with the recommendations of the Richmond 300 master plan. It aligns with the Community Mixed Use land use designation and fulfills the Plan's Goal 4: Urban Design, Objective 4.1 high-quality, distinctive, and well-designed neighborhoods and Nodes. The proposed use and its design addresses several of the strategies within this Objective including the following: "Allow and encourage a variety of architectural styles", "Require adequate distribution of windows and architectural features in order to create visual interest", and "Increase building permeability by requiring new buildings to have functioning entrances from the sidewalk and restricting blank walls at ground level", among others.

Staff finds the proposed development would provide additional housing units to support the commercial uses found within area and would increase potential ridership for high-frequency transit in the area, which is envisioned by the Master Plan for the Westhampton Node, specifically along Patterson Avenue with a transit stop at Patterson Avenue and Libbie.

Staff also finds that the proposed use is located within the Plan's Westhampton Neighborhood Node. Neighborhood Nodes are defined as "...local crossroads typically within or next to larger residential areas that offers goods and services to nearby residents, employees, and visitors." (C-1) The Westhampton Neighborhood Node "... that stretches from Libbie and Grove to Libbie and Patterson provides retail and services to nearby residents and attracts visitors from across the region to its businesses. Over time, a few underdeveloped parcels redevelop in a manner that complements and enhances the existing village-scale feel of the area. The Community Mixed-Use future land use designation permits the creation of additional residential units and business, while also ensuring that new buildings are an appropriate scale the existing commercial buildings and promote walkability by placing vehicular access to the rear of the building." (C-14)

A primary next step for the Westhampton Node is to rezone the area to allow for residential uses by-right in the Community Mixed-use area and retain a maximum height of three stories. Staff finds that if this rezoning had already taken place and established a three story height maximum prior to the submittal of this special use permit application, the proposed development would still need a special use permit, and would be considered against the Richmond 300 Master Plan as it is currently being considered. It should be noted that, while the overall height of the proposed development is four stories, the fourth floor will be stepped back from the street significantly, giving the appearance of a three-story building.

Staff further finds that the proposed use will not place an undue burden on the availability of on-street parking in the area as the proposed development includes over 50 off-street, structured parking spaces, which will provide two parking spaces per unit. Bicycle parking will also be provided.

Staff also finds that the proposed use, which proposes balconies along Libbie Avenue, will provide increased safety through a significant increase of "eyes on the street" upon this portion of Libbie Avenue, which currently contains office uses and surface parking.

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 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

417 Libbie Avenue is currently improved with a 3,694 sq. ft. commercial building, a portion of which was constructed in 1925, situated on a 32,825 sq. ft. (.75 acre) parcel of land. The property is located in the Westhampton neighborhood and is a part of the Libbie/Grove commercial district.

Proposed Use of the Property

Multi-family building.

Master Plan

The City's Richmond 300 Master Plan designates these parcels as Community Mixed Use. This land use category is defined as a "Cluster of medium-density, walkable commercial and residential uses that provide neighborhood services to nearby residential communities and sometimes feature regional attractions."

Regarding the development style, the building sizes "...density, and zoning districts for these areas may vary significantly depending on historical densities and neighborhood characteristics. Future development should generally complement existing context. Uses may be mixed horizontally in several buildings on a block or vertically within the same building. Developments continue or introduce a gridded street pattern to increase connectivity." 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.

Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access are prioritized and accommodated. Bike parking is provided. Driveway entrances are required to be of alleys whenever possible; new driveways are prohibited on priority and principal streets. Parking areas are located within the structure and to the rear of buildings and require screening; shared parking requirements are encouraged.

Intensity: Buildings generally ranging from two to six stories, based on street widths and depending on the historic context and stepping down in height adjacent to residential areas, as necessary. New buildings that are taller than historical buildings should step back from the build-to line after matching the height of the predominant cornice line of the block.

Primary Uses: Retail/office/personal service, multi-family residential, cultural, and open space.

Secondary Uses: Single-family houses, institutional, and government

The property is within the Westhampton Neighborhood Node. These Nodes are defined as "local crossroads typically within or next to larger residential areas that offers goods and services to

nearby residents, employees, and visitors.” (p. 24) The Richmond 300 Vision for the Westhampton Neighborhood Node sees a “...Node that stretches from Libbie and Grove to Libbie and Patterson provides retail and services to nearby residents and attracts visitors from across the region to its businesses. Over time, a few underdeveloped parcels redevelop in a manner that complements and enhances the existing village-scale feel of the area. The Community Mixed-Use future land use designation permits the creation of additional residential units and business, while also ensuring that new buildings are an appropriate scale the existing commercial buildings and promote walkability by placing vehicular access to the rear of the building. The intersection of Libbie and Patterson should be carefully planned and redeveloped to support and increase access to the high-frequency transit planned for Patterson Avenue.” (p. C-14)

The property is on a designated Great Street and with a street typology of “Major Mixed-Use Street”. These streets:

- Carry high volumes of vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles, through commercial and mixed-use areas
- Prioritize use and density-scaled sidewalks and crosswalks

- Require form elements, such as buildings to the street with parking in the rear, as well as building windows and entrances on the street

- Incorporate streetscape features, such as trees, benches, and trash receptacles
- Ideal locations for transit routes and transit stops

- Prioritize the curbside for walking, bicycling, transit, and short-term parking access and loading for local shops and restaurants

Zoning and Ordinance Conditions

The current zoning for the parcel is RO-1 Residential-Office. The following zoning regulations are not being met by the proposal, warranting special use permit approval.

ZONING AND USE:

The subject property is zoned RO-1 Residential-Office district (Sec. 30-424.1), which does allow multi-family dwellings as permitted principal uses however, many of the RO-1 feature requirements for multi-family dwellings are not met by the proposal. To authorize a waiver from those feature requirements a Special Use Permit is required to be adopted by City Council.

RO-1 FEATURE REQUIREMENTS

Lot area: a lot area of not less than 3,000 square feet is required per dwelling unit.

Twenty-six (26) dwelling units are proposed. Based on the square footage in the City Assessors records this requirement is not met by the proposal.

Front yard: a front yard of not less than 25' is required for multi-family dwellings.
13.56' is proposed.

Side and rear yard: side and rear yards of not less than 15' are required for multi-family dwellings. *Side yards of 10.15' & 10.48' are proposed. A rear yard of 10.55' is proposed.*

Usable open space: usable open space of not less than 60% of the area of the lot is required.
No usable open space calculation is provided.

Height: no building or structure shall exceed 25' in height.
The building is shown to be 54'-6" in height from mean grade.

Additional conditions will be imposed by the amended ordinance, including:

3(a) The Special Use of the Property shall be as a multifamily dwelling containing up to 26 dwelling units and off-street parking, substantially as shown on the Plans.

(b) No fewer than 53 off-street parking spaces shall be provided on the Property, substantially as shown on the Plans.

(c) All building materials, elevations, and site improvements, including landscaping, shall be substantially as shown on the Plans.

(d) All mechanical equipment serving the Property shall be located or screened so as not to be visible from any public right-of-way.

(e) The height of the Special Use shall not exceed four stories, substantially as shown on the Plans.

(f) Storage for a minimum of 11 bicycles shall be provided, substantially as shown on the Plans.

4(c) Facilities for the collection of refuse shall be provided in accordance with the requirements of the Director of Public Works. Such facilities shall be located or screened so as not to be visible from adjacent properties and public streets.

Affordability

The median household income for the Richmond region is currently \$68,529 per year. The affordability threshold is 30% of household income towards housing costs, which equates to \$20,559 per year, or \$1,713 per month, or less, to avoid a housing cost burden.* Based upon the median household income for the Richmond region, and the estimated pricing provided by the

applicant, the fee simple units are projected to be affordable to households making between approximately 200% to 450% of the Area Median Income (AMI)**

**(U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates)*

*** (Based upon VHDA fixed-rate, 30-year mortgage, with 20% down and 4% interest)*

Surrounding Area

Surrounding properties to the north and east are located in the R-4 Single-Family Residential District; properties to the west and south are located within the RO-1 Residential Office District. A mix of single-family residential, multifamily residential, office, and commercial uses are present in the vicinity.

Neighborhood Participation

Several neighborhood associations and area residents and property owners have been notified about this application. Staff has not received any letters of support or opposition.

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