

Response to the Application for a Special Use Permit at 5 North Colonial Ave. Richmond Va

Katherine A Kelly  
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As a near neighbor of the proposed project at 5 North Colonial I spent more than a year considering what this new apartment house would mean to me personally and to the Museum District Neighborhood collectively. My husband, Bo Millner, and I have met repeatedly with Mr Johannas in large and small gatherings. As yet we have not received any positive response to our concerns. We must rely on the members of the zoning and land use committee and the MDA Board to represent our interests. Eventually we hope the planning commission and city council will also help us reach a compromise.

**In order of importance, these are the three vital changes that we think must be made before this draft SUP is approved.**

1. The Garage entrance should be located at the rear of the property. The Richmond 300 plan clearly states on page 56 that “parking areas should be located to the rear of street-facing buildings” in Neighborhood Mixed Use areas. All of the properties in the block bounded by Arthur Ashe Blvd, Ellwood, Colonial and Floyd already conform to this standard. In fact, the Kukoskis adjacent apartment building has two double sized garages that open to the alley behind them not to the busy alley beside them. To have the primary entrance to a multifamily building on an alley is unusual. To have a double car garage open to a busy alley on the side of an apartment building is hazardous and irresponsible. The Master Plan is quite clear about its expectations and drivers in the area will naturally expect cars to be entering and exiting at the rear of a property.

2. The request for a height of 43’1” in an area with a 35’ maximum should be denied. The request for a loft with a raised roof area should be rejected. The monitor in no way adds value to the neighborhood or advances the goals of Richmond’s master plan. It is a luxurious extravagance which creates an eyesore for neighbors who are already being asked to adapt to the scraping of an existing historic home and the creation of an almost 4 story apartment building in its place.

3. The size and orientation of the roof deck should be restricted. The plans do not include details about the roof deck. It could be as large as 1,246 square feet. (600 in the back, 214 on the side and 432 in the front). There are very,very few roof decks now in the museum district. The current zoning does not address them and The Richmond 300 plan does not mention them. The few existing roof decks are usually an extension of the attic or third floor. The infill luxury townhouses at 2900 Monument Ave have small actual rooftop decks and the Kensington Court Apartments next to the VMHC has one as well. Otherwise, NO.

The prospect of a large roof deck on a new apartment building overlooking your backyard is intimidating to most property owners. We do not ask that the deck on this very tall building be eliminated. Simply that it be limited in size and that it be designed to provide maximum privacy for the occupants and the neighbors.

My husband and I feel strongly that the above three changes are reasonable and represent a compromise on which most neighbors can agree.

**In addition I offer some positive suggestions and ask a few clarifying questions:**

1. Coordinating with the city to improve the streetscape would have a dramatic positive impact. The lighting in front of the Kukoskis first apartment building is nonexistent. The sidewalks are treacherous and the city's trees are Ash and they are diseased. A lighting plan for both buildings, new healthy trees and safe sidewalks would be appreciated by every passerby.
2. Many museum district residents share a passion for the environment and support the Richmond 300 plan's to create a "sustainable and resilient city with healthy air, clean water, and a flourishing ecosystem." If the new project includes materials or practices that support these goals it will get lots of positive attention.
3. Many neighbors continue to be worried about parking. I understand that Richmond is encouraging a less car centric lifestyle with the 300 plan by eliminating parking requirements. I do wonder why the SUP application report says it is proposing two new parking places? The existing building has plenty of space for two if not three automobiles. The previous owner simply chose to allow pets and fenced in the parking area.
4. I have questions about permeable surfaces in the plan. We do mourn the loss of the current backyard and all of the lovely dogs we've befriended through the years. With the elimination of the yard is there still enough area to absorb the rainwater? Are there guidelines about this issue? Aren't you going to build a sidewalk from the front door on the alley to the street? Won't that also reduce the permeable area? Will the improvements to the existing alley be pavement? If so, what kind? Won't it look odd to have the surface alongside the new building be different from the rest of the alley? Is the city prepared to maintain the improved section as well as the rest?
5. Lastly I question the designation of this project as "a large owner occupied unit, plus two additional units". The SUP won't require the current or future owners to live in the building, will it? Also the unit 3 area on the second floor is the same area that was originally proposed as an Airbnb. **Clearly this could become a 4 unit apartment building at any time.** The size and shape of the building remains the same but the neighborhood impact can change at any time.

I took pride in our city for receiving [the 2021 Daniel Burnham Award for a Comprehensive Plan from the American Planning Association](#). I am still proud and I look forward to participating as we tackle the first big move, to "re-write the Zoning Ordinance". I know our MDA leadership will soon be engaging and educating the neighborhood about the implications of the new master plan. It should all be interesting.

I thank you for your patience and attention,

Katherine A Kelly

Property owner at 2817 Floyd Ave (adjacent to proposed new building)

Property owner at 4 North Colonial Ave (diagonally across the street from proposed new building)