



June 6, 2022

Kevin Vonck, Director
Department of Planning & Development Review
900 East Broad Street, Suite 511
Richmond, VA 23219

Re: 109 W 15th St Special Use Permit Amendment

Dear Mr. Vonck,

Please accept this letter as the Applicant's Report along with the Special Use Permit Amendment application for the property located at 109 W 15th Street. Currently, the property is improved with a 14,722 SF building that was constructed originally as the gymnasium for the Maury School. In 2007, a Special Use Permit adopted by Council authorized the use of this property as a theater and community arts center.

With this application the property owner and contract purchasers, Studio Two Three, are petitioning the City Council for a SUP Amendment to update the conditions of the ordinance to reflect the change in ownership and allow for the continued use of the space as a community arts center.

Existing Site Conditions

The subject property is one parcel containing 0.31 acres of land area located on the east side of W 15th St between Porter and Bainbridge Streets. The parcel has a lot frontage along W 15th St of 89 feet. The property is currently improved with a masonry building constructed in 1922 as the gymnasium for the adjacent Maury School.

Current Zoning

The property is currently zoned R-63 Multifamily Urban Residential which permits residential and limited commercial uses. The intent of this district is to promote a pedestrian oriented urban environment that is primarily residential in character, but that includes limited nonresidential uses that serve many of the day-to-day convenience needs of neighborhood residents and provide opportunities for residents to live and work within the neighborhood.

In 2007, City Council adopted a SUP for this very special historic property that authorized the use of the property as a live performance and entertainment theater, meeting space for lodges and non-profit groups, instruction in performing and visual arts, health and wellness services and instruction, non-medical offices, and private events and meeting space, under certain conditions.

Proposal

The current use of the building as a community dance theater has had an extremely positive impact on the Manchester Neighborhood over the past decade. The neighborhood has transformed tremendously since the building was first renovated for many reasons and the neighborhood is much more populated and thriving than when the theater first opened. The conditions placed in the SUP when it was first proposed seemed to be in response to a fear of the unknown. Since the theater first opened, it has proven to be a tremendous asset to the neighborhood and the overall dance community, and these fears should be relieved.

At the same time, for over a decade, Studio Two Three has served as a powerful convener for Richmond arts and culture. They regularly host advocacy summits for Richmond Public Schools, summer writing intensives for local youth, art workshops and weekly classes, as well as workshops and community celebrations. Each year they generate over \$150,000 for artists through vendor markets, provide workspace for over 140 artists, provide free event space for dozens of local initiatives, host over 200 workshops and classes at low cost and provide free programming space for a wide range of arts nonprofits.

The applicant wishes to modify the following conditions in the existing SUP ordinance so that their organization can flourish in this building and continue to provide this important support for the arts in Richmond:

- Ensure artist studios is included in the permitted uses
- Eliminate or expand the hours of operation to be consistent throughout the week
- Remove the condition for City Council review upon change in ownership
- Amend the parking requirement to what is provided on site
- Update the sign restrictions to reflect the proposed plan
- Remove the conditions around the concession stand/kitchen

City's Master Plan for Future Land Use

The Richmond 300 Master Plan recommends Neighborhood Mixed-Use land use for the property. These areas are existing or new highly-walkable urban neighborhoods that are predominantly residential with a small, but critical, percentage of parcels providing retail, office, personal service, and institutional uses.

For historic neighborhoods, Richmond 300 recommends that small-scale commercial uses that exist should be preserved or should be allowed to reestablish. In new neighborhoods, small scale commercial buildings should be introduced. The plan recommends residential as primary uses with secondary uses including large multi-family buildings (10+units), retail/office/personal service, institutional, cultural, and government.

Neighborhood Outreach

The applicant has reached out to Councilwoman Robertson and the Manchester Alliance to make them aware of the proposal. They are scheduled to present the proposal to the Manchester Alliance at their July meeting.

City Charter Conditions

We trust that you will agree with us that this proposed Special Use Permits meets the City Charter criteria for the granting of SUPs as the project will not:

- (i) be detrimental to the safety, health, morals and general welfare of the community involved;
- (ii) tend to create congestion in streets, roads, alleys and other public ways and places in the area involved;
- (iii) create hazards from fire, panic or other dangers;
- (iv) tend to be overcrowding of land and cause an undue concentration of population;
- (v) adversely affect or interfere with public or private schools, parks, playgrounds, water supplies, sewage disposal, transportation or other public requirements, conveniences and improvements; or
- (vi) interfere with adequate light and air.

Thank you for your consideration of this Special Use Permit. Please feel free to contact me at lory@markhamplanning.com or (804) 248-2561 if you have any questions or require additional materials to process the application.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Lory Markham', followed by a vertical line.

Lory Markham

Enc: Application form, plans, existing survey

cc: Matthew Ebinger, Secretary to the City Planning Commission
The Honorable Ellen F. Robertson, 6th District Representative