



CITY OF RICHMOND

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

Ord. No. 2023-091: To amend and reordain Ord. No. 97-370-351, adopted Dec. 15, 1997, which authorized the property known as 701 German School Road for the purpose of authorizing an existing radio broadcast studio and office tower and the replacement of an existing telecommunications tower with a new tower of increased height, to remove the limitation on the number of permitted wireless communications providers, upon certain terms and conditions. (9th District)

To: City Planning Commission
From: Land Use Administration
Date: April 3, 2023

PETITIONER
WXGI Inc

LOCATION
701 German School Road

PURPOSE
To amend and reordain Ord. No. 97-370-351 to remove the limitation on the number of permitted wireless communications providers on the existing telecommunications tower at 701 German School Road, upon certain terms and conditions.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The subject property is located in the R-4 Single-Family Residential District and the existing broadcast tower is a special use authorized by Ordinance 97-370-351. This ordinance limited the number of communications antennas to a maximum of three wireless carriers. As there is space and capacity on the tower for more than three wireless carriers, the tower owner wishes to eliminate the maximum number of wireless carriers. Therefore, a Special Use Permit Amendment is requested.

Staff finds that the proposed amendment to an existing 16 acre tower site would not be in conflict with the recommendations of the Richmond 300 master plan and would not authorize an increase of the existing tower's height.

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 special 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.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Site Description

The 16 acre subject property is located on the east side of German School Road between Seaman and Deter Roads. The property contained a broadcast tower prior to being annexed into the city from Chesterfield County in 1970. It existed as a legally nonconforming use until a special use permit authorizing the replacement of the existing 470 foot tower with a new 500 foot tall tower (Ordinance No. 97-370-351). The intended use of this tower was for supporting AM and FM radio broadcast antennas. A condition for approval required antenna space for “up to three wireless communications providers. This proposed amendment of the special use will not remove the condition specifying a maximum number of wireless carriers. This will allow greater flexibility for the collocation of additional wireless providers and the upgrading of existing wireless carrier antennas.

Proposed Use of the Property

The radio station and 500 foot tall tower were built in 1980 and centered on a 16 acre property. The primary purpose of the tower is for radio broadcast with secondary uses including microwave antennas, City of Richmond communications antennas, and a minimum of three wireless communications antenna brackets. The tower has adequate space and load bearing capacity to host additional communication antennas. By authorizing an increase in the tower capacity, additional communications towers will not be needed in the area.

Master Plan

The City's Richmond 300 Master Plan designates the property as Residential on the future land use plan. This designation is defined as a “Neighborhood consisting primarily of single-family houses on large- or medium-sized lots more homogeneous in nature.”

Development Style: Houses on medium-sized and large-sized lots in a largely auto-dependent environment. Homes are setback from the street. Future developments continue and/or introduce a gridded street pattern to increase connectivity. Future single-family housing, accessory dwelling units, duplexes, and small multi-family residential buildings are built to a scale and design that is consistent with existing building.

Ground Floor: Not applicable.

Mobility: Bicycle and pedestrian access are prioritized and accommodated. Low residential density means that it is not possible to provide frequent transit within these areas; however, frequent transit may be found at the edges of these areas within more intense future land use designations. Many homes have driveways and/or garages, which are located off an alley behind the home if an alley is present.

Intensity: Buildings are generally one to three stories. Lot sizes generally range up to 5,000 to 20,000+ sq. ft. Residential density of 2 to 10 housing units per acre.

Primary Uses: Single-family houses, accessory dwelling units, and open space.

Secondary Uses: Duplexes and small multi-family buildings (typically 3-10 units), institutional, and cultural. Secondary uses may be found along major streets.

Zoning and Ordinance Conditions

The Zoning Administration division recommended approval of this amendment request without further comment. The property is located in the R-4 Single-Family Residential District where the radio station and tower are authorized by a previously approved special use permit (Ordinance No. 97-370-351). This request will amend the existing SUP.

Staff recommends the approval of the requested special use permit amendment that strikes out the text “up to three (3)” in reference to the number of permitted communications antennas permitted on the tower.

Surrounding Area

The surrounding neighborhood is in the R-3 and R-4 Single-Family District and contains an office and single-family dwellings on large- and medium-sized lots.

Neighborhood Participation

Staff notified area residents and property owners. The area is not served by a civic association. No comments of opposition or support have been received.

Staff Contact: David Watson, Senior Planner, PDR, Land Use Administration, 804-646-1036