



CITY OF RICHMOND

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

Ord. No. 2023-068: To authorize the special use of the property known as 3600 Grove Avenue for the purpose of a multifamily dwelling containing up to ~~[260]~~ 253 dwelling units and amenity spaces, with off-street parking, upon certain terms and conditions.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Land Use Administration
Date: April 17, 2023

PETITIONER

Tom Burr

LOCATION

3600 Grove Avenue

PURPOSE

To authorize the special use of the property known as 3600 Grove Avenue for the purpose of a multifamily dwelling containing up to ~~[260]~~ 253 dwelling units and amenity spaces, with off-street parking, upon certain terms and conditions.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The applicant is requesting a Special Use Permit which would allow for a multi-family building with off street parking within an R-48 Multifamily Residential District, which use, among other things, is not currently allowed by sections 30-416.1, 30-416.4(b), 30-416.5(1), 30-416.5(2)b, 30-416.6, and 30-416.8 regarding permitted principal uses, lot area and width, front yards, side and rear yards, usable open space, and height, respectively, of the Code of the City of Richmond (2020), as amended. A Special Use Permit is therefore required.

Staff finds that based upon the City's adopted Richmond 300 Plan for this area, the proposed use aligns with the future land use of Community Mixed Use, including its height recommendations of 3 to 6 stories. The proposal also aligns with Objective 4.1 to "Create and preserve high-quality, distinctive, and well-designed neighborhoods, and Nodes throughout the city."

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 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 (p. 100).

Staff recognizes that the applicant has incorporated, per staff recommendations, several design considerations which bring the overall contemporary typology into better alignment with the Museum District's historic form, including:

- Removing the variety of building materials and colors
- Emphasizing brick as the primary building material
- Adding a distinct belt course between the 5th and 6th floors to further emphasize brick as primary material

- Adding a more prominent cornice to the building to reflect the frequent use of prominent cornices in the neighborhood
- Extending the hardscape surfaces at the corner of Thompson Street and Grove Avenue in anticipation of increased pedestrian activity.

Staff finds that the proposal is located on designated Major Mixed-Use and Major Residential Streets, both of which are intended for higher densities, and increased pedestrian and transit use. The proposed six stories in height is viewed as appropriate due to the building's location between the Museum District and Interstate 195. Major Streets require relatively higher volumes of residences to provide the densities needed for transit, walkability, and commercial uses. This portion of Thompson Street currently invites higher vehicular speeds that endanger pedestrians. Allowing more frequent resident navigation between this property and Carytown will provide a much needed increase in pedestrian activity and "eyes on the street".

The proposal also calls for curb extensions at the corners of Grove and Hanover Avenues which shortens the distance for pedestrian crossings while also calming vehicle speeds. Staff understands that the combination of additional pedestrians, slower moving vehicles, balconies, and building height, will make Thompson Street safer, quieter, and more attractive for residents, visitors, and the Museum District overall.

Staff also finds that the proposed use is located adjacent to the Plan's Carytown National/Regional Node. These Nodes are defined as centers "...with significant cultural, entertainment, government, and business destinations as well as shopping, housing, and unique place-based attractions." Staff sees the introduction of residents within walking proximity will support these destinations and attractions.

Staff further finds that the proposed use will not place an undue burden on the availability of on-street parking as the proposed design includes 330 off-street, structured parking spaces, which will provide approximately 1.3 spaces per unit.

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.

The applicant has proposed additional modifications to the plans (shown on the plan set dated April 12, 2023) in response to community feedback, including:

- Building stepped back after the 4th floor and further stepped back after the 5th Floor for the entire length of Thompson Street (which reduced the unit count to 253)
- Amenity Area on the 6th Floor is stepped back to the 6th floor Thompson Street step-back following same line
- Roof line massing reduced overall with reduction of roof at the amenity area on the 6th floor
- Building stepped back after the 5th floor for the entire length of Grove Avenue
- Revised the Signage from a blade sign on the building to a sign on the canopy entrances to the building

Therefore, staff recommends approval of the Special Use Permit request, with the following amendments to the ordinance:

-replace current plans with the plans dated April 12, 2023

-reduce number of units from 260 to 253

-reduce number of off-street parking spaces from 335 to 330

FINDINGS OF FACT

Site Description

The property is located in the Museum District neighborhood on Thompson Street, between Grove and Hanover Avenues. The property is currently a 98,699 square foot (2.3 acre) improved parcel of land, with a 27,390 square foot vacant building constructed, per tax assessment records, in 1955.

Proposed Use of the Property

The application is for a new, 6-story multi-family building with off-street parking.

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 off 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 adjacent to the Carytown National/Regional Node. The vision for the Carytown node is "...a lively mixed-use neighborhood that is home to Richmond's premier shopping destination. The establishments in Carytown include an eclectic mix of local and national retail, dining, entertainment, and service uses anchored by the historic Byrd Theater to the east and multiple grocery stores to the west. The retail corridor is surrounded by diverse residential neighborhoods which include a variety housing stock. In 2037, Carytown will continue to be a successful, walkable, mixed-use destination. Additional residential units at a range of affordability levels can be developed through compatible infill development and developing 2 to 3 stories of residential above existing commercial structures. New development should be compatible with the existing historic structures, and efforts should be made to preserve the existing historic fabric. Though Carytown currently is a walkable Node, the movement of people not cars should be further prioritized by limiting vehicular access to Cary Street, whether permanently or temporarily, while accommodating other modes of transportation. Pedestrian amenities including street trees and larger sidewalks should be included on Cary Street and into the surrounding residential communities. Opportunities to create new open space and improve existing spaces including the Grayland Tot Lot should be realized." (p. C-15)

Growth Potential: Medium – New development is limited to existing parking lots and the redeveloping single-and two-story structures into taller structures. (p. C-15)

The property is on a designated Great Street 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

The property is on a designated Great Street with a street typology of "Major Residential Street". These streets:

- Carry high volumes of vehicles, as well as pedestrians and bicycles, through residential Neighborhoods
- Prioritize for creating sidewalks and crosswalks
- Install street trees as a buffer between sidewalk and street
- Ideal locations for transit routes and transit stops
- Ensure low street speed by utilizing traffic calming measures

Zoning and Ordinance Conditions

The current zoning for the parcel is R-48 Multifamily Residential. The following zoning regulations are not being met by the proposal, warranting special use permit approval.

ZONING AND USE:

The subject property is zoned R-48 Multifamily residential. The proposal is to remove the existing vacant adult care facility and construct a 6-story multifamily building, with 253 residential apartments, resident amenities on the ground floor, and a structured parking deck. The multifamily use is permitted by-right in this district, but the parking deck is not a permitted by-right use.

LOT AREA

Multifamily dwellings shall be located on lots of not less than 2,200 square feet in area for each dwelling unit. The existing lot area is 98,699.32; therefore, 44 dwelling units are permitted by right.

With 260 dwelling units, the required lot area is 572,000 SF; this requirement is not met.

YARDS

A front yard of 25' is required, and a street side yard of 10' is required.

A yard of 6.39' proposed along Grove Ave, and a yard of 6.1' proposed along Thompson St. Either Street could be considered the front yard; the applicants should indicate which is a front and which is a street side yard. Either way, these requirements are not met.

The side yard requirement is 15'.

A 3.87' side yard is proposed adjacent to the I-195 off ramp on the north side of the property; this requirement is not met.

USABLE OPEN SPACE

Usable open space of not less than 50% of the lot area is required.

Usable open space calculations are not provided; however, this requirement does not appear to be met.

HEIGHT

The maximum height allowed is 35'.

The building height is not provided; however, the proposal of a 6-story building appears to exceed this requirement.

Additional conditions will be imposed by the ordinance, including:

- 3(a) The Special Use of the Property shall be as a multifamily dwelling containing up to ~~[260]~~ 253 dwelling units and amenity spaces, with off-street parking, substantially as shown on the Plans. The ground floor of the building may also contain permitted principal uses on corner lots in the R-63 Multifamily Urban Residential District, pursuant to section 30-419.3 of the Code of the City of Richmond (2020), as amended, within the area labeled "Leasing/Amenities" on the Plans.
- (b) No fewer than ~~[335]~~ 330 off-street parking spaces shall be provided for the Special Use, substantially as shown on the Plans.
- (c) All building materials, elevations, and site improvements shall be substantially as shown

- on the Plans.
- (d) All mechanical equipment serving the Property, including heating, ventilation, and air conditioning units, 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 six stories, substantially as shown on the Plans.
 - (f) Storage for no fewer than 65 long-term, on-site bicycle parking spaces and six short-term, off-site bicycle parking spaces shall be provided, substantially as shown on the Plans.
 - (g) All ground floor dwelling units fronting Grove Avenue and North Thompson Street shall be accessible from the exterior of the building and shall be provided with walkways from the entrances to the sidewalk.
 - (h) Subject to approval by Dominion Virginia Energy, which approval the Owner shall obtain from Dominion Virginia Energy in writing, all power lines along Grove Avenue and North Thompson Street adjacent to the Property shall be buried, substantially as shown on the Plans.
 - (i) Signs on the Property shall be limited to an aggregate of 300 square feet in area and shall not be internally illuminated. Roof-mounted signs shall not be permitted on the Property.
- 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.
- (e) The Owner shall make improvements within the right-of-way, including the installation of sidewalks and 19 new street trees, substantially as shown on the Plans, which improvements may be completed in one or more phases as approved by the Director of Public Works.

Affordability

The median household income for the Richmond region is currently \$71,223 per year. The affordability threshold is 30% of household income towards housing costs, which equates to \$21,367 per year, or \$1,781 per month, or less, to avoid a housing cost burden. The applicant has informed staff that the pricing for the proposed units will be based on current market rates.

**(U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates)*

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

Surrounding Area

The surrounding land uses include primarily residential with some institutional and commercial uses within the Museum District neighborhood and nearby Carytown.

Neighborhood Participation

The City has received letters of opposition for this application from the Museum District Association and nearby property owners. Letters of support have also been received. A letter from the Museum District Association regarding the updated plans has not been received.

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