

Ordinance No. PRE.2022.0578

Special Use Permit for 5314 1/2 Stokes Lane



DATE: April 13, 2023

TO: Ms. Alyson Oliver, Secretary of the Planning Commission
 The Honorable Mayor of the City of Richmond
 The Honorable Members of the City Council of Richmond
 The City of Richmond Planning Commission
 The City of Richmond Office of Economic Development and Planning
 The Department of Planning and Development Review

FROM: Ms. Charlene Hopkins and Concerned Residents of the Historic Westwood Community

RE: File Number: PRE.2022.0578 Statement of Opposition to the request to authorize the special use of the property located at 5314 1/2 Stokes Lane for the purpose of building a single-family, two-story detached dwelling.

I passionately **oppose** the request for a special use permit due to the following reasons:

1. The Hopkins family has maintained the land in question clear and free of debris, etc. for over 72 years. "Squatters' rights" apply in this situation as we have maintained this property for more than 70 years, specifically, for "15 consecutive uninterrupted years." This property legally belongs to the Hopkins family.
2. The property in question is located in the Historic Westwood Community founded by freed slaves and free men and women in 1871 who desired to have and own property of their own. **The Historic Westwood Community was built on faith and resilience and is the only Black neighborhood in the First District.** The initial homes were built by men, women, and children manually and have a historic significance in the history of the City of Richmond and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Residents of the Historic Westwood Community have had a contentious history with the City of Richmond over the years as the former City Aldermen tried unsuccessfully to condemn and take this land away from our ancestors. Sewer, running water, and other utilities were denied to the residents of Westwood. The residents had to challenge the City for the right to have access to public utilities.
3. The Commonwealth of Virginia Historic designation for the community was acquired in 2021 (SRA121). Discussions are currently underway with the Department of Historic Preservation to include this community in a heritage walk within the City of Richmond. As history repeats itself, we find ourselves in a fight again for the existence of our now historic neighborhood.

4. Building a two-story home on this small plot of land would be an encroachment on the families on both sides of the proposed structure. The proposed building would be too close to the existing homes on both sides and affect their privacy. The construction of the proposed two-story house would tower over the current homes and be disruptive to the airflow and overcrowd the land. (See pictures at [vxpe.info/stokes1](https://www.vxpe.info/stokes1))
5. The proposed construction is not in line with the current architecture of the neighborhood. There are no two-story dwellings on that side of the street. There are only two, two-story homes on Stokes Lane. The remaining homes are one-story ranchers and consistent with the architectural intent of the neighborhood.
6. Construction of the proposed two-story house would also adversely impact the sewage and water lines to the surrounding properties as the current sewage pipes and sewage materials are old had have not been updated or cleared by the city in over 50 years or more. We have experienced sewage backup in our home as the system currently exists. Sewer lines in the neighborhood and on Stokes Lane have been collapsing. This could cause more sewage problems including backup into their home and cost the city and residents money to replace, upgrade, and/or clear.

Based on the above concerns, I passionately believe that the Richmond City Planning Commission needs to:

- A. Reject Ordinance No.PRE.2022.0578 – Special Use Permit for 5314 1/2 Stokes Lane.
- B. Have the Department of Historical Resources (DHR) review all future proposed new construction in the Historic Westwood Community.
- C. Have Tim Roberts, Archaeologist for Community Outreach Coordination at DHR to review all future proposed new construction in the Historic Westwood Community. Although the construction of the new housing units is on private property, we believe that significant archaeological evidence that pertains to a successful formerly enslaved population may be lost during the development of the lot(s).
- D. Consult with the Westwood Civic Association to review any and all future proposed new construction in the Historic Westwood Community.

Please confirm receipt of this email and let me know if you need additional information.

Best regards.