



CITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

Ord. No. 2023-157: To authorize the special use of the property known as 301 West 6th Street for the purpose of a multifamily dwelling containing up to 553 dwelling units, with off-street parking, upon certain terms and conditions.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Land Use Administration
Date: June 5, 2023

PETITIONER

Preston Lloyd, Jr., Esq.

LOCATION

301 West 6th Street

PURPOSE

To authorize the special use of the property known as 301 West 6th Street for the purpose of a multifamily dwelling containing up to 553 dwelling units, with off-street parking, upon certain terms and conditions.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The proposal will allow for a multi-family building, with off-street parking, located within RF-2 Riverfront and B-7 Mixed-Use Business Districts, which use, among other things, is not currently allowed by sections 30-447.12(2)a, 30-447.15, 30-447.18(1), and 30-447.14(a)(b) regarding side and rear yards, usable open space, height, and building dimensions and space between buildings, respectively, of the Code of the City of Richmond (2020), as amended. A Special Use Permit is therefore required.

The site is currently vacant and underutilized making this designation ideal for the proposed high-density multi-family housing. The scale and relatively high number of units supports this land use by supporting local commercial uses, transit, and walkability. The overall height of the proposed development is only five stories taller than the maximum height permitted in the RF-2 District and will consist of two towers to break up the massing of the development and provide visual permeability.

Staff finds that the proposal is consistent with the recommendations of the City's Richmond 300 Master Plan pertaining to the Destination Mixed-Use land use designation.

The property is located within the Downtown – Manchester Priority Growth Node. Nodes are places in Richmond that can either 1) accommodate additional growth in jobs and population or 2) are major activity centers today and should be preserved/enhanced. Priority Growth Nodes are nodes the City is encouraging the most significant growth in population and development over the next 20 years.

A Primary Next Step for the Manchester Node pertains to the Riverfront Plan: Implement the Phase 1 recommendations identified in the Riverfront Plan for Manchester, which stresses the

importance of riverfront access in Manchester. In the area pertinent to this special use permit, riverfront access to the future Manchester Green open space area along the riverfront is called out in the Riverfront Plan via an extension of Perry Street. This special use permit would not obstruct the future extension of Perry Street. The special use permit also contains a provision that ensures access to the future Manchester Green site via the private street (former 6th Street) fronting the development, once the property to the west, known as 405 West 6th Street, is dedicated for public use.

It also adds green space in that the proposed side yard setback off of the western property line is twice that of the RF-2 District, which affords useable, publicly accessible open space at ground level.

Staff finds that the proposed development supports Objective 15.1a, which states “Increase the number of Richmonders living in a development pattern that encourages density and reduces dependency on single-occupancy vehicles.” The proposed units are located in walking proximity to an existing GRTC high-frequency transit route. (p.159)

Staff finds that the proposed architectural details support Objective 4.1 which states “Create and preserve high-quality, distinctive, and well-designed neighborhoods and Nodes throughout the city”, including the following objectives:

“Require the podiums of tall buildings to reflect the human-scale, with design elements and active uses on the ground level.” The proposed base floors of the proposed are design to be open and engaging with the street and are of distinct building materials from the center and cornice of the buildings.

“Increase building permeability by requiring new buildings to have functioning entrances from the sidewalk and restricting blank walls at ground level.” The ground floors are designed to be permeable through ample glazing.

“Encourage building placement and massing design that reduces the heat island effect by varying building heights in neighborhoods to increase airflow.” The building is separated into two towers to provide both air flow and break up the massing of the buildings. (p. 100)

Staff finds that the project largely aligns with much of the intent of the RF-2 Riverfront District, as it will facilitate the economic development benefits that will accrue through enhanced commercial and residential development, promote a concentration of uses that result in a high degree of pedestrian attraction and activity along the riverfront, and encourage public and private use of and access to the riverfront. As to its discussion of views of the James River, while views of the river itself are prominent from the top of the floodwall, the floodwall blocks such views from most properties and public spaces landward of it.

Staff finds that the proposed development would not pose an undue burden on the availability of on-street parking in the area due to the provision of one off-street parking space per unit, as well as 163 long-term, and 22 short term, off-site bicycle spaces included within the plans.

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 met with members of the community and Manchester Alliance Board of Directors. Based on feedback received, the applicant has provided additional conditions to be included in the special use permit ordinance.

Therefore staff recommends approval of the Special Use Permit request, with an amendment to include the following conditions in the ordinance:

- Facilities for the relief of dogs shall be constructed on the portion of the Property shown and labeled as “amenity outdoor space” on the Layout Plan, which is Sheet C4 of the Plans.

- Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the Owner shall dedicate a pedestrian access easement to the public for the portion of the Property (i) shown and labeled as “amenity outdoor space” on the Layout Plan, which is Sheet C4 of the Plans, and (ii) over a portion of the pedestrian improvements connecting the amenity outdoor space and the public right-of-way at Perry Street.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Site Description

The property is located in the Old Town Manchester neighborhood on West 6th Street, between Perry and McDonough Streets. The property is currently a 125,888 sq. ft. (2.9 acre) unimproved parcel of land. The application is for a new, 17 story multi-family building with off street parking. The surrounding land uses include primarily residential and commercial uses. The density is 553 units upon 2.9 acres or 190 units per acre.

Proposed Use of the Property

Multi-family building, with off street parking.

Master Plan

The City’s Richmond 300 Master Plan designates a future land use for the subject property as Destination Mixed Use. This designation is defined key gateways “...featuring prominent destinations, such as retail, sports venues, and large employers, as well as housing and open space. Located at the convergence of several modes of transportation, including Pulse BRT or other planned transit improvements.”

Development Style:

Higher-density, transit-oriented development encouraged on vacant or underutilized sites. New development should be urban in form, may be of larger scale than existing context, and, where relevant, should pay special attention to the historic character of the existing context. Development should enhance the public realm and create a sense of place. Many buildings are vertically mixed-use. Developments continue or introduce a gridded street pattern to increase connectivity.

Ground Floor:

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. Active commercial ground floor uses are required on street-oriented commercial frontages.

Mobility:

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 street frontages. Surface parking is prohibited as a principal use; when surface parking is provided as an accessory use, it should be located to the rear of buildings and screened. Parking requirements are reduced to allow more market-based parking strategies, including shared parking.

Intensity: Buildings typically a minimum height of five stories.

Primary Uses: Retail/office/personal service, multi-family residential, cultural, and open space.

Secondary Uses: Institutional and government. (p. 64)

The property is located within the Manchester Regional/National Priority Growth Node. Nodes are centers "...with significant cultural, entertainment, government, and business destinations as well as shopping, housing, and unique place-based attractions." (p. 24)

Zoning and Ordinance Conditions

The current zoning for this property is RF-2 Riverfront District, with a portion of the lot comprised of the former West 6th Street right of way being in the B-7 Mixed-Use Business District.

According to the Zoning Ordinance, the intent of the RF-2 Riverfront District is to provide for medium scale planned mixed-use development on relatively large sites in close proximity to the riverfront in a manner that will protect prominent views of the James River from public spaces and will encourage public and private use of and access to the riverfront. The district is intended to facilitate the economic development benefits that will accrue through enhanced commercial and residential development and increased tourism generated by riverfront redevelopment. Finally, the district regulations are intended to promote a concentration of uses that result in a high degree of pedestrian attraction and activity along the riverfront, while protecting the area at the shore of the river from building development.

The following conditions of the proposed development do not comply with the current zoning regulations:

Section 30-447.12(2)a: Side and rear yards.

A side and rear yard of 25' is required against adjacent properties; 50.79' is provided adjacent to 321 W 7th St., and 2.5' is provided along 405 W 6th St.

Section 30-447.15: Usable open space

Not less than 10% of the floor area shall be provided as usable open space. 544,803 sf of floor area is proposed. 54,480.3 sf of usable open space is required; 47,436 sf of usable open space is provided.

Section 30-447.18(1): Height

Building height must be between 2 and 13 stories in height. The proposed height is 18 stories.

Section 30-447.14(a)(b): Building dimensions and space between buildings.

Portions of buildings over 4 stories tall are not permitted to occupy more than 35% of the lot. At a lot size of ~2.891 ac (125,932 sf), maximum lot coverage for portions of buildings more than 4 stories is 44,076.2 sf.

This special use permit is conditioned on the following special terms and conditions:

- (a) The Special Use of the Property shall be as a multifamily dwelling containing up to 553 dwelling units, with off-street parking. Amenity spaces, including a ground-level outdoor amenity space labeled “Amenity Outdoor Space,” substantially as shown on the Plans, shall be provided. Non-residential uses permitted in the RF-2 Riverfront District, pursuant to section 30-447.11 of the Code of the City of Richmond (2020), as amended, shall also be permitted.
- (b) In the event that the adjacent property known as 405 West 6th Street and identified as Tax Parcel No. S000-0023/001 in the 2023 records of the City Assessor is dedicated for public use, the Owner shall allow public access to and from the property known as 405 West 6th Street and identified as Tax Parcel No. S000-0023/001 in the 2023 records of the City Assessor over the private access road located on the Property and labeled as “Private Drive” on the Plans.
- (c) No fewer than 553 off-street parking spaces shall be provided for the Special Use, substantially as shown on the Plans.
- (d) The height of the Special Use shall not exceed 18 stories, substantially as shown on the Plans.
- (e) All building materials, elevations, and site improvements shall be substantially as shown on the Plans.
- (f) All mechanical equipment, including heating, ventilation, and air conditioning units, serving the Property shall be located or screened so as not to be visible from any public right-of-way.

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. Based upon the median household income for the Richmond region, and the estimated pricing provided by the applicant, the proposed rental units are projected to be affordable to households making approximately 112% of the Area Median Income (AMI) affordability threshold.

Based upon census tract 610, for which 301 West 6th Street is located, these units are projected to be 124% of the affordability threshold.** In other words, the units may not be affordable to over half of households in the census tract.

**(U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Regional)*

*** (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Census Tract 610)*

Surrounding Area

Surrounding properties are within B-7 Mixed-Use Business and RF-2 Riverfront Districts. The surrounding land uses are primarily multi-family residential with some commercial and mixed-uses in the immediate vicinity.

Neighborhood Participation

Staff notified area residents, property owners, and the Manchester Alliance Civic Association of the proposed Special Use Permit. Staff has received both letters of opposition and support for the application.

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