

Miranda Eberle Shaw
5802 Guthrie Avenue
Richmond, VA 23226

Feb. 8, 2019

To:
City of Richmond
Department of Planning and Development Review
900 East Broad Street, Room 511
Richmond, VA 23219

Attn. Mr. Jonathan W. Brown

Re: Special Use Permit Application – 602 Libbie Avenue

Dear Mr. Brown,

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my objections to this SUP application. 602 Libbie Avenue is part of my immediate environment. I have a view of the property in question from my home as I write this letter.

A major criterion for a special use permit is approval by the community. We are an engaged community with a strong sense of responsibility for maintaining the integrity of our neighborhood while allowing for reasonable, compatible, harmonious growth and development. This special use has been resoundingly rejected by the community, as conveyed by letters, a petition, and the unanimous vote of the Westview Civic Association.

Why do we object? We fought this battle before, when a Proposed Master Plan Land Use Recommendation came before us in 2011. We advocated for the residential integrity of our neighborhood and, after months of meetings and consultations with city representatives (from the Planning Commission, City Assessor's Office, and our District Representative), managed to retain R-4 zoning and protection for the 600 and 700 blocks on the west side of Libbie Avenue in a hard-won victory.

The SUP application letter (dated Sept. 20, 2018) misleadingly states that "*the City's Master plan recommends mixed-use development of the property.*"¹ This was true of the original Proposed Master Plan Land Use Recommendation, but that was

¹ The letter states *that expansion of the Libbie/Grove Service Center should occur north on those parcels that front Libbie Avenue to Kensington Avenue as shown on the Land Use Plan map*, again, not referring to the distinction between the east and west sides of Libbie Avenue.

amended to distinguish between the east and west sides of Libbie Avenue for the 600 and 700 blocks. The properties on the east side of Libbie Avenue were slated for mixed-use development, but the 602 parcel is on the west side.

At the May 22, 2013, meeting on the Patterson/Libbie/Grove Master Plan, Mark Olinger explained the Planning Commission decision regarding the west side of Libbie Avenue as follows:

“The lots on the east side of Libbie Avenue are 200 feet deep and can accommodate off-street parking, while on the west side, the challenges to development are more significant because there is no space for parking. The lots are narrower. The current plan accommodates single family dwellings for that reason.”

The city’s master plan recognizes that the 600 and 700 blocks of Libbie are not large enough for parking lots. This was the main reason (among many) the city planners were persuaded that the parcels on the west side of Libbie were not conducive to the extensive mixed-use development they had envisioned.

At the same meeting, Principle Planner Roy Benbow confirmed the priorities of neighborhood integrity, sustainability, and walkability. The SUP application claims that *the property’s residential character will be preserved*. However, the plan calls for significant paving and a parking lot, the very use for which this and adjacent parcels were deemed unsuitable.

The **parking lot in question will be in the midst and direct line of sight of seven surrounding properties**. It introduces problems area residents raised in our earlier negotiations over the Master Plan. In addition to being an eyesore:

- * loss of tree canopy and screening foliage²
- * the noise and fumes attending increased motor traffic (vehicles of staff, clients, mail and package deliveries, waste management, and service providers)
- * creation of an asphalt heat pocket and loss of cooling greenery
- * the inherently public, or unenclosed, nature of a parking lot intrudes on our sense and reality of safety and security
- * if, as predictable, they train spotlights on the parking lot, this will create light pollution and make the view of the parking area from our homes and yards even more glaring

² The plan proposes to leave some mature trees in place, but this is not binding, and construction plans often call for tree removal, so loss of tree canopy is a foreseeable outcome.

The application letter claims that “*the appearance of the property from Libbie Avenue will remain largely unchanged.*” The addition of a paved, two-way driveway 12 feet in width is a significant change that makes the site less visually pleasing. That, combined with signage, however discrete, will diminish the residential feel. Moreover, because the parcel is so narrow, the driveway runs along the edge, putting traffic flow in the immediate sight and hearing of the residents of 600 Libbie Avenue.

The driveway also raises concerns about motor and pedestrian safety. At present, the neighborhood supports safe pedestrian traffic. The driveway cutting through the pedestrian walkway in the middle of a block erodes this area as a walkable community. We also have concerns about limited visibility of motor traffic on Libbie Avenue for drivers entering and exiting the driveway, posing a potential traffic hazard.

The SUP application advocates for the proposed special use on the basis of two contradictory claims: 1) that *the property’s residential character will be preserved* and that the special use 2) is part of an *accelerating positive trend that will eventually join [Patterson and Grove Avenues] into one shopping district*. Here, letter concedes that the SUP is not compatible with the neighborhood as it currently stands and would be **better suited to a future commercial zone**.

It is not clear whether the 600 and 700 blocks of Libbie Avenue will remain residential if the area every becomes a continuous commercial zone. However, that is a long-term vision and goal of the Master Plan. Representatives of the Planning Commission confirmed that long-term plan for the area will require significant investment by the city to address traffic, parking, sidewalk width, greenery for visual appeal and environmental sustainability, amenities to encourage pedestrian traffic and a sense of place and community, and a make-over of the dreary Patterson-Libbie intersection. These are long-term goals that would take a decade or more for the necessary studies, approvals, and infrastructure and landscaping projects. The city has not (to my knowledge) even funded a traffic study of Libbie Ave since the 2008 study presented to us in 2011.

This SUP is for a property on the west side of Libbie Avenue. Meanwhile, there are many larger properties on the east side of Libbie Avenue that are already slated for mixed use and commercial development. There is even space for an alley behind them to accommodate deliveries and waste management. There are also vacant commercial spaces with parking lots on Patterson Avenue just two blocks away.

The SUP application ignores the efforts and negotiations that I, my neighbors, and the Westview Civic Association have exerted to preserve the residential quality of our neighborhood against intrusive mixed-use development and commercial encroachment.

Overall, the special use will start to change the human scale of our neighborhood and impede the visual appeal, walkability and livability of the area.

Your decisions should promote orderly development of parcels in ways that are reasonable, compatible, and harmonious with adjacent areas.

A special use should not change the character or disrupt the comfort of the residences in an R-4 zone. This special use will do both.

I urge you to vote against this SUP or send it back to the proposers for less obtrusive features.

Sincerely,

Miranda Shaw

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Resident:

5802 Guthrie Ave.

Richmond, VA 23226