



CITY OF RICHMOND

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

Ord. No. 2021-256: To authorize the special use of the property known as 706 Libbie Avenue for the purpose of an office use, upon certain terms and conditions.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Land Use Administration
Date: October 4, 2021

PETITIONER

Robert Lancaster, Lancaster Custom Builder, Inc.

LOCATION

706 Libbie Avenue

PURPOSE

To authorize the special use of the property known as 706 Libbie Avenue for the purpose of an office use, upon certain terms and conditions.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

The applicant is requesting to authorize the special use of the property known as 706 Libbie Avenue for the purpose of constructing a new two story office building with accessory parking. The property is located in an R-4 Single Family Residential District, which does not permit the proposed office use. Additionally, feature requirements of the R-4 District, including parking and yards (setbacks), are not met for the proposed office building. Therefore, a special use permit is necessary to authorize the proposed office building.

Staff finds that the proposed office use is consistent with the recommendations of Richmond 300. The property has a land use designation of Community Mixed-Use. The proposed office use is a primary use that is recommended for Community Mixed-Use. The portion of Libbie Avenue that abuts the property is designated as a "Major Mixed-Use Street" on the Great Streets and Street Typologies Map. As requested by staff, the applicant has placed the building closer to Libbie Avenue with a sidewalk from the front entrance directly onto Libbie Avenue and parking located to the rear. Additionally, the site is proposed to be heavily landscaped, with seven shade trees and three Crape Myrtle trees, as well as a variety of shrubs. The office user is a home builder, so the building design is residential in order to showcase the builder's work as well as complement surrounding residential properties. A covered front porch with the main entry facing Libbie Avenue is proposed, with fiber cement siding being the primary exterior finish. The applicant has agreed to provide at least three bike racks on the property, which is a condition of the special use.

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.

Therefore, staff recommends approval of the Special Use Permit.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Site Description

The subject property consists of an 8,145 square foot (0.187 acre) parcel that is currently unimproved. The property is located in the Westhampton neighborhood at the southwest corner of Libbie Avenue and Kensington Avenue.

Proposed Use of the Property

The proposed Special Use Permit would allow for the construction of a new building that would serve as an office use.

Master Plan

The City's Richmond 300 Master Plan designates the property as Community Mixed-Use. This land use category is described as a cluster of medium-density, walkable commercial and residential uses that provide neighborhood services to nearby residential communities and sometimes feature regional attractions.

Development Style: The building size, 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: 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.

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 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 also within the Westhampton Neighborhood Node, which envisions new development on underdeveloped parcels to be in a manner that complements and enhances to existing village scale feel of the area. The portion of Grove Avenue that this property fronts on is

designated as both a “Great Street” and a “Major Mixed Use Street” on Richmond 300’s “Great Streets and Street Typologies Map.”

Zoning and Ordinance Conditions

The subject property is located within the R-4 Single Family Residential District. The proposed office use is not permitted in the R-4 Single Family Residential District, and the yards (setbacks) and parking for the proposed office building do not meet the requirements of the R-4 Single Family Residential District. Therefore, a special use permit is necessary to authorize the proposed building containing an office use.

If adopted, the Special Use Permit would impose the following conditions on the properties:

- (a) The Special Use of the Property shall be as office use, substantially as shown on the Plans.
- (b) A minimum of four parking spaces shall be provided on the Property, substantially as shown on the Plans.
- (c) A minimum of three bicycle racks shall be provided on the Property.
- (d) All building materials and site improvements, including but not limited to building finishes and landscaping, shall be substantially as shown on the Plans.
- (e) All mechanical equipment serving the Property shall be located or screened so as not to be visible from any public right-of-way.
- (f) Signs on the Property shall be limited to (i) one freestanding sign substantially as shown on the Plans and (ii) signs permitted in all districts, pursuant to section 30-505 of the Code of the City of Richmond (2020), as amended.

Surrounding Area

The subject property and all surrounding properties are located within the R-4 Single-Family Residential District. Single family uses are located to the west, south, and east of the subject property. A surface parking area is located to the north of the subject property.

Neighborhood Participation

Staff notified area residents and property owners, the Westhampton Citizens Association, and the Westhampton Merchants Association. Staff has not received any letters of support or opposition.

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