

https://www.dnronline.com/news/local/city-council-approves-changes-to-apartment-complex-plan/article_8c37964d-fb3b-5613-b4a8-86d7c85509d8.html

HOT TOP STORY

City Council Approves Changes To Apartment Complex Plan

By IAN MUNRO Daily News-Record
Sep 15, 2021



The Harrisonburg Planning Commission recommended denial of proposed changes that would strip commercial from a planned mixed-use complex featuring 400 apartments.

S

Harrisonburg City Council went against recommendations from staff and the Planning Commission on Tuesday as it voted to approve changes requested by a developer for a six-story apartment complex on Peach Grove Avenue.

City Council voted 3-2 in favor of allowing Skylar & Talli LLC to change the first floor of the proposed Apartments at Peach Grove building from commercial to residential space, which would add roughly 60 new beds to the planned six-story, 400-bed apartment block on 5.44 acres at 1051 and 1351 Peach Grove Ave. off Port Republic Road.

Mayor Deanna Reed was joined by Councilmen Chris Jones and George Hirschmann voting in favor, while Laura Dent and Sal Romero voted against the changes.

Prior to the vote, Adam Fletcher, director of community development, explained why staff recommended denial of the requests.

“We could envision a development there that could be all residential, so we could see staff supporting a proposal for residential-only, but only if the location of the building were changed to allow for future commercial and or mixed-use development and if the the bedroom per unit breakdown and overall unit design provided housing for the nonstudent demographic,” Fletcher said.

He also said staff had asked the developers to move the building’s location to increase walkability and meet other city planning goals.

Reed said she understood the developer’s request due to the collapse in commercial space value as numerous businesses have closed during the pandemic, leaving an abundance of available space.

However, she asked the developer’s representative, Mac Nichols, a lawyer at Harrisonburg firm Flora Pettit, why the original room designs in the plans City Council approved in 2019 had been changed.

Reed and Jones spoke about how excited they were to support the project as a mixed-use development, but times and economy have changed, making mixed-use less doable than in 2019.

Previously, City Council approved the rezoning and three special-use permits for the development on May 28, 2019, to allow the project with commercial space on the first floor.

Originally, there were units with different numbers of bedrooms, but the final design called for

100 4-bedroom apartments. Reed said builders should be coming to council with what they plan on actually building.

Nichols said he was not part of the design process since the original design was approved and was brought back onto the project as the developer sought to convert the commercial space on the ground floor to residential.

Jones made a motion to approve the requests from the developer, seconded by Hirschmann. Jones said he would like staff from the economic development office on hand at meetings to provide extra information to council about how their decisions on projects like Peach Grove could help or hurt the city's economy.

Jones also said the apartments could draw more students out of other city housing that could then be used by families.

Reed added the developers would still be able to build the apartment block even without the changes and cited that as a reason to support the requests.

Dent said she stood by her vote at the Planning Commission meeting against the requests, where she said the sentiment was the city does not need more student housing.

Fletcher also said staff does not believe more student housing is necessary.

In other votes Tuesday, City Council was in agreement with recommendations from staff and Planning Commission.

City Council unanimously supported requests for two developments, one a 40-unit town home development on 3.14 acres at 601 Pear St. called Cobbler's Court from Cobbler's Valley Development Inc., and the other, 22 town homes on 2 acres at the end of Suter Street from PDY LLC with a cul-de-sac at the end of the street.

Romero asked about any impact on flooding on Suter Street, and Gil Coleman, an engineer for the project, said the development will meet requirements about runoff, but flooding in the neighborhood is a larger issue.

Romero said he and others are working on organizing community meetings with residents on

and around Suter Street who experience regular flooding.

“I think we need to address this moving forward,” Romero said.

City Council also unanimously approved applications for Virginia Department of Transportation grants for Country Club Road sidewalks, the next phase of the Northend Greenway and the University Boulevard relocation project.

Council also learned Tuesday there is a vacancy on Planning Commission since Isaac Hull has resigned, according to Fletcher.



Contact Ian Munro at 574-6278 or imunro@dnronline.com. Follow Ian on Twitter @iamlanMunro

Ian Munro