

MEMORANDUM

TO: Karl Moritz, Rob Kerns, Nathan Randall, Leon Vignes
FROM: Dave Brown
SUBJECT: DSUP 2024-10010, Westridge Towns Property
DATE: March 31, 2025

This memo revises and extends my initial comments on this application, provided to you in our virtual meeting last week. I have now visited the Property and given further thought to the application materials and staff report. My concerns about the application are not diminished. Please remove this case from the Consent Calendar tomorrow; there is much to discuss.

I. The Application

The application and staff report present a preliminary question: **where is the subdivision application?** The cover sheet of the drawing set states that a subdivision application to create two lots is being submitted concurrently. In other places, the materials reveal that new lot 800, at 8019 sf, is comprised of part of lot 705, and new lot 801, at 34,365 sf (prior to a 458 sf dedication along Nob Hill Court), is comprised of the other part of lot 705, plus outlot 2. Plainly, either a subdivision or resubdivision request is involved, and its concurrent consideration with the DSUP would seem to be in order. I do not want to proceed with the DSUP until the subdivision/resubdivision application is before us as well, especially since the two new lots are proposed for different zones: R-8 for lot 800; RA for lot 801.

II. Applicable Development Standards

Lot 800: In Table 1 of the staff report, staff states that the application shows that proposed lot 800 will meet all development standards for its existing R-8 zoning as well as the residential use limitations for the zone (by providing for construction of one detached single-family home). That is sufficient for me to recommend approval of the DSUP with respect to Lot 800 if that new lot is concurrently approved. The only issue I wish to raise about Lot 800 development is the proposed removal of Tree 917, a 29" dbh red cedar, which is outside the limits of disturbance. It should be redesignated as a tree to be saved.

Lot 801 (RA Zone): In Table 1 of the staff report, staff reports that the number of units will be 19. Starting with the RA density maximum of 22 units per acre, and considering that the gross area of lot 801 is .7889 acres (34,365/43560),

that means the maximum number of units cannot exceed 17 ($22 \times .7889 = 17.356$). Since this maximum is below the proposed 19 units, 7-700 bonus density is needed. That bonus is determined in terms of FAR, even though density is figured in the RA zone as a maximum number of units per acre. In Table 1, the reported FAR density of the lot after bonus is .969 FAR, as compared to .75 FAR without a bonus, for a total density, in area terms, of 33,312 sf. The applicant reports that with this bonus, lot 801 is proposed to be developed at 24.1 units per acre. I have no issue with the correctness of these calculations.

The other point of note about Table 1 is that six setback modifications are sought. There is no diagram or discussion in the staff report showing exactly where these modifications are, or exactly where they are sought, or the practical impact of each setback reduction on the current use and enjoyment of the adjacent property. Nor is this omission adequately cured via inspection of the drawings submitted by the applicant. The conflated analysis of all the setback modifications in the staff report (at 11) is not adequate. In addition, the analysis that is provided does not explain (at least to me) how “specific and identified features of the site design” compensate for the reduced distance from the buildings to the property line, which is the effect of the modifications.

Lot 801 (R-8 Zone): The applicant and the staff correctly note that the area including Lot 801 is recommended for “Residential Low” use in the Taylor Run/Duke Street SAP. The applicant does not claim that with rezoning to RA, lot 801 will, if developed as proposed, still be “Residential Low.” The staff report (at 8) nevertheless advances the idea that RA zoning here will be consistent with the SAP. Staff fails to mention that the SAP closely associates the “Residential Low” land use category in the SAP with the R-8 and R-12 zoning that predominated in the plan area (60%) in 1992, a calculation that appears just as true today. What is missing from both the staff and the applicant is any answer to this obvious question: why there is any necessity for a rezoning of this lot at all? Just considering the six adjacent properties (including an approved lot 800), five of them (4 now and 1 in the future for lot 800) are zoned R-8 and occupied by single-family detached homes.

While it is true that lot 801 will border or be near some multi-family properties, this raises in my mind not any obvious necessity for a zoning change but rather consideration of what could be done by right on lot 801 without a zoning change that would be responsive to its transitional location. With a lot size of over 32,000 sf, lot 801 appears to be a candidate for further subdivision into two, three or four R-8 lots. Under the new Zoning for Housing R-8 permitted use standards, each of those lots could contain one dwelling unit for one, two, three or four families. It appears to me that the issue of access to a public road, i.e., Nob Hill Court for the

(up to) two lots not fronting on that public street could be resolved with a private street or public cul-de-sac. Alternatively, considering the sharp drop in elevation of the lot (from lot 800 to Nob Hill) and other possible development constraints, a cluster development option may be available. None of these possibilities are discussed in the staff report, even to mention their infeasibility if that is the case.

III. “REZONING” FOR HOUSING

Despite its flaws, the rezoning of lot 801 might be found marginally acceptable because, unlike continuation of the R-8 zone, rezoning to RA will produce an additional affordable housing unit for the City. Some may find this compensatory factor overriding here. I do not, in significant part because of the experience the City recently had with the Zoning for Housing (ZFH) initiative. ZFH, as enacted, permits two-, three-, and four-unit dwellings in all the single-family detached residential zones—zones where those uses had not previously been permitted. Compared to the experience in some other jurisdictions, this change was enacted with broad (though not complete) support among residents of those zones. Citizen concerns about ZFH resulting in the dismantling of our highly valued single-family detached neighborhoods was addressed through independent studies showing that the changes would be both modest and gradual. Post-ZFH enactment, those assessments have so far held up well.

As background to my support for the ZFH initiative, I brought awareness that, as best I can recall during my service on the Commission prior to ZFH enactment, there had been no rezonings of a single-family residential lot occupied by a detached home into a zone for replacement of that home with any form of multi-unit dwellings. As best I can tell, this application is a first: the first time “Zoning for Housing” is bypassed in favor of “Rezoning for Housing,” or RFH. I worry that RFH is an unexplored, unanticipated detour around ZFH redevelopment that, considering this example, will lack the modesty of the ZFH initiative, and could prove to be a bellwether for much less gradual erosion of our single-family neighborhoods.

In short, the case for expanding ZFH to RFH has not been carefully made, and there is ample reason to believe that an RFH initiative would not prove acceptable. There may come along a few considerably larger scale projects where properties in the detached single-family zones pre-ZFH might be able to be rezoned for development as a townhouse or multi-unit project, but that possibility is considerably less concerning than opportunistic emulation of this application, targeting just one or two (or other small number of) lots in the City for more radical change than contemplated in ZFH.

From: [Karl Moritz](#)
To: [Lanning J Blaser](#); [Kendra Jacobs](#); [Nancy Williams](#)
Cc: [Paul Stoddard](#); [Robert Kerns](#); [Nathan Randall](#); [Leon Vignes](#)
Subject: Commissioner Brown's Memo on Docket Item #4 and Staff Response: transmit to Planning Commission
Date: Tuesday, April 1, 2025 9:20:47 AM
Attachments: [Memo on Longview Property DSUP.docx](#)

Good morning!

BCU Team: Please convey this email (Commissioner Brown's memo and staff's response) to the Planning Commission prior to tonight's hearing.

Karl

Karl W. Moritz (he/him) | Director of Planning & Zoning
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From: Nathan Randall <Nathan.Randall@alexandriava.gov>
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 3:19 PM
To: David Brown <dwbapc@gmail.com>
Cc: Karl Moritz <Karl.Moritz@alexandriava.gov>; Paul Stoddard <paul.stoddard@alexandriava.gov>; Robert Kerns <robert.kerns@alexandriava.gov>; Christina Brown <Christina.Brown@alexandriava.gov>; Leon Vignes <bert.vignes@alexandriava.gov>
Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL]Fwd: Consent Docket #4. DSUP 2024-10010

Commissioner Brown:

Thank you for the attached memo outlining your thoughts and questions regarding the Westridge Towns project. Here is our response.

- **Subdivision Approval**

Separate subdivision approval, using an SUB case number and separate application materials, is not required for projects like DSUPs that require City Council approval. The applicant is still required to show the proposed subdivision as part of their site plan, which is the case for Westridge Towns. They also still need to file for final plat approval as part of the final site plan review process in the future. This approach, which staff has followed for many years, is provided for at Section 11-1704(B) of the Zoning Ordinance.

- **Preservation of Specific Trees**

In our recent briefing, you had asked about the potential for four specific trees at the site to be saved – Trees #917, #974, #991, and #993. One of these trees, #917, was mentioned in your

memo as well. We have consulted with our landscape architect, and here is our answer about the status of all four of these trees:

- A. Tree #917 – This tree is listed as having a health of only 50%, and apparently has a fungus, suggesting that its health is likely to keep declining. We don't think this is a good candidate for preservation.
- B. Tree #974 – This linden tree is listed once, but it's actually a series of small trees growing from the stump of one that was removed many years ago. According to our landscape architect, trees exhibiting this growth habit aren't good candidates for long-term preservation.
- C. Tree #991 – This tree appears to be located where one of the multi-unit buildings is proposed and cannot be saved in connection with the proposal.
- D. Tree #993 – Same as (C) immediately above.

- **Modifications in the Staff Report**

Staff has included information about the requested modifications in three places: A) the Zoning Tabulations (Table #1) on page 7 of the staff report; B) the Setback Modifications Table (Table #2) on page 11; and C) the section/narrative about the modifications on page 11. As noted there, the six setbacks for which the applicant is requesting a modification are: A) the front, north side, and rear of Building #1; B) the south side of Building #2; and C) the south side and rear for Building #3. In our narrative on page 11, we note that the continued existence of a setback/buffer (albeit smaller) would continue to accomplish the same goals that the original requirement was intending to address.

- **“Residential Low” Designation**

Staff has made the determination that the proposal is consistent with a “residential low” designation for a few reasons. We view the overall number of units – 19 townhouse-style units and one single-unit dwelling – as being low. The types of units involved, as townhouse-style units and a single-unit dwelling, were a factor. The proposed building heights – 35 feet for the townhouses and 24 feet for the single-unit dwelling – are also low overall and somewhat lower than what we see for other dwellings of the same type.

- **Necessity of Rezoning / Alternatives**

We appreciate your thoughts about whether the project needs a rezoning and whether alternative development could have been considered here. Our approach has been to consider the entire project together, as 20 units, while maintaining the applicant's proposal to keep all 19 of the multi-unit dwellings on one lot. We would need to have additional internal discussions to determine the feasibility/legality of breaking projects (like this one) into smaller parts such that they would be consistent with the maximum allowance of four units on each lot that was created for zones like R-8 as part of the ZFH project.

Single-Unit Residential Rezoning / “Rezoning for Housing”

Thanks also for your thoughts about the intersection of rezonings and the ZFH regulations. We would like to share with you three examples of projects in which the Commission recommended approval of a rezoning from a single-unit zone to allow multi-unit residential. Those examples are:

- A. In January 2022, the City Council, with the unanimous support of the Planning Commission and support of the neighborhood (no speakers at the public hearing except the applicant), rezoned [4575, 4555, and 4547 Seminary Road](#) from R-8/Single-family (as it was then called) to further the project known as AHDC Seminary (townhouses and a multifamily building), which is now under construction. The three parcels consisted of an underdeveloped city-owned parcel, a single-family home, and a second single-family home that had long been serving as a group home.
- B. In January 2015, City Council approved [The Fillmore](#) at 5000 and 5001 Echols Avenue. The rezoning changed the zone from R-12 to CRMU-M.
- C. In March 2021, City Council approved the [Upland Park project](#), which proposed to replace approximately 18 single family homes with 92 townhouses. The land had been brought into CDD#21 previously; the underlying zone is R-12. One or more multi-unit buildings is proposed for a later stage.

Again, we thank you for your comments about the Westridge Towns project.

Sincerely,
Nathan

From: David Brown <dwbapc@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 11:34 AM
To: Nathan Randall <Nathan.Randall@alexandriava.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]Fwd: Consent Docket #4. DSUP 2024-10010

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From: **David Brown** <dwbapc@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Mar 31, 2025 at 11:23 AM
Subject: Consent Docket #4. DSUP 2024-10010
To: Karl Moritz <Karl.Moritz@alexandriava.gov>, Robert Kerns <Robert.Kerns@alexandriava.gov>, Nathan Randall <nathan.randall@alexandria.gov>, <bert.vignes@alexandriava.gov>

Please see attached memo. Thanks, Dave Brown

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