

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: NOVEMBER 23, 2021

TO: CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: KARL MORITZ, DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & ZONING

SUBJECT: INFORMATION FOR DOCKET ITEM #8 – Special Use Permit #2021-00094 –
401 High Street

This memorandum is provided to correct the reason the lot of record at 401 High Street is considered substandard. The staff report notes that the lot is substandard due to not meeting the R-12 zone's 95-foot lot width and 60-foot lot frontage requirement, but it is only substandard for not meeting the R-12 zone's lot width requirement. The subject lot is 88.5 feet in lot width and lot frontage, therefore it complies with the R-12 zone's lot frontage requirement.

Original language on page 3 of the staff report:

The existing lot is substandard as it does not meet the R-12 zone's minimum lot width and lot frontage requirements.

Proposed edit to original language on page 3, to read as follows:

The existing lot is substandard as it does not meet the R-12 zone's minimum lot width ~~and lot frontage~~ requirements.

Original language on page 9 of the staff report:

Zoning Ordinance section 12-901 classifies the subject property as a substandard lot because it does not provide the R-12 zone's lot minimum lot width and lot frontage requirements.

The existing lot and proposed dwelling would meet all R-12 zoning requirements besides lot width and lot frontage.

Proposed edit to original language on page 9, to read as follows:

Zoning Ordinance section 12-901 classifies the subject property as a substandard lot because it does not provide the R-12 zone's lot minimum lot width ~~and lot frontage~~ requirements.

The existing lot and proposed dwelling would meet all R-12 zoning requirements besides lot width ~~and lot frontage~~.

Staff will update the staff report with these changes for the City Council docket. Staff continues to recommend approval of SUP2021-00094.

[EXTERNAL]Planning Commission 12/7/21 Docket 8 — SUP for 401 High Street

Chad Stackhouse <mcs405@me.com>

Wed 12/1/2021 9:22 AM

To: PlanComm <PlanComm@alexandriava.gov>

Cc: Ingre Stackhouse <ilstackhouse@icloud.com>

[You don't often get email from mcs405@me.com. Learn why this is important at <http://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification.>]

Good morning, we are the owners of 405 High Street and the direct neighbors to 401 High Street. We are sending this email in advance of the December 7 Planning Commission meeting. Docket 8 will be the consideration of the SUP for 401 High Street.

We have reviewed the staff report and discussed the staff analysis and recommendation with neighbors and the NRCA.

Ingre and I oppose the recommendation for the SUP at 401 High Street and disagree with many aspects of the staff report.

The basis for the SUP recommendation is principally supported by the staff's finding that the proposed redevelopment of 401 High Street by the applicant is in accordance with section 12-901(C) of the City's zoning code. This section provides that a proposed redevelopment must be "compatible with the existing neighborhood character in terms of bulk, height, and design". We believe that the applicant failed to satisfy the first two requirements. Approving the SUP would permit a large house to be constructed on a lot that doesn't support it and only qualifies because of the applicants numerous deductions and would seem to obviate the intended purpose of the ordinances in place to protect against this type of development.

In terms of bulk, the 401 lot size is approximately 13k square feet. It is the smallest lot size on its side of High Street by at least 5k square feet. The current house is also the smallest on the block. The staff report provided that the existing house is a one story home with a gross floor area of 3,075. This total must include the basement. However, when describing and comparing the new home the staff only mentions the net floor area of the new home and not the gross. The proposed new home development will have a gross floor area of over 6k square feet. Per the SUP calculation, for the 401 lot size the max allowable floor area is 4K square feet. The only way the proposed new development at 401 satisfies this requirement is by deducting the entire 2245 square footage of the basement. These deductions do not seem to be within the spirit of the zoning ordinances which were updated in response to the very large homes built on Crest Street over a decade ago. If a builder can back into the number it needs to satisfy the floor area square footage requirement by building large basements or garages just small enough the exceptions seem to swallow the rule. The gross square footage of the house should be given more weight by the staff. This new home will be the largest home on High Street in terms of net and gross square footage relative to lot size. The other 4 lots on the same side of the street as 401 have lot sizes that range from 18k to over 27k square feet. The staff report fails to adequately give the full picture of the lot sizes relative to the existing

homes and only looks at the net square footage. For example, the property at 501 High Street has a net square footage of 4253 and a lot size of more than 27k square feet. The lot size of 401 is more than half as small yet the proposed new home net square footage is only approximately 300 square feet less than 501. The proposed new home at 401 would be almost identical in size to the home at 405 while having a lot size of nearly 5k square feet less than 405. We can make the same comparison with the other houses and lot sizes on High street. This proposed new home at 401 will be a large home on a smaller lot in comparison to the other homes on its side of the street. When looking at the gross square footage the new home square footage is more than half of the square footage of the entire lot. The bulk compatibility of the proposed new development doesn't seem to be consistent with the current homes on the street.

The height of the proposed new development at 401 will be taller than every house on High street. The street has a gradual slope to it from Braddock to the stop sign at the corner of High and Orchard streets. The existing roof lines follow this contour so there is a gradual step down as you walk down the hill. The proposed new development will have a roof line that doesn't follow the existing roof lines on the street and will tower over the houses at 501, 405 high street and 1806 orchard street. The staff believes that the height is within the range of heights presented on the street. This isn't the case. The house at 1702 Orchard Street was built around 1918, isn't facing High Street, has a lot size of about 18k square feet and sits way back off the street corner surrounded by mature trees that are higher than the peak of the house. Moreover, the roof at 1702 is a simple square roof with a small peak. The proposed roof line at 401 will run almost 60 feet along the property line dramatically changing the view from Orchard Street and the view from 405 High Street. The proposed new roof will be about 1 1/2 feet higher than the roof line at 405 despite 405 being up hill from 401 by about 5 ft. We don't see how the proposed height could be compatible with the existing neighborhood character. The staff noted design elements and separation mitigants which fail to take into account the length and breadth of the proposed new structure and doesn't dilute the impact of the increased height.

The stormwater run off continues to be another area of concern. We hope that any grading plan will take into account the adjacent properties and that the City's storm water management team will study and propose a few remediation plans for consideration.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Thank you. Ingre and Chad Stackhouse

DISCLAIMER: This message was sent from outside the City of Alexandria email system. DO NOT CLICK any links or download attachments unless the contents are from a trusted source.

[EXTERNAL]12/7/21 Docket Item #8, SUP #2021-00094-401 High Street

johnfehrenbach@comcast.net <johnfehrenbach@comcast.net>

Sun 12/5/2021 12:47 PM

To: PlanComm <PlanComm@alexandriava.gov>

Cc: Yon Lambert <Yon.Lambert@alexandriava.gov>; Ashley Labadie <Ashley.Labadie@alexandriava.gov>; Ann Horowitz <ann.horowitz@alexandriava.gov>

 1 attachments (214 KB)

NRCA-Ltr-to-Planning-Commission re 401 High St SUP.pdf;

Please see the attached comments of the North Ridge Citizens' Association re the above-referenced matter.

Best regards,

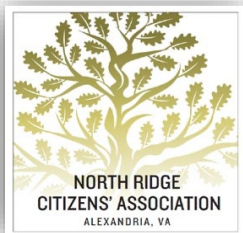
John Fehrenbach

202-352-5925

President

North Ridge Citizens' Association (NRCA)

DISCLAIMER: This message was sent from outside the City of Alexandria email system. DO NOT CLICK any links or download attachments unless the contents are from a trusted source.



NRCA, P.O. Box 3242, Alexandria, VA 22302

December 5, 2021

Planning Commission
c/o Department of Planning & Zoning
P.O. Box 178
Alexandria, VA 22314

Delivered Via Email: PlanComm@alexandriava.gov

Re: December 7, 2021, Docket Item #8, SUP #2021-00094—401 High Street

Dear Chairman Macek and Planning Commission Members:

North Ridge Citizens' Association ("NRCA") shares the following concerns regarding the above-referenced application and, more generally, relevant City zoning code provisions.

According to P&Z staff and the developer, the proposed replacement house meets the City's height, setback, and bulk (floor area) rules. Nonetheless, the result would be a structure of over 6,000 gross square feet that is taller than all the surrounding houses. Some of the new height and size would be due to the basement, which—while partially above-ground—is completely excluded from the floor area calculation.

If the proposed structure is indeed compliant with the City's zoning code, we strongly urge a reconsideration of the code itself. In particular, the basement exclusion is so over-broad that it essentially swallows the floor area rule. In addition, the "average pre-construction grade" criterion is difficult to visualize and understand (except through a surveyor's transit), and is susceptible to confusion and possible manipulation. Application of the basement exception and/or "average pre-construction grade" has already resulted in houses that to the eyes of neighborhood residents are clearly not compatible. An example in North Ridge is 3202 Old Dominion Drive. We encourage Commission members to look at that house, three stories tall viewed from the street, and judge if it is compatible with the surrounding houses. Is this what the City code is intended to allow?

Stormwater also is a significant concern. While the management of stormwater runoff is not an element of the SUP process, we urge that Transportation and Environmental Services and the developer give special attention to runoff in the review and permitting process. We understand that the property currently receives a good deal of stormwater from uphill properties and that the project may exacerbate drainage issues. This case offers yet another reason and opportunity for Alexandria to improve its stormwater management.

We appreciate the time and patience of the developer Mike Dameron and P&Z staff Ashley Labadie and Ann Horowitz in discussing the proposal with us. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Fehrenbach, President

cc: Yon Lambert, T&ES