Westhaven – Critical Slopes Waiver

On behalf of the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority, we are seeking a critical slopes waiver under the Charlottesville Development Code 34-5.2.16.D.1.

The subject property is constrained by critical slopes to the south and east, running the length of the property lines. These are manmade slopes created during the site's original construction and constitute an "unusual physical condition" that currently restricts efficient redevelopment of the property. A literal interpretation of the critical slopes provisions would unreasonably restrict the redevelopment of this site, preventing the City from realizing its goal of providing much-needed affordable and senior housing.

The proposed design does not merely encroach on these slopes; it proactively stabilizes them. By building two multifamily apartment buildings into the hillside, the building walls act as integrated retaining walls. This structural approach effectively eliminates the risk of future erosion and ensures the long-term structural integrity of the site and adjacent properties – a significant improvement of the current unmanaged state. Notably, the site contains no environmentally sensitive areas such as streams or wetlands, making it an ideal candidate for high-density redevelopment.

The public benefit of allowing this targeted disturbance far outweighs the benefit of protecting these manmade slopes. The project provides a critical social utility by creating 266 affordable housing units, including units specifically dedicated to seniors. The reuse of an already developed site prevents the need for additional greenfield development elsewhere and aligns with the City's Comprehensive Plan for density and housing equity.

Beyond the social utility, the project provides several technical environmental benefits:

- Stormwater control: To mitigate the loss of existing vegetation, the project utilizes an underground detention system to manage stormwater runoff. This facility provides essential detention that limits the volumetric flow rate and velocity of the stormwater runoff existing the site and entering the City's existing stormwater infrastructure. This protects adjacent properties from runoff impacts that are currently unmanaged.
- Groundwater recharge and open space: While the redevelopment increases density, decreased groundwater recharge is being mitigated through the strategic inclusion of proposed open spaces onsite in key areas.
- Tree canopy and landscape design: Although the project requires the removal of some mature trees, the proposed landscape design exceeds City minimum requirements. This ensures a net gain in the visual quality and environmental health of the community when compared to the current site condition.

- Rigorous E&SC: During construction, redundant E&SC measures, including silt fencing, sediment traps/basins, and downhill structural practices, will be employed to ensure adjacent properties and undisturbed areas remain protected.

By allowing this strategic disturbance to existing critical slopes, the City enables the conversion of an underutilized manmade hillside into a high-density, socially beneficial community that utilizes modern engineering to project the surrounding environment.