

Purcell Park Development Concerns

8 July 2026

Dear Mayor Reed; Vice-Mayor Flemi; Councilmembers Robinson, Dent, and Alsaadun; Director of Community Development Fletcher, and Deputy Director Dang:

The proposed multiple-use development on the east side of South Main Street between Edgelawn and Weaver has raised a number of concerns among citizens who live in the Purcell Park Neighborhood. In a previous letter of 6 July 2026, I addressed the overriding concerns: traffic and safety. In this letter, I would like to address the specific details of the proposal and its proffers, upon which the Council will vote on July 28.

To reiterate from my previous letter: My wife (Suzanne Fiederlein) and I have lived at 28 Edgelawn Drive—at the Northwest corner of the Purcell Park neighborhood—for 30+ years. We dearly love Harrisonburg in general and our “Norman Rockwell” neighborhood in particular. However that neighborhood is constantly under threat from commercial creep, JMU expansion, increased traffic (the subject of the letter of July 6), and unruly students in nearby frat houses.

In our experience it seems that about every five years the neighborhood faces a major threat, often in the form of proposed development that could have a significant negative impact on the neighborhood. Fortunately, the Council has voted down the most egregious proposals: for example, Lou Holtzman’s proposal two decades ago to build a Liberty gas station where the Starbucks now resides across Port Republic Road from the main entrance to JMU, or the recent proposal by 7 Brew Coffee to open a drive-thru coffee shop (with loud music) where the Marks & Harrison Law Office is now located at the corner of Port Republic Road and Main Street. In the three decades we have lived in the neighborhood, the City has approved several proposals that have had mildly negative, neutral, or slightly positive effects on the neighborhood, depending upon perspective: for example, the construction of a Rite Aid on South Main (now a Dollar Tree), the small strip mall across from the main entrance to JMU, re-zoning for the use of a former residence on South Main as a restaurant (Grilled Cheese Mania), and the re-purposing of the former SunTrust/Truist Bank branch office at Port Republic and Main as a law office (Marks & Harrison). I am grateful to the City for its historic wisdom in these difficult decisions that, for the most part, have preserved the integrity of the neighborhood.

The current proposal by developers Mike Hendricksen and Hans Harman falls into what I consider a gray area. It is not the best use of the property in my estimation; neither is it the worst. Whether or not the net effect on the neighborhood is negative or positive depends to a large extent on the specific details of the implementation, many yet to be determined.

Before I address those details, let me start with some givens. 1) Nature abhors a vacuum, and invariably some sort of development will go into the currently undeveloped space. 2)

The City has a dire shortage of single-family dwellings and one-bedroom apartments. 3) Mixed-use development **can** enhance the quality of life in a neighborhood, but whether or not the net impact is negative or positive depends strongly on the details of the project and what types of establishments occupy the commercial space.

Now to the details and their merits. The developers propose a three-story building (oriented along South Main Street between Weaver and Edgelawn) with 5000 square feet of commercial space on the ground floor and 26 apartments, up to 6 of which can be two-bedroom. The main entrance would be on Weaver because current state guidelines prohibit the right-in, right-out access on Main Street that both the developers and neighborhood residents would like to see. The parking area will be fence enclosed, with a six-foot high fence. A row of trees will be planted outside the fence along Edgelawn.

Here are some details that need to be addressed in assessing whether the proposed development will be a benefit or detriment to the neighborhood and the City.

- 1) According to the developers, traffic algorithms predict that the combined residential and commercial space will produce 400 additional automobile trips daily that emanate from the development. This will greatly impact the already problematic traffic situation in the neighborhood that was the subject of my previous letter. If the state disallows the proposed right-in, right-out access along Main Street, then traffic on Weaver, already problematic when JMU is in session, will become far worse. Moreover, some Weaver traffic will divert onto Edgelawn Drive, which is a one-lane alleyway not meant to be a thoroughfare. When combined with additional traffic associated with the imminent opening of the new Kids Castle in Purcell Park, the traffic associated with the proposed development will produce a dangerous traffic scenario for the neighborhood. In my judgement, if the state will not grant a waiver for right-in, right-out access on Main Street, the proposal should not be approved.
- 2) It is the opinion of this resident that a strictly residential use of the property would be a better option than mixed-use, specifically all townhomes or a courtyard full of attractive duplexes and/or triplexes, such as those shown in the accompanying photograph. Strictly residential use would decrease traffic impact and eliminate worries about how the commercial space is used. For example,
- 3) There should be no late-night or noisy uses of the commercial space: no vape shops, tattoo parlors, massage parlors, or restaurants with late-night bars.
- 4) To minimize impact to neighbors and their property values, the proffered fence should be 8 feet tall, not 6. Moreover, the property would be much more attractive (and less detrimental to nearby property values) if it included trees/landscaping within the parking area, not just along Edgelawn Drive.

- 5) What can be done to insure that the property will not be overtaken by unruly fraternities like those across Main Street?

Finally, I'd like to close with a rhetorical question for City Council members. The current modus operandi is that developers make a proposal, and one way or another, try to force it upon residents. If the neighborhood is lucky, sometimes the developers are reasonable enough to consider the concerns of the neighborhood and to tweak their proposals according, as has thankfully been the case for Giles Stone's original proposal and for Mike Hendricksen's modified proposal. However, this is still backwards. Why can't the City require developers to consult with residents BEFORE submitting proposals? Why can't residents and developers be on the same team for the betterment of the Friendly City? We could be, but it will take innovative thinking and some new ordinances.

Respectfully yours,
Dave Pruett
28 Edgelawn Drive

