
The Link Rezoning Comments - Paul St Extension

From Steven Tennyson [REDACTED]

Date Fri 6/26/2026 1:27 PM

To CD Planning <CDPlanning@harrisonburgva.gov>

WARNING: External email. Be cautious when clicking on links or opening attachments.

Dear Ms Dang,

Please share the comments below regarding the proposal of the rezoning of 473 South Main Street with the members of the Harrisonburg Planning Commission in anticipation of their July meeting. Please include them in the agenda packet for the public record.

Respectfully,
Steven Tennyson

A Formal Objection to the Paul Street Extension as Part of The Link Development

Dear Planning Commission Members,

I am writing to formally object to the apparent use of the subdivision ordinance process to approve elements of the proposed Paul Street extension that would otherwise require a variance under the City's zoning and development standards.

At issue is not simply the design of the Paul Street extension, but the procedural pathway being used to authorize it.

Under established land use principles, when a proposed development cannot meet required standards—whether related to roadway design, connectivity, right-of-way, or other dimensional or infrastructure requirements—the appropriate mechanism for relief is a variance. The variance process exists specifically to ensure that deviations from adopted standards are:

- Justified by a demonstrated hardship,
- Limited in scope, and
- Evaluated through a quasi-judicial process with clear evidentiary standards and meaningful public input.

In contrast, the subdivision approval process is administrative or legislative in nature, intended to assess compliance—not to grant relief from standards.

In this case, the subdivision process appears to be functioning as a substitute for a variance. If the Paul Street extension, as proposed, does not meet applicable requirements, then its approval through

subdivision review constitutes a de facto variance without adherence to the legal standards required for one.

This raises several significant concerns:

1. Avoidance of Legal Standards

The hardship test, central to any variance request, has not been demonstrated. Instead, the design is being advanced without the burden of proof required under a variance process.

2. Circumvention of Quasi-Judicial Review

The Board of Zoning Appeals exists to evaluate deviations based on evidence and legal criteria. That level of scrutiny is not present in subdivision approval.

3. Diminished Public Accountability

The variance process ensures focused public engagement tied to specific findings. Subdivision review does not provide the same procedural safeguards.

4. Creation of a Precedent

Allowing ordinance requirements to be bypassed through process selection undermines the integrity of the City's regulatory framework and invites similar circumvention in future developments.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the City:

- Determine whether the proposed Paul Street extension meets all applicable standards without modification;
- If not, require that the applicant seek appropriate relief through the variance process before any subdivision approval is granted;
- Clarify that subdivision review cannot be used to waive or reinterpret standards in a manner that would otherwise require a variance.

At its core, this is a question of process integrity. If a variance would be required under one pathway, it should not be avoidable by proceeding under another.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter and for your commitment to consistent and transparent application of the City's ordinances.

Respectfully,

Steven Tennyson

507 Paul Street

The Link - Comments for Planning Commission

From Jennifer [REDACTED]

Date Thu 7/2/2026 8:45 AM

To Thanh Dang <Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov>

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Hello! Please forward to the Planning Commission for the July 8th meeting.

Dear Planning Commission,

The City has acknowledged that its zoning ordinance no longer reflects Harrisonburg's vision for the future and has begun a comprehensive rewrite.

Downtown, historic neighborhoods, and transition areas deserve careful study as new standards are developed. Those conversations are intended to answer the very questions raised by this proposal: What is appropriate at the gateway to downtown? How should new development relate to historic neighborhoods? What should mixed-use development really look like? Where should student housing be situated in our city?

If these questions are important enough to spend years rewriting the ordinance, they are important enough to answer before approving one of the most consequential rezonings the City has considered in decades.

Approving a large, student-oriented rezoning now risks establishing a precedent under rules the City has already determined are outdated.

This is not an argument against growth or housing; it is an argument for thoughtful planning with input from the citizens. Complete the zoning rewrite first, establish clear expectations that reflect Harrisonburg's long-term vision, and then evaluate projects against those standards.

I am opposed to rezoning of the Lindsey Funeral Home property.

Regards,

Jennifer Cunningham

Old Town Resident

B1C

From Bobby Lifka [REDACTED]
Date Thu 7/2/2026 10:16 AM
To CD Planning <CDPlanning@harrisonburgva.gov>

WARNING: External email. Be cautious when clicking on links or opening attachments.

Really, what is it that you folks do not get. This new submission is just lipstick on a pig. We do not want any large housing development downtown. We do not want some large cinder block building, parking garage, and the headaches from a student housing building. The smoke and mirrors of this project is unbelievable, and so is the developer just trying to cash in and leave us holding the mess in time. You ALL have an obligation to support the community's wishes. Scrap the project and put up the park that was promised in this green space.

Bobby Lifka

COMMENTS REGARDING THE PROPOSED REZONING OF 473 SOUTH MAIN STREET (THE LINDSEY)

Submitted to the Harrisonburg Planning Commission

**Jeffrey Roy
519 Paul Street
Harrisonburg, Virginia**

Executive Summary

I respectfully request that the Harrisonburg Planning Commission recommend denial of the requested rezoning for the following reasons:

Key Concerns

- The proposal remains student housing by design despite being described as mixed-use.**
- The requested rezoning is permanent, while the proposed building and future ownership are not.**
- The revised proposal reduces numbers but leaves the fundamental planning concerns unchanged.**
- Existing neighborhood streets, sidewalks, and intersections were not designed for this level of residential intensity.**
- Parking remains inadequate relative to the project's size.**
- Downtown 2040 calls for thoughtful growth that balances redevelopment with neighborhood compatibility and preservation.**
- Since this proposal was first introduced, the planning context has changed, including JMU's Campus Master Plan emphasizing additional on-campus housing and intentional enrollment management.**
- The existing zoning already allows meaningful development. The question before the Commission is whether this additional intensity is appropriate.**
- The surrounding neighborhood already functions as an important pedestrian and vehicle connection between Downtown, James Madison University, and adjacent residential areas. The project's impacts will therefore extend well beyond the development site.**

The following comments explain each of these concerns in greater detail.

Introduction

Planning Commission Members,

Thank you for your continued service to the City of Harrisonburg and for your thoughtful consideration of this rezoning application.

Over the past several months, I have attended public meetings, reviewed the rezoning application and supporting materials, listened carefully to both supporters and opponents, and made a genuine effort to evaluate this proposal through the lens of the City's adopted Downtown 2040 Plan rather than emotion alone.

I appreciate the applicant's willingness to revise the proposal. The reduction in residential units, bedrooms, and building height demonstrates that public input was considered to some degree. However, after reviewing the revised application, I remain convinced that these changes reduce the project's size without resolving the fundamental concerns that led many residents to oppose the original proposal.

My family chose to live in this neighborhood knowing that James Madison University was already an important part of our community. We accepted that reality and have enjoyed living in a neighborhood where students and long-term residents coexist. **My opposition to this rezoning should not be interpreted as opposition to students, growth, or development. Rather, it reflects my belief that this particular rezoning is inconsistent with the planning vision established in Downtown 2040 and would permanently alter a neighborhood in ways that the current zoning does not permit.**

The Permanent Nature of Rezoning

Zoning decisions are among the most permanent decisions a local government makes. Buildings may eventually be renovated or replaced. Property ownership changes. Businesses come and go. Residents change over time. The zoning, however, remains until a future governing body determines otherwise.

For that reason, **I believe the Commission's responsibility extends beyond evaluating the building proposed today. It must also consider the long-term precedent established by permanently changing the allowable intensity of development on this property.**

The existing R-3 zoning already permits meaningful development of this site. The question before the Commission is therefore not whether this property should be developed—it certainly can be. **The question is whether Harrisonburg should permanently authorize a substantially greater level of intensity and the corresponding impacts that accompany this requested rezoning.**

Student Housing by Design

Although the proposal is described as a mixed-use development, I remain concerned that its design continues to function primarily as student-oriented housing.

The revised application still permits up to 85 four-bedroom apartments while requiring only 2,500 to 5,000 square feet of commercial space.

While the applicant has stated that the project is intended to serve a variety of residents, the building configuration, unit mix, and proximity to James Madison University strongly suggest that students will likely remain the primary residential market for this development.

Mixed-use development should be more than a small commercial component beneath a predominantly residential building. In both design and function, this proposal remains overwhelmingly residential, and remains substantially more consistent with student-oriented housing than with a balanced mixed-use development.

The Project's Impacts Extend Beyond the Property Line

One of my greatest concerns is that the discussion surrounding this proposal has focused primarily on what occurs within the development itself.

The project's impacts, however, will not remain within its property boundaries. Without the requested rezoning, the additional intensity—and many of the corresponding impacts discussed throughout this letter—would not exist.

Every resident, visitor, delivery driver, rideshare vehicle, cyclist, and pedestrian generated by this development will ultimately enter Harrisonburg's existing transportation network. These neighborhood streets are not simply local roads. They function as important connections between Downtown, James Madison University, and surrounding residential neighborhoods. As a result, the project's impacts will naturally disperse well beyond the boundaries of the site itself. **Those impacts—not the amenities provided within the development—are what the Planning Commission is being asked to evaluate.**

This proposal should therefore be considered not only as an individual building, but as a **permanent addition to an established neighborhood whose streets, sidewalks, intersections, and infrastructure were designed for a substantially lower level of residential intensity.**

One additional consideration is the structure of the surrounding street network itself. The residential streets east of the proposed development do not function independently. Rather, many of them ultimately rely on Paul Street as their primary connection to Martin Luther King Jr. Way and the broader transportation network. Consequently, additional pedestrian and vehicle trips generated by this development would not remain isolated to the development site but would be concentrated along an existing neighborhood corridor that already serves multiple residential streets.

Traffic, Pedestrian Safety, and Neighborhood Infrastructure

Traffic discussions often focus on vehicle counts. I believe the **more important consideration is the number of conflict points created by introducing hundreds of additional residents into an existing neighborhood.**

The surrounding streets already serve a diverse mix of pedestrians, including James Madison University students, downtown visitors, families, cyclists, and long-time residents. While sidewalks exist along portions of the surrounding neighborhood, they do not provide continuous pedestrian connections. Several neighborhood streets transition from sidewalks to shared travel lanes as pedestrians move farther into residential areas.

Likewise, neighborhood streets such as Paul Street, Mason Street, Ott Street, Preston Avenue, Myers Avenue, and others already present challenges due to roadway width, on-street parking, and limited sight distances. Paul Street rises from the proposed development into the neighborhood, while intersections throughout the area experience reduced visibility created by roadway geometry and parked vehicles. Likewise, Paul Street serves as the only direct connection to Martin Luther King Jr. Way for several nearby residential streets. Consequently, additional neighborhood traffic generated by the project has the potential to affect not only Paul Street itself but also the surrounding residential street network that depends upon it for access.

Students frequently choose neighborhood streets rather than the primary arterial roads when traveling between campus and off-campus housing. This existing pattern of pedestrian and vehicle travel should be recognized when evaluating the cumulative impacts of additional residential density.

These conditions already require drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians to exercise caution. Increasing neighborhood intensity without corresponding improvements to the surrounding public infrastructure increases the potential for conflicts that extend well beyond the property itself.

During previous discussions, the City's traffic engineer acknowledged that existing traffic concerns are already present within this area and suggested that additional mitigation could be considered in the future if warranted. I respectfully question whether intentionally increasing development intensity while postponing transportation improvements until after impacts are experienced represents the most prudent planning approach. In my opinion, infrastructure should adequately support a development before additional intensity is introduced rather than relying on future taxpayer-funded improvements after problems become apparent.

Parking

Although the revised proposal reduces the number of bedrooms, it also reduces the amount of structured parking.

As a result, the underlying parking concerns remain largely unchanged.

The proposal still provides a minimum of 320 structured parking spaces for up to 440 bedrooms and permits up to 85 four-bedroom apartments.

Overflow parking should not be viewed merely as an inconvenience; it also affects visibility at intersections, emergency access, and pedestrian safety on streets already constrained by their design.

Neighborhood streets such as Mason Street and Paul Street already accommodate significant on-street parking while functioning as important neighborhood connectors. Additional parking demand reduces visibility, narrows travel lanes, complicates emergency access, and increases conflicts among vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrians.

The revised proffers also include a \$45,000 contribution for future traffic-calming improvements. While appreciated, this contribution appears unlikely to address the full scope of improvements that may ultimately become necessary if neighborhood traffic impacts require additional mitigation.

Consistency with Downtown 2040

Harrisonburg's adopted Downtown 2040 Plan recognizes that Downtown should continue to grow and evolve. I fully support that vision. The question before the Planning Commission, however, is not whether growth should occur, but whether this particular rezoning achieves the balance the plan calls for between new development, neighborhood compatibility, walkability, preservation of historic character, and community-supported planning.

Although this proposal has been reduced in size, its fundamental characteristics remain largely unchanged. The requested rezoning is the same, the building footprint remains substantially similar, the Paul Street extension remains part of the proposal, and the development continues to function primarily as a large residential project. While I appreciate the applicant's revisions, I do not believe they resolve the underlying compatibility concerns that have been raised throughout this process.

This concern is reinforced by recent developments beyond the rezoning application itself. In 2026, Preservation Virginia placed the Harrisonburg Downtown Historic District on its List of Virginia's Most Endangered Historic Places. In announcing that designation, the organization noted that more than ten contributing historic structures have been lost within the district over the past decade and specifically identified this proposed apartment development as an additional challenge facing Downtown. Preservation Virginia concluded that "rightsizing infill development and encouraging the adaptive reuse of existing structures will help preserve downtown while allowing for new housing."

I recognize that Preservation Virginia does not determine local land-use policy, nor should it. However, I believe this independent assessment highlights the same planning challenge now before the Commission: how to accommodate growth while preserving the historic character and neighborhood compatibility that make Downtown Harrisonburg unique.

Downtown 2040 does not present growth and preservation as competing goals. Rather, it **envision[s] that both can be achieved through thoughtful, appropriately scaled development that complements surrounding neighborhoods and strengthens Downtown's identity.** I respectfully submit that, even as revised, this proposal has not yet demonstrated that balance.

Housing Need

I recognize that Harrisonburg continues to grow and that additional housing will be necessary in the years ahead.

Since this application was originally proposed, conditions surrounding student housing needs at JMU have evolved considerably.

James Madison University's Campus Master Plan now calls for housing approximately 60 percent of students on campus by 2040 and intentionally managing future enrollment growth. This represents a significant shift in the long-term planning context since this application was originally conceived. The University specifically recognizes that on-campus living improves student success, retention, community, and overall well-being.

Although the development is located near portions of James Madison University, students' daily transportation needs extend beyond classroom buildings to employment, shopping, medical appointments, recreation, and destinations throughout the City. Proximity to one edge of campus should therefore not be assumed to eliminate vehicle ownership or parking demand.

At the same time, Harrisonburg has approved numerous residential developments over the past several years, several of which have not yet been constructed or occupied, making the long-term housing supply still uncertain.

Given these changes, I question whether permanently rezoning adjacent residential neighborhoods for additional student-oriented private housing remains necessary or consistent with the University's own long-term vision.

Community Engagement

While I appreciate the applicant's efforts to engage the public, I did not feel the facilitated meetings represented a genuine opportunity to consider whether rezoning itself was appropriate.

Participants were invited to discuss modifications to a proposal that already assumed the requested rezoning would occur. Alternatives that maintained the existing zoning or explored fundamentally different development concepts were never meaningfully presented.

As a result, many residents—including members of the No to B-1C coalition—did not view the process as collaborative planning but rather as discussion regarding modifications to a predetermined proposal.

Not Opposition to Growth

Some have characterized residents who oppose this rezoning as opposing growth or development. I respectfully disagree with that characterization. Harrisonburg's future depends upon continued investment, additional housing, and responsible redevelopment. **My concern is not with growth itself, but with ensuring that growth occurs in a manner consistent with the City's adopted plans, compatible with existing neighborhoods, and supported by appropriate infrastructure. Those are the planning questions I respectfully ask the Commission to consider.**

Conclusion

My opposition to this rezoning should not be interpreted as opposition to development or to James Madison University.

However, not every proposal represents good planning.

The existing zoning already allows meaningful development of this property. The additional impacts discussed throughout this letter arise not from development itself, but from the substantially greater intensity made possible only through the requested rezoning.

Good planning is rarely measured by what can be built today. It is measured by whether the decisions we make today continue to serve our community decades from now.

I respectfully ask the Planning Commission to consider not only the building proposed before you, but also the permanent precedent this rezoning would establish. Because this property serves as one of the primary southern gateways into Historic Downtown Harrisonburg, today's decision will influence not only this parcel, but expectations for future redevelopment along this important corridor.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Planning Commission recommend denial of the requested rezoning.

Thank you for your careful consideration of these comments and for your continued service to the Harrisonburg community.

Respectfully,

Jeffrey Roy

**519 Paul Street
Harrisonburg**

Amy Roy

519 Paul Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

July 2, 2026

Harrisonburg Planning Commission
409 South Main Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Re: Rezoning Application – The Lindsey (473 South Main Street)

Dear Planning Commission Members,

Thank you for taking the time to consider my comments regarding this application.

My family moved to Harrisonburg from Southern California in 2016. Like many people who relocate from larger metropolitan areas, we were drawn to Harrisonburg because it offered something that has become increasingly difficult to find: a vibrant downtown, established neighborhoods, and a genuine sense of community.

We immediately fell in love with the character of the city, particularly its historic downtown, where students, families, longtime residents, business owners, and visitors all share the same sidewalks, restaurants, parks, and community events. It was exactly the kind of welcoming, walkable community we had hoped to find.

In 2021, we intentionally chose to move even closer to downtown because we wanted to be able to walk to local restaurants, businesses, community events, and everything that makes downtown Harrisonburg special. We didn't choose this neighborhood because it was isolated from growth—we chose it because it represented the kind of thoughtfully planned, human-scale community that is becoming increasingly rare.

One of the reasons my family chose Harrisonburg was because it offered a different vision—one that embraces growth while preserving the character, charm, and sense of place that make the city unique. I hope those qualities continue to define Harrisonburg as it grows.

Because of that, I have never viewed change as something to fear. Cities should evolve, and I believe Harrisonburg will continue to grow and prosper. I support new housing and thoughtful redevelopment. My concern is simply that not every location is appropriate for every type or scale of development.

As a physician assistant student, I spend much of my time learning how the environments in which people live influence their health and well-being. Healthy communities are shaped not only by housing, but also by thoughtful planning, safe public spaces, connected neighborhoods, and development that fits comfortably within its surroundings. Those qualities are part of what drew my family to this area, and I hope they remain part of its future.

I appreciate that the applicant has revised the proposal, and I recognize the effort that has gone into responding to public feedback. Even so, I remain concerned that the requested rezoning would create permanent changes to this area in ways that extend well beyond the building itself. Once a zoning change is approved, it becomes part of the long-term framework that guides future development, and I believe that makes this decision particularly significant.

I also hope the Commission will remember that many of the residents who have expressed concerns are not opposed to growth. We chose to live near James Madison University because we value being part of a vibrant,

active community. Our hope is simply that future development continues to strengthen that relationship while preserving the character that already makes this neighborhood such a special place to call home.

I respectfully ask the Planning Commission to recommend denial of the requested rezoning. I welcome redevelopment of this property within the existing zoning and sincerely hope to see a project that reflects both Harrisonburg's need for continued investment and the qualities that make our downtown neighborhoods so special. I believe those goals can coexist, and I remain hopeful they can be achieved on this site.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your continued service to the City of Harrisonburg.

Respectfully,

Amy Roy

re: Rezoning for "The Link"

From Douglas Hendren [REDACTED]
Date Thu 7/2/2026 12:16 PM
To CD Planning <CDPlanning@harrisonburgva.gov>

WARNING: External email. Be cautious when clicking on links or opening attachments.

Thanh Dang
Deputy Director of Community Development

Dear Thanh,

re: Rezoning for "The Link"

My wife and I have lived in Harrisonburg now for 30 years, during which time we have watched it grow into a thriving, bustling community. So far, it has been able to maintain a charming, accessible downtown area despite the rapid growth and expansion of JMU only a few blocks away.

I believe re-zoning the Lindsay Funeral Home area to permit a large, multi-story residential tower will very likely destroy the ambience that makes the area around City Hall and the Farmers Market such an attractive and popular part of the Harrisonburg community. The expansion of JMU in recent years has included taking over where the hospital once stood, right down to Hotel Madison on Main Street. It still, however, leaves a buffer neighborhood of small businesses and professional offices as a gateway to the downtown area. Putting a large, student-dominated facility smack in the middle of this would feel very much like the JMU juggernaut starting to take over the downtown space. It would rob much of the current charm.

I appreciate the challenges of your department, and understand the ideas about housing density and walkability. On paper, the Link might appear to be a solution. But I believe it would be short-term at best, and one the City would soon regret.

Sincerely,

Doug Hendren MD

Fwd: Rezoning Application for The Link

From Laura Conklin [REDACTED]
Date Thu 7/2/2026 12:35 PM
To Thanh Dang <Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov>
Cc CD Planning <CDPlanning@harrisonburgva.gov>

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Resending due to misspelling of name. Please accept these comments that were sent prior to noon 7/2/26.

Thank you,
Laura Lee Conklin
Sent from my iPad

Begin forwarded message:

From: Laura Conklin <conklinl6@gmail.com>
Date: July 2, 2026 at 11:56:38 AM EDT
To: Tanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov
Subject: Rezoning Application for The Link

Members of the Planning Commission:

I wish to express my opposition to the approval of The Link, aka The Lindsey. While I typically do not speak out on local issues, this proposal has caused me to write to you.

I have lived in Harrisonburg since I graduated from JMU in 1986, working at JMU off and on for nearly 20 years. My husband and I have raised our two children here and were involved with the founding of the Explore More Discovery Museum due to our interest in the community and downtown Harrisonburg. We recently relocated from the county to the City of Harrisonburg, close to downtown, bringing life back to a 1950s home built by Joseph Nielsen for his daughter. Obviously, we care deeply about the history and the future of Harrisonburg.

I believe that whatever the size, shape and purpose of a residential building at the entrance to downtown would permanently change the character of the downtown area, including Old Town, to a less desirable destination and place to live. JMU's plan to house up to 60% of its students in the next several years will cause students to leave other

student complexes, most of which are 4 bedroom/bath, leaving inappropriate housing for our workforce and families in the future. Although the proposed mostly residential building is close to the JMU campus, the majority of the students who would live in the facility would bring and use their cars regularly. With only 320 parking spots for 440 bedrooms, students will be parking all over downtown and Old Town. If these and other reasons presented to you by other concerned citizens are not enough cause to disapprove this rezoning, Preservation Virginia's inclusion of Harrisonburg's Historic District on its list of Virginia's Most Endangered Historic Places List 2026 should. This should not only bring all of us pause, but also put a stop to this rezoning. Countless individuals, groups, and the city government have worked tirelessly for years and spent thousands of dollars to restore and maintain our historic and beautiful downtown.

Thank you for your service to our community, for reading and considering all citizens' thoughts on the project under review and for voting No to B1C.

Kind regards,
Laura Lee Conklin

Sent from my iPad