CITY OF HARRISONBURG

November 12, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting

Title
Consider a request for Subdivision Ordinance variations and exceptions at 741 South Main Street (Grace & Main Parking Lot) — Meg Rupkey, Community Development

Summary

Project name	Grace & Main Parking Lot (JMU)
Address/Location	741 South Main Street and 10 and 16 Grace Street
Tax Map Parcels	25-L-1, 16, and 17
Total Land Area	+/- 0.91 acres
Property Owner	Commonwealth of Virginia, Visitors of James Madison University, and Gary L Beatty Trustee
Owner's Representatives	Monteverde Engineering & Design Studio
Subdivision Ordinance and Design and Construction Standards Manual Variations and Exceptions Requests	• SO Section 10-2-41(a) – Street Design Standards • DCSM Section 3.10.2.4.1 – Commercial Entrance Width • DCSM Section 3.10.2.5.2 – Commercial Entrance Curb-Return Radius
Planning Commission	November 12, 2026
City Council	Anticipated December 8, 2026

Recommendation
Option 1. Recommend approval of the variations and exceptions as requested.

Context & Analysis
The following land uses are located on and adjacent to the property:

Site:	Parking lot, residential uses, and James Madison University housing facilities, zoned R-3
North:	Residential dwellings, zoned R-3
East:	Across South Main Street, Hotel Madison, zoned R-3/Institutional Overlay
South:	Across West Grace Street, James Madison University facilities, zoned R-3
West:	Across Walnut Lane, James Madison University housing facilities, zoned R-3

The applicant, James Madison University (JMU), proposes to construct a parking lot at 741 South Main Street (Grace & Main Parking Lot) and is requesting variations and exceptions from the

Subdivision Ordinance (SO) related to entrance design standards. The properties involved are addressed as 741 South Main Street and 10 and 16 West Grace Street and identified as tax map parcels 25-L-1, 16, and 17.

The submitted site plan illustrates 62 vehicular parking spaces to be located on tax map parcel 25-L-1 at the corner of South Main Street and Grace Street, which is owned by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The planned project would remove the existing curb cuts along Grace Street and replace them with sidewalk while creating a new primary vehicular access from Walnut Lane to the parcel through the 16 and 10 West Grace Street properties, which are owned by Gary L. Beatty, Trustee, and the Visitors of James Madison University, respectively.

During the review for this request, staff suggested for the applicant to consider closing the 735 South Main Street entrance (which is owned by the Visitors of James Madison University) and for the proposed new entrance on Walnut Lane to serve as a shared entrance for both of the properties. Closure of the South Main Street entrance would reduce the number of access points and potential conflict points along South Main Street. At this time, the applicant was not interested in this option.

Requested Variations and Exceptions

The applicant is requesting variations and exceptions to the Subdivision Ordinance (SO) and the Design and Construction Standards Manual (DCSM) for a proposed entrance at Walnut Lane. The applicant is requesting a variation and exception to SO Section 10-2-41(a). This SO section requires that a property owner meet the requirements of the DCSM when developing a site. The DCSM sections the applicant is requesting to deviate from include:

- DCSM Section 3.10.2.4.1 – Commercial Entrance Width, and
- DCSM Section 3.10.2.5.2 – Commercial Entrance Curb-Return Radius.

Commercial Entrance Width

DCSM Section 3.10.2.4.1 requires a minimum 30-foot-wide commercial entrance; however, the applicant is requesting a 20-foot-wide entrance to be permitted. The applicant states the width of 20 feet is necessary for two-way passenger vehicle access while working with limited frontage available along Walnut Lane between the existing driveway to the south and the rear property line of 16 West Grace Street. Staff finds that the proposed 20-foot-wide entrance is adequate for the anticipated volume and type of traffic associated with the 62-space parking lot and the dwellings at 10 and 16 West Grace Street.

Commercial entrance curb-return radius

DCSM Section 3.10.2.5.2 requires a minimum 12.5-foot curb return radius. The applicant is requesting an 8-foot curb return radius on only the south side of the proposed entrance, which is adjacent to the existing driveway serving 16 West Grace Street. The curb return radius on the north side of the proposed new entrance will meet the required 12.5 feet. The applicant states that the reduced south-side radius would avoid affecting the existing driveway and neighboring frontage, is suitable for the anticipated passenger vehicle traffic, and would encourage lower speeds.

The proposed entrance will also be used by emergency and service vehicles. An AutoTURN analysis submitted with the site plan demonstrates that a fire engine can enter and exit the site using the proposed 20-foot-wide entrance with an 8-foot curb return radius on the south side. The proposed access also keeps new access points outside the immediate intersection area of South Main Street and West Grace Street, which reduces potential conflicts from turning vehicles to and from the site.

Conclusion

The requested 20-foot entrance width and the 8-foot south-side curb-return radius are necessary to provide access from Walnut Lane while preserving the existing driveway serving the residential dwelling at 16 West Grace Street. The submitted plan demonstrates that a fire engine can access the site through the proposed entrance. The proposed access configuration also avoids creating new access points within the functional area of the South Main Street and West Grace Street intersection, where turning movements could create operational and safety concerns. Staff recommends approval of the requested variations and exceptions for the Grace & Main Parking Lot project at 741 South Main Street.

Options

1. Recommend approval of the variations or exceptions as requested.
2. Recommend denial of the request.

Attachments

- Site maps
- Applicant's supporting documents