
474 S Main St Rezoning - Question on building height and final design

From Carl Larsson [REDACTED]
Date Tue 7/7/2026 8:06 AM
To Thanh Dang <Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov>
Cc CD Planning <CDPlanning@harrisonburgva.gov>

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

Please include the following note in the public comment for the July 8th meeting of the Planning Commission.

Dear Members of Planning Commission,

In addition to numerous other concerns that I have about the revised rezoning request for 473 S Main St., I'd also like to write with a question for you concerning the maximum height and number of stories allowed in the revised rezoning proffers for 473 S Main Street.

I understand that the revised renderings depict a 4-story building, but **the current proffers do not explicitly state a maximum number of building stories.** Instead, the proffers only specify a maximum 52' building height.

While I understand that it is entirely possible for a 4-story building to reach 52' tall, my question is on whether it might also be possible under these proffers to build a 5-story multi-family apartment building with compressed floor heights? If so, why hasn't the applicant included a clearly worded, legally binding "4-story cap" proffer to accompany its revised renderings?

Furthermore, if the building height is to be measured from the uphill Paul St extension side, then how tall will the parking deck and building be on the downhill, "back side" that faces City Hall, the Farmer's Market, and Build Our Park? Will the height of the concrete parking deck visually dominate our City Hall?

As a related point, I am also concerned by the ambiguity of the legal proffers in describing final building plans and materials:

- **Why does the rezoning application use the legal phrase "substantial conformance" in one proffer, but only "general conformance" in another proffer?**
- **How much leeway do the proffers give the developer to deviate from the pictured renderings and later change the building design and final materials?**

I understand that the developer may not want to take on the risk of committing to certain designs and materials at this early stage of the development process, but that risk can't disappear; it's simply passed on. In other words, who should hold the risk of design and material commitments: the developer who can sell and walk away, or the local community that ends up living with the building for generations to come?

The Downtown 2040 Plan, adopted by City Council as a guiding document for downtown development, clearly states on p. 44 that "Main and Liberty Streets are the primary front doors to Downtown. They should aspire to the highest standards in design, as they reflect the first impression visitors have of Downtown." For a building in a location as important as this one, which will effectively define our gateway to downtown and civic-center for generations to come, I ask that you please do not recommend approval of the rezoning request until these ambiguities are fully vetted and clearly specified in the legally binding proffers.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these points.

Best,

Carl Larsson
487 S Mason St.

Unit Mix of the Revised 473 S Main Proposal

From Carl Larsson [REDACTED]
Date Tue 7/7/2026 8:06 AM
To Thanh Dang <Thanh.Dang@harrisonburgva.gov>
Cc CD Planning <CDPlanning@harrisonburgva.gov>

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Please include the following note and attached/embedded images in the public comment for the July 8th meeting of the Planning Commission.

Dear members of the Planning Commission,

As you review the revised rezoning proposal for 473 S Main St (the Lindsey apartments, aka The Link), I ask that you please consider how drastically the housing needs of our city have changed since the last time the commission convened to review this rezoning request in March of 2026. Since March, it's my opinion that JMU's newly announced commitment to building on-campus housing now makes it unnecessary, and potentially even harmful, to approve a rezoning that intends to create surplus, student-oriented housing on this crucially important property at our downtown gateway. I therefore request that the Planning Commission move to recommend denial of the current request on grounds that include (but are not limited to) its excessive focus on 3- and 4-bedroom unit types, while encouraging the applicant to instead consider alternative proposals (e.g., a downtown park, public event space, or apartments that focus on the 1- and 2-bedroom layouts that have proven to be popular in several recently built multi-family apartments such as the Urban Exchange, the Ice House apartments, the Kavanaugh apartments, the Foundry, and the Keezell building apartments.).

For background on JMU's strategic plan, JMU's board of visitors in April 2026 endorsed [The Madison Promise and approved the 2027 Campus Master Plan](#). The plan includes a commitment to "house approximately 60 percent of students on campus by 2040." The JMU press release notes the rationale for this decision as follows:

Research shows that on-campus living is associated with improved student outcomes, creating a sense of belonging and community, greater retention and graduation rates, and improved overall student well-being.

Some quick calculations using figures from page 3 of the [final draft of the strategic plan](#) show that the number of JMU students living off-campus is projected to decline from a baseline 2025 figure of 16,673 students off-campus to a projected estimate of only 12,000 students off campus by 2040.

Thus, our city is projected to have 4,473 fewer JMU students living off campus by 2040.

In light of this significant reduction in future demand for student housing, it was my hope that the development team behind the Lindsey would adjust their unit mix to better reflect the more pressing housing needs that our city faces by eliminating 3- and 4-bedroom units from their plan, and instead focus on 1- and 2-bedroom units. In contrast, the *revised plan actually increases the proportion of 3- and 4-bedroom units allowed under the new proffers*, thus tilting the possible unit mix even further towards the possibility of becoming a student-dominated apartment block. This type of off-campus student housing is not only no longer needed in our city, but it furthermore puts our downtown gateway and civic-center at risk of the well-documented, negative impacts of “studentification”. (If there is any question at all of whether the Link/Lindsey is intended to be student housing, please note the “Student Housing” label used by the developers themselves under their “Harrisonburg Development”, here: <https://timberwolfcp.com/developments/>).

On the contrary, there are several examples of dense, recently completed downtown apartments that, going by the online listings below, appear to consist of only 1- and 2-bedroom units (i.e., no 3+ bedroom units):

- [The Ice House apartments](#)
- [The Kavanaugh apartments](#)
- [The Foundry apartments](#)
- [The Keezell building apartments](#)

Anecdotally, it’s my understanding that these apartments house a healthy, diverse mix of students, grad students, and non-student residents alike. The popularity of these apartments points to the sound financial feasibility of building 1- and 2-bedroom downtown apartments, with the implication that undergraduate-student-oriented 3- and 4-bedroom units are not necessary to make a project economically feasible in downtown Harrisonburg. In other words, it seems false to believe that 3- and 4-bedroom units are needed to make an apartment building “pencil out” in downtown Harrisonburg.

I’d also like to highlight **Urban Exchange** as yet another example of a downtown apartment building that better serves local housing needs for students and non-students alike. After reviewing online listings for Urban Exchange on Matchboxrealty.com, I found that **Urban Exchange consists of almost all 1- and 2-bedroom units, with a small amount of 3-bedroom units, and absolutely no 4-bedroom units**. I am attaching a detailed table of my findings here for your reference. Here are the highlights:

- Urban Exchange has **zero four-bedroom units**
- Student-oriented **3-bedroom units make up only ~21% of units** (~30% of all bedrooms) listed on the Matchbox website, **with under 3% of all listed beds in 3-bed/3-bath units.**
- **Urban Exchange is predominantly 1- and 2-bedroom units (~79% of all listed units).**

Many community members, myself included, appreciate the mix of units at Urban Exchange that can house both seasonal students and year-round, non-student residents (I also appreciate how it is truly

mixed-use with more commercial space than that which is proposed at the Link/Lindsey...I sense that our downtown could benefit from more commercial/retail space!).

In contrast, the Lindsey is very much a student-oriented floor plan with an extremely high proportion of beds in 3- and 4-bedroom units possible under the proffers. **In fact, assuming that studios are counted as "0 bedroom units" (a technical question about the wording of the proffers that should be addressed by Planning Commission), the current proffers could allow for up to 100% of bedrooms to be located in 3- and 4-bedroom units (similarly, Community Development's analysis with different assumptions finds that up to 77% of beds in the Lindsey could be housed within 4-bedroom units). Furthermore, there are no longer any occupancy limits imposed on the units (previously proffer 1.f.), thus meaning the total number of residents in the building is uncapped and could theoretically reach numbers within similar ranges as previous iterations of the rezoning request.** For purposes of illustration, I'm attaching a sample analysis of a possible unit / bedroom / resident mix for 473 S Main under the current proffers (note that it assumes double occupancy throughout - while I concede that this is not likely, **the main point is that the current proffers introduce an inordinate amount of uncertainty into the city's planning process and should be tightened up to reduce the significant risks to the city under the revised proposal**).

I would also like to suggest that the downtown location of 473 S Main should not grant it a special exception to create more, now-unnecessary student housing, as if excess student housing is okay as long as it is within walking distance of a small portion of JMU's geographically expansive campus. It's common knowledge that students often prefer driving, even for short distances.

Furthermore, 473 S Main is still a rather long drive from most other parts of campus. For example, **473 S Main is a 1.9 mile drive from the Convocation Center, a common destination for students who are driving to park on that side of campus (map attached). This implies that the Lindsey/Link will likely generate traffic along the already-congested S Main and Port Republic corridors.**

I agree with our city staff report for the rezoning request at 1351 and 1361 Peach Grove, which correctly noted a disadvantage of that location for student housing is that "the proposed development is over one mile from academic buildings when following public streets and existing shared use paths or trails." **To be consistent with the treatment of all rezoning applications, could the planning commission please consider investigating the rather long driving distance from 473 S Main to all parts of JMU's campus (including along Port Republic Rd), rather than only noting the distance to the closest edge of campus? Given this information, how credible is the claim that its student residents will routinely choose to walk and bike to campus rather than drive?**

I greatly appreciate how the PC Memorandum for the rezoning request at 1351 and 1361 Peach Grove Avenue addresses the impact of JMU's recently released housing plan on our city's housing needs, such as in the following statements made by city staff:

- **"Staff suggested the applicant consider proffering a multi-family building that would have one-, two, and three-bedroom units"**
- **"Staff does not believe that more student-oriented housing is needed at this time."**
- Finally, in reference to the student-oriented unit mix of the Peach Grove Ave proposal, the PC Memorandum wisely states, **"it would be better for the community to provide the appropriate style of units at the initial time of construction."**

It's my hope that the Planning Commission will apply these same standards consistently and recommend denial of the 473 S Main St rezoning based on the extremely high proportion of 3- and 4-bedroom units allowed under its current proffers. While some may argue that 3- and 4-bedroom units can later be converted to 1- and 2-bedroom units, our city needs to consider how likely (or unlikely) this outcome is given the intensive disruptions and required capital investments needed to convert 4-bedroom units into 1- and 2-bedroom units at a later date. As stated by City Staff, it would be far better for the applicant to provide 1- and 2-bedroom units, already proven to be popular downtown, at the time of construction, rather than constructing now-unnecessary, student-oriented 3- and 4-bedroom units.

While some may argue that changing the recommendation to a denial of the 473 S Main rezoning request would be inconsistent with the outcome of the March planning commission, it is important to once again **summarize the two new, significant developments since March of 2026:**

1. **First, JMU's strategic plan newly approved in April '26 forecasts significantly lower future demand for student housing, to the tune of a projected 4,473 fewer students living off campus by 2040.**
2. **Second, the rezoning applicant has nonetheless chosen to increase the proportion of student-oriented 3- and 4-bedroom units allowed under its revised proffers.** This change seems to ignore the major impact of JMU's strategic plan on demand for off-campus student housing, while also seemingly missing out on the opportunity to capitalize on the apparent popularity of 1- and 2-bedroom floorplans proven by recently completed apartments across our downtown.

These two developments seriously throw into question whether the applicant's proposed unit mix is aligned with our city's housing needs, and they should cause us to question whether the proposed public benefits still merit an upzoning.

Please note that in addition to the concerns noted above, I continue to hold many other concerns about the Link (e.g., negative impacts of "studentification" on the surrounding blocks, negative impacts on our historic district as highlighted by Preservation Virginia's addition of our Downtown Historic District to its 2026 "Most Endangered" list, negative environmental impacts on the tree canopy and stormwater runoff to Blacks Run, lack of commitment to LEED or similar building standards, uncertainty regarding final design and materials given the ambiguous language of the proffers, negative impacts on the experience of visitors to the farmer's market, City Hall, and Build Our Park, negative impacts during construction (e.g., how will it affect the Farmer's Market and summer concerts? Will there be street closures? If so, for how long?), negative impacts on surrounding neighborhoods, traffic, etc., etc.). It's my hope that the issues that have surfaced via public comment over the last year will be thoroughly vetted and addressed by the developer in updated, legally binding proffers before our city can consider recommending approval of the rezoning.

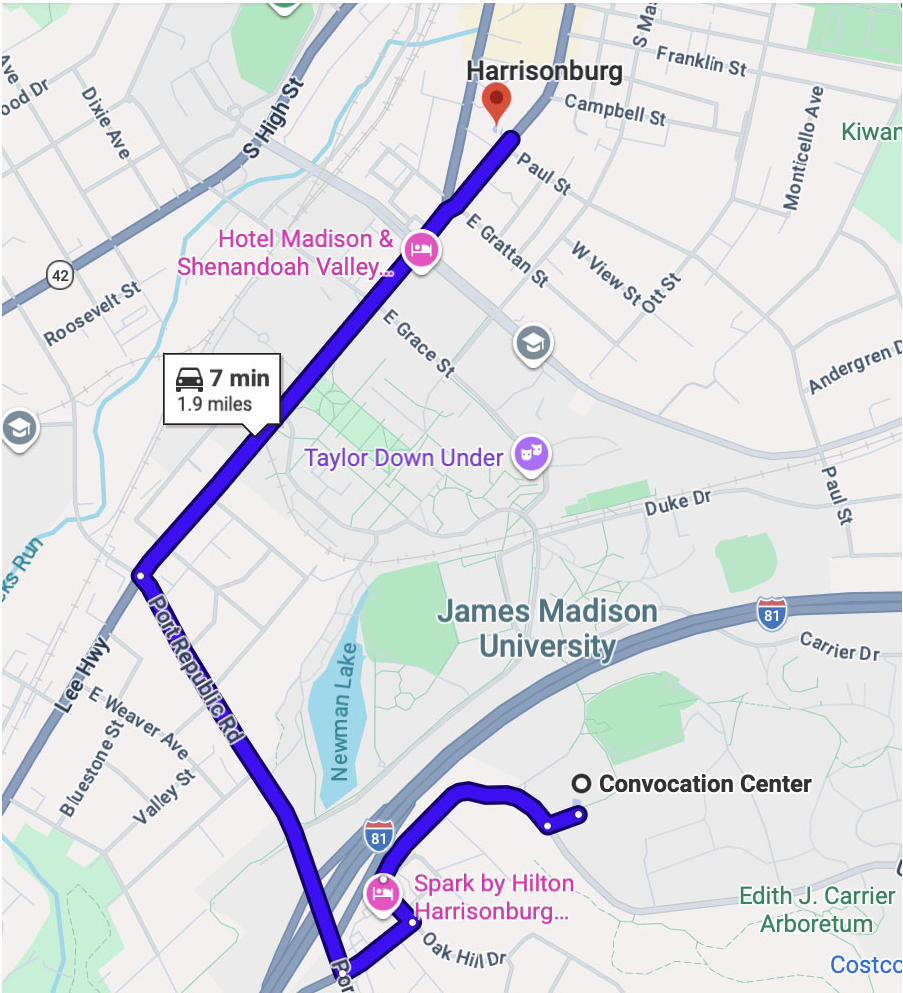
Finally, I'd like to question how the rezoning applicant's attorney has previously framed this decision as a choice between two outcomes: either the Link/Lindsey, or R-3 townhomes. I feel that this is a false dichotomy which puts forth only two, suboptimal outcomes for our city, all while ignoring the possibility of many other, alternative outcomes that could better serve the common good of our city (e.g., a park/public event space; or a context-sensitive apartment building consisting of 1- and 2-bedroom units, with existing mature trees and historic buildings on the property preserved; among other options). **Of course, none of these better options can be explored until the current,**

student-oriented development proposal is flatly denied. In other words, please say “no” today so that we can work towards a better “yes” tomorrow!

Please let me know if there are any questions that I can answer about the information in this email, and thank you in advance for your time, consideration, and service to our city.

Best,

Carl Larsson
487 S Mason St.



Urban Exchange				
	1 BR	2 BR	3 BR	Totals
Units	16	125	38	179
%	9%	70%	21%	100%
Beds	16	250	114	480
%	4%	66%	30%	100%

Source: Matchboxrealty.com. Note that 179 listed units on Matchboxrealty.com do not match the 194 units at Urban Exchange previously cited by city staff.

473 S Main St Proposal (June 5th Revision) - Possible scenario

	Studio (0BR)	1 BR	2 BR	3 BR	4 BR	
Units	72	0	0	23	85	180
%	40%	0%	0%	13%	47%	100%
Beds	0	0	0	69	340	409
%	0%	0%	0%	17%	83%	100%
Residents*	144	0	0	138	680	962
%	15%	0%	0%	14%	71%	100%

Source: Calculated using proffers from June 5th Revision of rezoning application for 473 S Main St.
Table assumes that studios count as "0 bedroom" units, and thus do not count towards the proffered cap on bedrooms

*For purposes of illustration, residents are calculated as 2 occupants per bedroom (updated proffers do not impose constraints on number of residents per unit or bedroom)

Lindsey Building

From Brian Miller <[REDACTED]>
Date Thu 7/9/2026 8:48 AM
To CD Planning <CDPlanning@harrisonburgva.gov>

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

To Whom it may Concern,

As a multi-generational resident and community member, I just wanted to voice my thoughts and feelings on the proposed housing at the Lindsey property.

My family has owned and operated the same farmland just north of the Harrisonburg City limits for well over 100 years. While I understand the growth we are facing as a city and county, I do not believe this is the correct location for such a property.

City and county residents already cannot access downtown the way we should. The enormous popularity of businesses downtown is fantastic and something we all should be grateful for, though it is not something we should take advantage of by adding more residents to that area. Downtown is already under equipped to handle what we have. The lack of parking is evidence to that. Adding another housing complex of this size, that close in proximity to downtown will effectively remove any chance locals have of visiting these businesses.

As much of a blessing to our local GDP as JMU is, if students are allowed housing in this proposed building downtown will become even more of a disaster than it already is during school months. Students unfortunately do not appreciate our city and surroundings as much as residents do and you can tell by other student housing that they do not take care of where they live. Downtown will become a trash zone. Students will overtake it more than they have and local residents will reject downtown more than they already do while JMU is in session.

It's also an unfortunate fact that our homeless population has increased because of Harrisonburg's push for "low income housing" (which most still cannot afford), and this has made our Downtown a haven for soliciting and drug use on the very street that is proposed to add yet more lower income housing. Harrisonburg should consider a remedy to that issue before they add another area that will downgrade the wonderful Mainstreet we have. The city has worked very hard to get downtown to the place it is now. Lets not throw the views and thriving businesses away for a random housing complex that we do not need.

Please consider some of this while this building is continually discussed. Residents have already spoken out against it, and in perfect Government fashion, the name was changed and size reduced just a tad to attempt to hide it from the community who already rejected it. Do not disregard the wants and needs of the current residents. They should come first. Do we need more housing? Yes. Absolutely. Just not a building like this downtown.

Thank you
Brian Miller
[REDACTED]