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August 30, 2024

Via Permit Arlington

Ms. Arlova Vonhm, Zoning Administrator
Arlington County Zoning Division
2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 1000
Arlington, Virginia 22201

Re: Statement of Justification

Request for GLUP Amendment, Rezoning, Administrative Regulation 4.1 Site Plan, and Use Permit

Property: 712 & 750 23rd Street S., 24th Street S. (RPC# 36-039-015, -016)

Applicant: 23rd Redevelopment Owner LLC

Dear Ms. Vonhm:

On behalf of the Applicant, please accept this statement of support for the above-referenced applications for a General Land Use Plan amendment, Rezoning, Administrative Regulation 4.1 Site Plan, and a Use Permit to permit the proposed redevelopment of the Property. As detailed more fully below, the Applicant consists of two non-profit organizations that have partnered together to propose redevelopment of the Property with a new mixed-use building containing 100 percent Committed Affordable Units (“CAFs”) and community service space that provides workforce development and community programming services for people with disabilities.

Melwood Horticultural Training Center, Inc. (“Melwood”) and its predecessor—Sheltered Occupational Center of Northern Virginia (“SOC”)—have owned and operated the Property, providing support, educational, and workforce training services for people with disabilities since 1981. Melwood has selected Wesley Housing Development Corporation (“Wesley Housing”) as its joint development partner to realize an innovative vision for the Property that furthers each of the non-profit organization’s missions, as described more fully below.

Property Background

By way of background, the Property is located on the northeastern portion of the block bounded by 23rd Street S. to the north, S. Grant Street to the east, 24th Street S to the south, and S. Hayes Street to the west. The Property is bordered by a one-story commercial building to the west,

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two to three story commercial and institutional buildings to the north, a church to the east, and Nelly Custis Park to the south. The Property comprises two parcels of record containing 82,302 square feet (1.89 acres) of site area and is currently developed with a 2.5-story building, a surface parking lot, and a portion of Nelly Custis Park (RPC #39-039-016; known as “Parcel B”).

The Property is split-zoned to the C-1 Local Commercial and R-6 One-Family Dwelling zoning districts. The majority of Parcel A (RPC #39-039-016) is zoned to the C-1 district, while the remainder of the Property, including Parcel B, is zoned to the R-6 district. The County’s General Land Use Plan (the “GLUP”) currently designates the Property as “Public.”

The existing building on the Property was formerly operated as the Nelly Custis School. It was originally constructed in 1923, with additions constructed in the 1930s, 1960s, and 1990s, all compromising the original historical character of the building. After the school’s closure in 1979, the County and SOC agreed to a land swap in 1981. On October 23, 1981, SOC conveyed a 15,000 square-foot parcel near the Ballston Metro Station to the County in exchange for the Property. As part of this land swap, the two parties executed an Agreement of Exchange which required the County to grant a special exception use permit for a sheltered work center for people with disabilities and required SOC to grant a public park and open space easement over Parcel B within Nelly Custis Park. While there is, and will remain, a public easement over Parcel B and no improvements within the park area are proposed, the Agreement of Exchange permits the Property owner to include the site area of Parcel B for density purposes in connection with the development of Parcel A, thereby acknowledging that redevelopment of Parcel A was anticipated. As reflected in the Administrative Regulation 4.1 Site Plan, the Applicant proposes to utilize Parcel B for density purposes as anticipated in the Agreement of Exchange.

Additionally, as required by the Agreement of Exchange, the County Board later approved Use Permit U-2314-81-3 on October 20, 1981, to permit an educational and occupational training-work center for disabled persons. SOC owned the Property and operated such a facility on the Property until 2018, when Melwood acquired the Property. Today, the Melwood operates a facility that provides support services and educational training opportunities to people with disabilities and will continue to do so in the new development.

Planning Guidance

In December 2021, Melwood filed a Tier 1 Special GLUP Study application, which was heard at the May 12, 2022 Long Range Planning Commission (“LRPC”) meeting. After this meeting, both the LRPC and County staff recommended a Tier 2 Special GLUP Study, which began in the fall of 2023. On May 21, 2024, the County Board adopted the *750 23rd Street South (Melwood) Special General Land Use Plan (GLUP) Study Document* (the “Study Document”). Concurrent with the adoption of the Study Document, the County Board authorized the advertisement of potential amendments to the GLUP to revise the land use designation for Parcel A from “Public” to “Low-Medium” Residential, while Parcel B will remain “Public” as there is a public access easement for open space and it is included within Nelly Custis Park.

The Study Document established five guiding principles and recommendations (“Guiding Principles”) to reflect community and staff analysis and inform the potential development of the Property. The five adopted Guiding Principles are as follows:

1. Ensure building scale, massing and materials complement the surrounding area, including the adjacent Nelly Custis Park;
2. Provide for attractive and welcoming pedestrian-level conditions through landscaping, other biophilic design and underground parking;
3. Enhance access, connectivity, and safety for all modes of travel in and around the site;
4. Prioritize sustainability through compact building design that conserves on-site open space, and trees and stormwater mitigation measures that contribute to improving stormwater conveyance systems adjacent to and downstream of the site; and
5. Prioritize affordable, accessible, equitable housing with redevelopment.

Proposal

As the existing building has been altered various times since its construction, it has lost its historical integrity and is at the end of its useful life. Melwood and Wesley housing now have a unique opportunity to partner together to utilize scarce land resources in Arlington County to fulfill their respective missions to serve the most vulnerable individuals and families, including those with intellectual or developmental disabilities (a population that is deeply underserved in Arlington County). Together, Melwood and Wesley Housing propose to demolish the existing building and redevelop the Property with a multi-family building with ground floor community service space for Melwood programming.

The proposed building will contain approximately 18,121 square feet of community service gross floor area (“GFA”) to accommodate approximately 60 daily participants and staff members, approximately 136,179 square feet of residential GFA comprised of amenity space and 105 units, all of which will be provided as CAFs available to households at up to 60% of Area Median Income for a minimum of 30 years. In addition, the Applicant intends that 30% of the total units will have priority preference for people with disabilities. These individuals will benefit from independent housing along with the services Melwood provides, creating a truly inclusive community.

The majority of the total units will be family-sized, with 60% two-bedroom units and 21% three-bedroom units. The new building will also contain one level of below grade parking with approximately 95 spaces, of which 75 will be reserved for residents (0.71 spaces per unit) and 20 will be reserved for Melwood’s community service use (1 space per each 3 seats (i.e. program participants and staff)). Vehicular access to the below-grade garage is provided on the western side of the Property’s 23rd Street frontage, while loading and fire truck access will be provided on S. Grant Street. The proposed loading dock will be shared by the community service and residential uses, which is appropriate for the limited amount of loading activity that will occur on the site.

The main pedestrian entrance to the residential and community service uses will be along 23rd Street S.

The proposed building design is consistent with the Guiding Principles. The scale and mass have been broken down to relate to the nearby context through building articulations, setbacks and step backs, as well as architectural design. Along 23rd Street S., horizontal architectural elements, a step back, and a building recess where the second-story green roof is located emphasize the ground level and enhance the pedestrian experience. The brick detailing, cast stone cornice, and window fenestration interpret and honor the historic elements of the former Nelly Custis School building. Along S. Grant Street, the building steps back at the third level and its mass is broken down through differing materials and colors. On the rear façade, the building is set back approximately 39 feet from Nelly Custis Park and the step backs at the second and third levels, along with grass and plantings, create a gentle transition from the new building to the existing park and neighborhood.

In addition, the proposed redevelopment will enhance the pedestrian realm through the biophilic landscaping and open space along 23rd Street S., building setbacks and step backs along S. Grant Street, and increased trees and landscaping along the southern boundary to provide a buffer along Nelly Custis Park. All parking is located below grade and will not be visible to pedestrians. The parking entrance is also located on 23rd Street S. to prevent vehicular conflicts between church activity and pedestrians traveling to Nelly Custis Park along S. Grant Street and 24th Street S. The main building entrance and accessible passenger loading zone area are located on 23rd Street S. to provide safe and convenient access for people with disabilities.

The proposed building is also designed to achieve The Kelsey Inclusive Design Standards certification. These design standards build on current federal and state requirements to provide a disability-forward and inclusive design that addresses the broad and diverse needs of people with disabilities. Key design elements that will be implemented with this project include accessible and automatic entrances, rooms and corridors designed for adequate turning space for mobility devices, direct access to natural light from common areas and units, low-glare wall and surface materials, flexible shared social spaces for a variety of users, and ADA accessible units.

To facilitate the proposed development, the Applicant requests the following, consistent with the Study Document recommendations adopted by the County Board: a GLUP amendment to designate Parcel A as “Low-Medium” Residential, a Rezoning of Parcels A and B to the RA8-18 zoning district, an Administrative Regulation 4.1 Site Plan, and a Use Permit for the community service use.

Proposed Modifications & Density Exclusions

The Zoning Ordinance permits the County Board to modify certain regulations for 4.1 Site Plans. With this application, the Applicant requests the following modifications:

- Pursuant to §§ 15.5.8 and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance, the Applicant requests approximately 20 units of additional density for the provision of on-site CAFs;

- Pursuant to § 15.5.7.A of the Zoning Ordinance, the Applicant requests a reduced residential parking ratio from 1.125 spaces per unit to 0.71 spaces per unit and an increased residential compact parking ratio from 15% to 19% (14 compact spaces ÷ 75 total residential spaces). The Property is proximate to convenient public transit and, in the Applicant's experience, a substantial portion of residents with intellectual or developmental disabilities will not require a parking space. As such, the proposed parking ratio is adequate to serve the residential component and will allow the Applicant to provide all parking below-grade. The increased compact spaces are also necessary to accommodate required drive aisle widths and building support columns. In addition, the 20 dedicated parking spaces for the community service use will be available for resident parking outside of operating hours;
- Pursuant to § 15.5.7.A of the Zoning Ordinance, the Applicant requests reduced yard setbacks to facilitate the proposed redevelopment; and
- All other modifications necessary to achieve the proposed development.

The Applicant proposes a total of approximately 2,443 square feet of density exclusions from GFA for below-grade mechanical rooms and air shafts.

Summary

The proposed redevelopment will fulfill the goals and recommendations of the Study Document by providing a mixed-use building that appropriately transitions to the surrounding environment, increases the County's affordable housing stock, and provides services to a diverse range of underserved people, especially those with disabilities. With their aligned missions, Melwood and Wesley Housing will be able to replace the existing aging building and surface parking to deliver the first-of-its-kind community in Arlington County that also meets several County goals and policies, including the Study Document, the Affordable Housing Master Plan, and the County's Institutional Partnerships Initiative.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need additional information.

Very truly yours,

WALSH, COLUCCI, LUBELEY & WALSH, P.C.



M. Catharine Puskar

Enclosures