



## Site Plan Review Committee

Community Engagement Comments and Responses  
2025 Fairfax Drive – Wakefield Manor (SPLN22-00001)

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#### Site Plan Project Information

**Project Name:** 2025 Fairfax Drive – Wakefield Manor (SP #417)

**Items Requested:** Major Site Plan Amendment

**Online Engagement Opportunity:** December 1 – 12, 2022

**Review Focus Topics:** Land Use & Density, Site Design & Layout, Historic Preservation & Neighborhood Context, Building Height, Form & Architecture, Transportation, Open Space & Landscaping



### About this Document

This document contains all the comments received as a part of the Site Plan Review Committee's (SPRC) Online Engagement Opportunity for the 2025 Fairfax Drive project. A total of 95 respondents provided comments during the Online Engagement Opportunity period between December 1-12, 2022. The links to the feedback reports and responses to common topics can be found below. All comments beyond the review focus topics are categorized as "Other".

### Feedback Results

- [All Participants](#)
- [SPRC Members](#)
- [Other Board, Commission, or Committee Members](#)
- [Residents of Wakefield Manor or Courthouse Manor](#)
- [Community Members](#)

### Responses to Common Topics

Below are common topics or themes received through the online engagement session that were identified by County staff. The list includes a summary of the topics and responses from County staff and the applicant. Please note that the topics have been summarized to provide an overview of the common themes and may not fully capture the concerns expressed by each individual respondent.

- **Land Use & Density:** While most respondents agree the residential use is appropriate at the site, many believe the proposed density is excessive and would negatively impact parking availability, opportunities for open space and the historic character of the garden-style apartments. On the other hand, some respondents are supportive of the proposed density in a walkable and transit-rich area, which will further the County's housing goals.

*Staff Response: The total proposed density of 2.60 FAR plus the 1.29 FAR density transferred off-site exceeds the zoning ordinance maximum of 3.24 FAR in the Fort Myer Heights North Special District. However, additional density is permitted provided the project is designed in a manner that meets the goals of the Fort Myer Heights North Plan ("FMHN Plan"). Additional density may be earned through green building designation and the provision of identified features and amenities that benefit the community. At this time, the applicant is engaged with the County Manger on a proposal for earning additional density, consistent with adopted Policy and FMHN Plan goals.*

*Applicant Response: The FMHN Plan recommends a building height of 12 stories and 125 feet on the property, which the proposed project provides. The FMHN Plan permits greater density and height on the property in consideration of the permanent historic preservation of the existing Wakefield Manor and Courthouse Manor apartment buildings. The existing buildings have been permanently preserved, and the proposed density and building mass conform to the FMHN Plan recommendations for the property. Additionally, the Applicant is utilizing the County's Green Building Incentive Policy at the 0.35 FAR level to achieve additional density. The remaining requested bonus density will be earned through community benefits to be negotiated with County staff in accordance with the Zoning Ordinance and County policy.*

- **Site Design & Layout:** Several respondents express concerns there is not enough separation between the new and existing buildings, which negatively impacts the pedestrian experience and reduces the amount of sunlight, air, greenspace and privacy for residents. Some respondents noted the proposal includes appropriate site circulation, provided adequate lighting is installed for pedestrian safety.

*Staff Response: Staff acknowledges that, when compared to the approved site plan, the proposal has less building-to-building separation to the north, while maintains the same building-to-building separation to the west. At the same time, the incorporation of pedestrian pathways between the new and existing buildings supports site circulation and opportunities for plantings. Staff will continue to work with the applicant on potentially improving building separation and transitions to the existing lower-scale buildings.*

*Applicant Response: The west facade of the proposed building will be setback approximately 13.5 feet from the existing Wakefield Manor apartment building before tapering back to 18.5 feet at Floor 3, while the north facade of the proposed building will be setback approximately 18.5 feet, starting at Floor 1, from the existing building. Additionally, the building separation increases further at the northwest corner of the site as the courtyard opens up into the property. Taken together, these elements provide adequate building separation and room for pedestrian circulation throughout the site. The proposed building tower also steps back on the west and north facades to increase the view of the sky from the walkways between the buildings and to minimize the visual impact of the height. Further, the architectural detailing on the lower levels, including the horizontal cornices, brick detailing, and brick rustication, visually relate to the existing apartment buildings while breaking down the building mass to create an appropriate transition. The architectural elements, along with the walkways, plantings, and amphitheater seating area enhance the pedestrian experience and circulation around the site.*

- **Historic Preservation & Neighborhood Context:** Most respondents believe the proposal is incompatible with both the historic nature and scale of the surrounding community and would overwhelm and overshadow the existing Courthouse and Wakefield Manor properties. However, a few respondents believe the building height is comparable with the higher density buildings in the area.

*Staff Response: While both the Courthouse and Wakefield Manor properties are fully protected as a result of the previous site plan approval, the FMHN Plan recommends new development be compatible with the scale of surrounding buildings through the use of setbacks, stepbacks, variable roof heights and other architectural features. Staff will continue to work with the applicant on possibly improving compatibility with the existing buildings through these massing and design strategies. Given the site constraints and limited developable area, the FMHN Plan also permits a maximum building height of 125 feet and 12 stories at this location.*

*Applicant Response: The Applicant has designed the building to appropriately relate to the existing historic garden apartments through its architectural elements. The brick color, detailing, and rustication relate to the existing garden apartments. The horizontal cornices at the first and third floors break up the building's massing and reference the height of the adjacent historic buildings. Lighter materials on the top of the building also reduce the visual weight of the building and minimize the impact of its height. Further, the building steps back on the west and north façades to provide a sensitive transition. The architectural enhancements and step backs relate to the scale of the adjacent historic buildings while also fitting in with the surrounding context of mid- to high-rise buildings.*

- **Building Height, Form & Architecture:** Many respondents express concerns about the tall building height and lack of appropriate tapering and transitions to adjacent lower-scale buildings. Architecturally, several respondents find the building generic and does not evoke the Colonial Revival or Art Deco styles reminiscent of the garden apartments in the neighborhood.

*Staff Response: Staff acknowledges that, when compared to the approved site plan, the proposal has reduced tower stepbacks and tapering above the podium. Although the proposal incorporates architectural features drawn from the Colonial Revival and Art Deco style garden apartments of the neighborhood, the proposal is also less ornate and decorative compared to the approved site plan. Staff will continue to work with the applicant on potentially improving building transitions and architecture as they relate to the existing buildings.*

*Applicant Response: The FMHN Plan recommends a building height of 12 stories and 125 feet on the property, which the proposed project provides. The proposed setbacks and step-backs on the west and north façades provide appropriate separation from the adjacent historic buildings. The architect studied the existing historic buildings and surveyed the works of their architect, Mihran Mesrobian. Architectural design elements, such as the brick detailing, horizontal cornices, corner windows, curved balconies and entrance, and brick rustication were developed, based on this research, to relate to the existing historic buildings and create a sensitive transition from new to old. Rather than replicate the historic buildings' architecture, the proposed building echoes Colonial Revival and Art Deco design elements to better relate to the neighboring apartments while also incorporating contemporary design elements that complement the surrounding neighborhood. Mihran Mesrobian was not replicating architecture of the past when he designed the original buildings, a style was developed appropriate for its time and place, and a similar process is the vision for this proposal.*

- **Transportation:** Most respondents commented the on-site parking provided will be inadequate to meet the needs of existing and future residents/visitors and raise significant concerns about future impacts on on-street parking availability and local traffic during and after construction. Some respondents noted they would like to see certain sidewalk and bicycle facility improvements as part of the project scope, in order to close gaps in the pedestrian and bicycle networks. Additionally, a few respondents noted an opportunity to reduce the width and length of the Fairfax Drive dead-end area and incorporate additional areas for open space and plantings, similar to the approved 2011 site plan.

*Staff Response: As amended in 2020, the approved residential parking ratio of 0.60 spaces/unit is slightly above the proposed parking ratio of 0.48 spaces/unit. Taking into account parking for existing and future users, as well as the proposed transportation demand management plan, staff will continue to evaluate the proposed parking reduction to ensure enough parking is provided and excess parking is not constructed. Staff will require the applicant provide site-wide sidewalk improvements, as originally approved, to best support existing and future residents and the surrounding community. The approved site plan also includes reconstruction of Fairfax Drive and the provision of a cul-de-sac and additional space for pedestrians and cyclists to gather and move. Staff will work with the applicant and community to ensure the best overall use of Fairfax Drive.*

*Applicant Response: The proposed project will provide 30 parking spaces for existing Wakefield Manor residents in its garage, along with 90 parking spaces for residents of the new building, for a total parking ratio of 0.48 spaces per unit on the block. Residents of the existing buildings will continue to have access to the 10 spaces within the surface parking lot on the northeast corner of the block. The proposed parking ratio conforms to the County's multifamily residential parking guidelines adopted in 2017. These guidelines recommend lower parking ratios on the property due to its proximity to Metrorail and alternative modes of transit. The property is located in a transit-rich neighborhood as it is less than a third of a mile from the Courthouse Metrorail station, a bus transit hub, and bikeshare stations. The Applicant will also implement a Transportation Demand Management plan, which will encourage residents to use alternative modes of transit. Further, the amount of provided parking will attract residents who do not rely on single occupancy vehicles and will encourage use of public transit and/or carshare and bikeshare services.*

- **Open Space & Landscaping:** Most respondents raise serious concerns about the proposed removal of the mature trees at the site, with several noting they should be adequately replaced with new trees elsewhere at the site. While several respondents do not believe the elevated private courtyard is appropriate since it is not visible or accessible to current residents of Courthouse and Wakefield Manor, others note the proposal as a whole lacks sufficient open space.

*Staff Response: Given the proposed removal of a significant tree identified in the FMHN Plan, staff has requested the applicant provide sufficient tree replacement for removing a tree of this scale and importance. Staff will work with the applicant to potentially incorporate pedestrian access from the ground to the elevated private courtyard to improve sightlines and connectivity to the rest of the site.*

*Applicant Response: The FMHN Plan recommends new construction on the property and there are no viable site development scenarios in which the existing mature tree in the center of the site can be preserved. However, the Applicant will continue to evaluate the ability for large canopy trees given site constraints and the location of underground utilities. The proposed at-grade amphitheater courtyard provides appropriate open space for residents and existing Wakefield Manor residents. The proposed design creates a welcoming and interactive*

*space and functions as a garden element that provides a front porch experience where residents may gather, observe, and interact. Native plantings will be prioritized in this area and integrated into the project's overall biophilic landscape design. Additionally, the amphitheater's garden folly design incorporates the Wakefield Manor residents' access into the new secure dedicated parking garage for their use. The amphitheater courtyard will also act as a visual and spatial transition from the private courtyard above into the public gardens. Further, additional open space is provided throughout the block surrounding the existing buildings.*

- **Other:** Some respondents express concerns related to construction activity and noise, especially potential structural impacts on the abutting historic buildings. A few respondents also raise questions regarding the trash disposal plan for residents of the existing Courthouse and Wakefield Manor properties.

*Staff Response: Staff refers to the applicant regarding construction impacts and the trash disposal plan.*

*Applicant Response: The Applicant will utilize the expertise of contractors and structural engineers to ensure the building is constructed in a safe manner and without structural impacts to the surrounding buildings. The proposed building will conform to the statewide building code and related regulations. Conditions implemented with the site plan approval will also require the Applicant to engage with the neighboring community throughout construction to address any concerns. Multiple trash disposal locations for the existing Wakefield Manor residents will be located on the site and will be coordinated with the property owner and building management to ensure adequate services are provided.*