

City Planning Commission Clears Way for Proposed SRO Facility

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The Charlottesville Planning Commission has recommended approval for a special use permit to allow a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) housing facility in the City. Richmond-based Virginia Supportive Housing (VSH) has proposed building a 60-unit complex at the corner of 4th Street NW and Preston Ave for both affordable housing and for the homeless.

If also approved by City Council, the facility will be built on the location of a building formerly occupied by Region Ten Community Services. So far, Council has contributed over \$500,000 to bring the project to Charlottesville.

This SRO facility was made possible by the Planning Commission in June when they voted to change the zoning ordinance to allow for SRO units.

Allison Bogdanovich, Director of Housing Development for VSH, told commissioners on November 10, 2009 that the company holds high standards for their residents and enforces regulations stringently. She said VSH will staff a full-time property manager, counselors, and security personnel for the facility. The entrance will be monitored 24 hours a day and residents will be required to swipe access cards to gain entry. Other rules will include the prohibition of overnight guests and illegal substances. She also said that VSH conducts an “intensive screening process” for applicants, which includes criminal history and credit checks.

Bogdanovich assured commissioners that VSH has had a successful record in managing other SRO facilities in Virginia. She reported that neighbors in other communities who were once opposed to living next to such facilities actually became proponents after observing their operation. She also claimed that crime was reduced in areas where SRO facilities were built and police were summoned less often.

Bruce Wardell, the project’s architect, told the Commission that the site was “perfect” for the proposed use since it was located near downtown to allow residents to travel on foot to several possible places of employment.

“To have an affordable housing option that is in fact part of the downtown community would be an option that this community hasn’t ever provided,” said Wardell.

The approval process for the special use permit was complicated by the fact that unlike other VSH properties across the state, only half the units are expected to initially be targeted towards the homeless. The other half would be priced as affordable housing units. Virginia has guidelines on the maximum amount of income residents can earn and still qualify for subsidies for an SRO unit.

The special use permit only applied to the SRO portion of the facility since the construction of standard affordable housing units did not have to go through the same scrutiny.

City Planner Nick Rogers told the Commission that if the special use permit was eventually approved by City Council, the facility would fall under two zoning designations, each of which had distinct parking requirements. The Planning Commission could recommend in their approval of the special use permit how many parking spaces the SRO units should be allotted. But City zoning

regulations stipulate that affordable housing be provided one parking space per unit.

This requirement was at odds with VSH's preliminary site plan which depicted 27 total parking spaces. If VSH kept the 30/30 split of SRO and affordable housing units within their plan, 30 parking spaces would be required, at the very least, to meet the zoning ordinance pertaining to affordable housing.

After Commissioners discussed the details of parking, Chairman Jason Pearson reminded his colleagues that the only issue before them was the question of granting a special use permit for the SRO units. The site plan will come back at a later date. Commissioner Michael Osteen said the Commission's discussion was too concerned with specifics.

"We're suggesting our intent. Council's got to figure it out. They're officially doing something. We're just making a recommendation," said Osteen.

Commissioner Dan Rosensweig moved that the Commission approve the special use permit while recommending a parking waiver which allowed City Council to determine the final number of parking spaces needed for the 30 proposed SRO units.

The Commission passed this resolution unanimously with five votes. Commissioner Kurt Keesecker recused himself because he works for Bruce Wardell Architects. Commissioner Genevieve Keller was not present.