

City Commission Backs Senior Housing

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The Charlottesville Planning Commission recommended approval Monday of a major rezoning at 1512 E. Market St., the site of the historic Timberlake-Branham home. The Jefferson Area Board for Aging intends to build a 28-unit, multi-family development in and around the 1886 structure. “For seniors, the days of senior-only housing in the middle of nowhere are over,” said Chris Murray, JABA’s manager of business development, in an interview. “The worst thing we can do to our seniors is isolate them. We want seniors integrated in our community.”

“This is as good a project as you could ever get,” said Victoria Dunham, president of the Woolen Mills Neighborhood Association, in an interview. “Our preference would be that nothing be there, but this is a golden opportunity. ... Instead of dreading the bulldozers coming in, we are actually looking forward to our new neighbors.”

The Timberlake-Branham home is an Individually Protected Property and, as such, requires design review by the Board of Architectural Review for any modifications. After discussions with the neighbors, JABA agreed to also have the new buildings, which are not on protected property, reviewed by the BAR prior to construction.

“We asked them to proffer that this be under design control,” Dunham said. “It will have to be more sensitive to its surroundings. ... It is an additional layer of protection.”

JABA — an area organization that provides services for seniors — runs the Mary Williams Community Center in the house. On the almost 3 acre site, JABA intends to build 22 of the 28 housing units at Timberlake Place in three new structures. The remaining six units will be in the existing home and community center.

JABA proffered that 80 percent of the units would be affordable housing and leased to residents aged 55 and older. For the remainder, Murray said that he hopes residents will include workers with skills related to senior living, such as certified nursing assistants.

“We have a goal of 20 percent workforce housing on the same site” Murray said.

Five residents spoke at a public hearing, with two Woolen Mills residents saying they were concerned about an increase in traffic from the development. However, the proposal ultimately won the support of the Woolen Mills Neighborhood Association.

“We really want to be able to set a standard here for developers and neighbors working together,” Dunham said. “This is something the applicant, the city and the neighborhood can all be proud of.” The commission’s vote in favor of the rezoning was unanimous with Commissioner Bill Emory absent.

Charlottesville’s City Council is expected to consider the rezoning at its May 3 meeting. With financing and the city’s final approval, JABA hopes to complete construction by December 2012. Charlottesville Tomorrow is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization covering land-use and transportation issues in Charlottesville and Albemarle County.