

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Maeve Gould, AICP, Comprehensive Planner

RE: 2022 Comprehensive Plan Amendment – Preferred locations for high density student housing and housekeeping items

DATE: October 28, 2022

The Planning Commission reviewed the Comprehensive Plan Amendment at the October 18, 2022 work session. Based on discussion from the work session, a few minor modifications were made to the Preferred High Density Student Housing Locations Text. The redevelopment criteria related to strong property management has been emphasized and refined to include more detail around the inclusion of a code of conduct for residents.

Additional text has also been added to the Virginia Tech on-campus housing section. In order to bolster this section, text has been added to indicate that any future growth in Virginia Tech undergraduate student enrollment be accompanied by additional on-campus student housing.

Attachments:

- Revised Preferred High Density Student Housing Locations text

Preferred High Density Student Housing Locations Text Amendment

Background

In order to have a healthy economy and thriving community, there is a need for a mix of housing types in Town. Over time in Blacksburg, pent up demand for new high-end, purpose-built undergraduate housing has impacted all other segments of the housing market. This was first identified in the Downtown Blacksburg Housing Market Study conducted by Development Strategies in 2015. To respond to this need, between 2017 and 2021, roughly 3,500 additional bedrooms of student-oriented multifamily housing were approved by Town Council. In 2019, Town Council adopted a resolution that outlined the parameters for locations of student-oriented housing. The resolution is intended to provide guidance regarding future student housing requests. It includes existing bedrooms of multi-family housing in Town, additional bedrooms of multifamily housing approved but not yet constructed, and 2017 information from Virginia Tech regarding enrollment expansion. As follow up to the resolution, the Preferred Locations for High Density Student Housing and Mixed Use with Student Housing Map (Map E) was created as part of the Land Use Map Series and identifies areas throughout Blacksburg that are most appropriate for undergraduate student housing now and in the future.

The Preferred Locations for High Density Student Housing and Mixed Use with Student Housing Map designations do not affect existing zoning. Designations on the map do not prevent rezoning for high density multifamily residential development outside these areas, nor obligate the Town to approve development proposals within them. In addition, the designations do not mandate a specific type or style of development on a property. This section includes redevelopment criteria which should be evaluated for any development proposals. Both categories of student housing shown on the map are located in proximity to the Blacksburg Historic District and the historic St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall. Any redevelopment that occurs in these areas should be very carefully considered and sensitive to their unique character.

Designating preferred areas of student-oriented housing will support the development of other much needed types of housing, such as senior housing, workforce housing, and housing for young professionals. More detail about the housing challenges and needs for these and other segments of the community can be found in the [Housing](#) chapter.

Preferred Locations for High Density Student Housing and Mixed Use with Student Housing Map

Purpose-built student housing can range from large-scale multifamily apartment buildings to duplex and townhome developments. The map has two designations: High Density Student Housing and Mixed Use with Student Housing. The High Density Student Housing area designates where high-intensity, purpose-built student housing exists today and should be located in the future. These are areas with infrastructure necessary to support higher density development and where other services, such as transit, exist. Minimizing the interface with other residential non-student neighborhoods is important. The core of the High Density Student Housing area is the

Patrick Henry Drive Corridor and University City Boulevard area. These areas contain older developments such as Chasewood Downs Apartments and newer developments such as Park 37 and The Hub.

There are also two Mixed Use with Student Housing areas designated on the map: Downtown Northwest and The Fork. These two areas were identified in studies conducted for the Town by consulting firm Development Strategies as appropriate for consideration of a mix of student multi-family residential and commercial projects. Site design and integration into the existing fabric of the Downtown area are key for any redevelopment that occurs in these areas.

High Density Student Housing Designation

The High Density Student Housing areas designate those most appropriate for undergraduate student housing in the long-term. These types of housing are often characterized by structured parking, large building mass, and rentals by the bedroom rather than by the unit. They also typically provide student-oriented amenities such as study rooms, gyms, and bed-bath parity. Clustering student housing developments in the same area allows for similar uses to be located together with complementary infrastructure and amenities, while minimizing lifestyle conflicts. Map E reflects areas where this type of development exists today, is under construction, or is appropriate to be located in the future.

Several portions of the High Density Student Housing area redeveloped between 2019 and 2022, resulting in a significantly increased residential density. It is expected that the recently redeveloped areas will remain at the current level of residential density for the foreseeable future. However, student-oriented redevelopment of older existing housing may be expected in the future.

When redevelopment at a much higher density occurs, attention should be given to how the more intense student housing interfaces with other nearby residential uses. The transition and mitigation measures should be provided within the High Density Student Housing area. Additionally, redevelopment areas should include some small commercial uses that fit the surrounding context, such as small coffee shops, co-working spaces, and neighborhood corner stores.

Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, with safe, accessible, and convenient routes to the Virginia Tech campus and Downtown, are important. The Patrick Henry Drive and University City Boulevard core area has access to transit and some bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Improvements to the existing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure is anticipated through redevelopment and Town initiated efforts. While further from the Virginia Tech campus, a portion of Foxridge is designated on the map partially due to the extensive trail system and bus service to connect student residents to campus. The Edge, while not in the High Density Student Housing core, abuts the Virginia Tech campus, allowing people walking and biking to conveniently reach campus and Downtown.

Also designated on the Preferred Locations for High Density Student Housing and Mixed Use with Student Housing Map is the Virginia Tech main campus. High density student housing on the

Virginia Tech campus is the optimal location to meet the University's need for housing with any future growth in enrollment. Any future growth in Virginia Tech undergraduate student enrollment should also include the addition of on-campus student housing. On-campus housing should be located in the core campus area, close to academic buildings and other campus hubs. The University owns the lands most suitable for new undergraduate housing, with proximate locations to student centers, existing infrastructure, and other services such as sidewalks, trails, and transit.

Redevelopment on campus should not reduce the amount of student housing provided, but rather, the University should retain on-campus housing to serve at least one-third (1/3) of undergraduate students. One new residential building, the Creativity and Innovation District Living Learning Community, has been constructed on Kent Street but more are needed. The University has indicated that other residential facilities are planned in the future west of the Duck Pond on campus.

Redevelopment Criteria

Expansion or redevelopment of older existing multifamily housing should be evaluated based on the criteria listed below which are key to quality design. Development should also meet the Residential Infill Development Guidelines detailed in the Design Considerations section of this chapter.

Key Criteria for High Density Student Housing:

- Bicycle and pedestrian connectivity to the Town's transportation network (sidewalk, trails, bicycle infrastructure)
- Long-term, secure, and sheltered bicycle parking
- Transit access and quality of amenities at transit stops
- Strong property management including code of conduct for residents
- Meaningful open space
- Structured parking to minimize impervious area
- Attention to neighborhood context with setbacks, height, buffering, and location of outdoor amenities
- Building designs that are original, context sensitive, and specific to Blacksburg
- High quality sustainable building practices, including durable building materials
- Sustainable site design and development methods, such as graywater recycling systems or bio-retention areas/rain gardens
- Consideration of future trends and needs, such as electric vehicle charging stations
- Designated convenient drop off/pick-up areas for ridesharing and deliveries
- Convenient locations throughout a development for trash and recycling

Mixed Use with Student Housing Designation

There are two Mixed Use with Student Housing areas shown on the map. These two areas are designated for meaningful commercial and retail uses with residential above, including residential

for undergraduate or graduate students. Both locations are adjacent to the Virginia Tech campus, as well as commercial areas on North Main Street or Prices Fork Road, and the Mixed Use with Student Housing designation is site-specific based on these conditions. The residential density of these areas is not defined but would be determined through zoning or project review. Development design should also take into account the principles in the Residential Infill Development Guidelines detailed in the Design Considerations section of this chapter.

The two Mixed Use with Student Housing areas on Map E were designated in studies conducted for the Town by Development Strategies. The Downtown Northwest area is the triangle of North Main Street, Turner Street NW, and Prices Fork Road, and was identified in the Downtown Strategic Plan completed in 2019. In the study, the vision for this area is described as mixed in use, walkable, urban, and the only residential area in downtown targeted for students. The Fork district was identified in the North Main Street Study completed in 2020, and is comprised of the North Main Street, Progress Street NW, and Kabrich Street areas. The study describes this area as having potential for mixed use, with high quality retail space close to campus and student-oriented housing.

Redevelopment in these areas should include commercial and retail spaces, such as restaurants and shops, to support all types of residential uses and not only students. The value of the student housing portion should enable high quality design and materials for the mixed use redevelopment as a whole. It should also consider the Non-Residential Development Design principles detailed in the Design Considerations section of this chapter. Mixed use development may occur in other areas of Town, however, the Mixed Use with Student Housing designation indicates the areas most appropriate for a mix of uses that includes student-oriented residential.