

MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Commission

From: Matthew Sampa, Planner I

Date: April 14, 2023

Subject: EXP 23-0001: Exception Request for Parking in front of the front building line at 1284 North Main Street (Tax Map Nos. 226- A327 & 226- A328) For the Islamic Society of the New River Valley (owner).

SITE SUMMARY

Property Location	1284 North Main Street	
Tax Parcel Numbers	226- A327 & 226- A328	
Parcel(s) Size	0.853 & 2.260 Acres	
Zoning District	GC General Commercial	
Current Use	Religious Assembly / Vacant	
Adjacent Zoning Districts	North:	GC General Commercial
	East:	GC General Commercial
	South:	R-5 Transitional Residential
	West:	RD Research and Development / GC General Commercial
Adjacent Uses	North:	Justin Tebbenkamp, DDS – General & Cosmetic Dentistry
	East:	Campus Cookies
	South:	Giles Road Duplexes
	West:	Moog Inc.
Adopted Future Land Use	Commercial	
Proposed Use	Religious Assembly	
GC DISTRICT STANDARDS		
Minimum Lot Size	Fifteen Thousand (15,000) Square Feet	
Minimum Lot Frontage	Thirty (30) Feet	
Minimum Setbacks	Front: 10'	
	Side: 0'	
	Rear: 0'	
Maximum Height	60', or 70' with an additional 1' setback per 1' of additional height	
Maximum Lot Coverage	85%	
Maximum FAR	None	

STRUCTURE OF REPORT AND KEY ELEMENTS

This staff report is divided into topical areas of evaluation. Many of the overarching principles in the Comprehensive Plan and various sections of the Zoning Ordinance overlap into key topical focus areas. To aid in review of the staff report each topic or focus area is covered only once. The analysis is contained in this staff report.

KEY ELEMENTS FOR DISCUSSION

- Landscape buffering along North Main Street
- Parking related to Entrance Throat Requirements

BACKGROUND, REQUEST, EXISTING CONDITIONS

Background

This is a request for an Exception (EXP) allowing parking in front of the front building line at 1284 North Main Street. The applicant is the Islamic Society of the New River Valley (ISNRV) which is an Islamic Faith non-profit 501 (c)(3) corporation.

The ISNRV has been at its current location in Blacksburg since the early 1990s. The organization provides services such as daily and Friday prayer, Islamic Sunday School, and wedding and funeral services. The ISNRV purchased an adjacent 2.260 acre parcel from the Virginia Tech Foundation for a proposed expansion that will include flexible learning spaces, spaces for university students, a gym, and multipurpose and event spaces.

Existing Site Conditions

The 0.853 acre property at 1284 north Main Street was purchased by the ISNRV in January of 1990, and the building on the property was completed two years later. In 1994, the ISNRV obtained an access easement for the northeastern adjacent property at 1280 North Main Street. This was the primary access point to the parcel until a driveway connecting to North Main Street was approved in 2015.

As seen on the aerial attachment of the staff report, the existing structure on the parcel splits two parking areas to its front and rear with a drive aisle on the left side. There are currently 12 existing spaces in the front parking area, and 22 in the rear. The newly purchased 2.260 acre adjacent parcel is vacant, with dense trees on its east and west borders. It has approximately 30 feet of elevation change from North Main Street to its southern border, where Stroubles Creek lies.

Request

Along with the building expansion, additional parking is proposed. The exception request is to the Religious Assembly Use & Design Standard §4338(b)(2) which prohibits parking in front of the front building line. Out of the 108 total parking spaces that are proposed upon completion of the future improvements, 16 spaces are requested in addition to the existing 12 spaces in the front to make a reconfigured front parking area with 28 total spaces.

EVALUATION OF APPLICATION

Section 1112 indicates that Town Council may grant special exceptions to certain Zoning Ordinance requirements as authorized by Virginia Code §15.2-2286. Exceptions should be considered by Town Council with regard to the criteria stated in this section and detailed below. The application should also be evaluated for its conformance with the Comprehensive Plan, the purposes of the zoning district, and the intent of the standard in question. Town Council may impose conditions on the exception, if approved, in order to minimize any adverse impacts anticipated. In determining to grant a special exception, the Town Council shall be guided by the following general considerations:

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

1. The unusual shape or topography of a lot or an adjoining lot;
2. The location of existing structures; and
3. Whether mature trees can be preserved through the exception.

Section 1112 of the zoning ordinance further states, “*For exceptions to requirements for parking in front of a building line, the primary considerations should be the shape or topography of a lot, the location of existing structures and preserving mature trees. However, the considerations may also include the degree of exception requested, the impact on the relationship of the building to the street, internal/external connectivity, safety concerns and consistency with existing development patterns. When an exception is granted, it should be conditioned on buffering the parking with landscaping, including natural plant materials, shrubs and trees.*”

Comprehensive Plan Map Series

In evaluating whether the proposed special exception conforms to the general guidelines and policies contained in the Comprehensive Plan, applicable sections of the Plan should be included in the review of the application. The Comprehensive Plan offers a wide range of guiding principles for the future of development with the Town. The following text identifies the designation of the property on the maps in the Future Land Use map series.

Map A: Future Land Use Designation

The future land use designation of the parcel is Commercial, which is defined as:

Small or large-scale commercial developments. Uses with higher impacts including but not limited to factors such as lighting, noise, parking, traffic and hours of operation are appropriate along arterial roadways. Examples include larger scale retail, restaurants, and offices, hotels/motels, and auto-service related uses. Uses that are smaller in scale with more limited impacts are appropriate adjacent to residential neighborhoods. Examples include smaller scale professional offices, retail establishments, and restaurants. While complementary residential uses may occur in these areas, the primary use of this designation is commercial.
Typical Implementing Zoning Districts: General Commercial (GC), Planned Commercial (PC), Office (O), Research and Development District (R&D), and Mixed Use (MXD).

The property also falls within Mixed Use Area C. Specific uses are governed by the implementing zoning districts. Religious Assembly is permitted as a by-right use in the GC General Commercial zoning district.

Map B: Urban Development

This property falls within Urban Development Area C. Urban Development Areas were designated to indicate areas where future higher density residential and non-residential uses could be accommodated. Development within UDAs should incorporate principles of Traditional, Neighborhood Design, including compact or mixed use forms, pedestrian and bicycle friendly streets, and an interconnected transportation network. The architectural design for the proposed expansion, along with the layout of the parking lot with landscaping has been included with the application.

Map C: Neighborhood, Employment, and Service Areas Map

The property is located in the Commercial and Urban / Walkable Neighborhoods Areas on the Neighborhood, Employment, and Service Areas Map. Commercial areas contain the restaurants, retail shopping, and other services for the community. Urban/walkable neighborhoods are compact residential neighborhoods located within walking distance of employment and commercial centers.

Purpose of Zoning District

There is a statement of purpose for each district in the Zoning Ordinance.

GC General Commercial District Section 3150.

“The General Commercial district is designed for a variety of commercial uses, both pedestrian and automobile oriented. The intent of the district is to provide for more intense commercial uses than the Downtown Commercial district, but in a manner which is consistent with the Town’s character. Modern “strip” commercial development is not in keeping with the small-town character of Blacksburg, and this district is intended to discourage such development. Instead, a vital and lively streetscape, created by commercial buildings with windows and entrances oriented to the street, is an important goal of this district. While residential uses are allowed in the district under some circumstances, such uses should complement the commercial uses that serve as the primary intent in this district.”

The evaluation of the special exception request should take into consideration whether the proposed modification is in keeping with the purposes of the district in which it is proposed. As part of their application, the applicant has included a description and justification for the proposed site modification.

Intent of Standard in Question

Religious Assembly Use & Design Standard §4338(b)(2) states that parking shall be located behind the front building line. This standard is intended to create a lively streetscape with buildings oriented to the street.

SPECIAL EXCEPTION CRITERIA

General Criteria

- The unusual shape or topography of a lot or an adjoining lot
The newly acquired adjoining lot has approximately 32 feet of fall from the grade at North Main Street to the existing stream at the back of the property. Due to the small portion of R-5 zoned area on this parcel, the Flood Hazard Overlay District applies to this site. While additional information will be required at the plat or site plan stage, the applicant may wish to consider how Flood Hazard Overlay may impact the proposed layout. More information on this subject is provided in the Floodplain Memo attached to the staff report.
- The location of existing structures
The existing structure is located nearly 200 feet from North Main Street, and an existing parking lot with 12 spaces sits in front of the building. The applicant has stated that the location of the building leaves 25% of the total acreage of the parcels in front of the front building line. The new expansion and connection is proposed to be adjoining with the existing structure with 28 parking spaces in front of the front building line, and 80 spaces in the rear.

- Whether mature trees can be preserved through the exception

A line of vegetation that includes medium/large trees provides a buffer between the two parcels. These trees will be removed for the proposed expansion and parking lot. However, Section 5420 of the Zoning Ordinance requires removed trees during site development be replaced up to canopy coverage for the district (10%). Additionally, development standards for parking lot landscaping require 1 tree per 10 spaces, 1 street tree per every 30 feet of public street frontage, and a perimeter planting bed of 10 feet in width containing trees and vegetative ground cover to be located between the parking lot and public right-of-way. The applicant has provided a landscaping plan showing the required number of street and parking lot trees. The applicant should clarify the percent of canopy coverage before, and after site development. The applicant has also provided a site plan layout and street elevations that do not show the required planting beds along North Main Street. The applicant will need to revise the application to meet these standards.

Considerations Specific to Parking Requests - Section 1112(d)

- The degree of exception requested

The applicant is requesting an exception for 28 spaces (26% of total) that are in front of the front building line. 12 existing parking spaces that are currently located in front of the building line will be reconfigured and added to the new parking area. The site layout included with the application shows 5 spaces (2 ADA) located directly in front of the existing building, and 9 spaces (2 ADA) directly in front of the proposed building. A roughly 4,200 square foot (SF) parking area with 12 spaces is proposed about 10 feet from the North Main Street sidewalk. The remaining 5 spaces are 40-60 feet from North Main Street. The applicant should clarify the phased timeline of construction of parking and building expansion.

- The impact on the relationship of the building to the street

The existing 4775 SF building is set back approximately 200 feet from North Main Street. The site layout shows the proposed 9450 SF expansion being parallel and adjoining with the existing building. The building elevations provided show the proposed design for the expansion, and the height is stated as less than 60 feet on the site layout. Renderings show parking will be highly visible from North Main Street. Staff recommends shrubs be planted along North Main to screen the parking lot from the right-of-way.

- Internal/External connectivity

The proposed site layout shows sidewalk that wraps around the building on three sides with a walkway to the rear entrance. Multiple marked crosswalks are shown in the rear parking lot, including those that connect sidewalk to the stairs at the very back of the parcel, going down to the creek area. A crosswalk also connects sidewalk to bike parking and the proposed lawn recreation community space at the southwest edge of the development. The applicant will need to show sidewalk that connects North Main Street to the building.

- **Safety Concerns**

There is one entrance/exit to the parcel from North Main Street with a dead end, two-way drive aisle leading to the front parking area, and a two-way drive aisle on the side of the proposed building that connects to two dead end, two-way drive aisles in the rear parking area. Staff recommends connecting the two dead end drive aisles in the rear parking area. This connection will make the flow of vehicular traffic through the parking lot safer. Further, Town Engineering staff has stated that the entrance does not meet minimum entrance throat requirements per VDOT Access Management requirements. The minimum entrance throat length is 75 feet for an entrance with 2 egress lanes, and there are two parking spaces located within the required entrance throat length. These spaces will have to be eliminated or reconfigured in order to meet the VDOT requirement.

SUMMARY

The decision to grant an exception and any conditions that may be applied is a discretionary decision. The application shall be evaluated on compatibility with the Comprehensive Plan, the purposes and requirements of the Zoning Ordinance, the intent of the standard from which the exception is requested, and the specific considerations in Section 1112(d).

STAFF RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS




1. The property shall be developed in substantial conformance with the application dated March 1, 2023.
2. A perimeter planting bed of at least 10 feet in width containing trees and vegetative ground cover shall be added between the parking lot and public right-of-way.
3. A row of evergreen shrubs, abelia or similar non-dwarf variety with a minimum height of 3 to 4 feet at time of planting shall be planted at 8' on center, between the front parking area and North Main Street right-of-way to screen the parking area from the right-of-way.
4. The number of parking spaces in front of the front building line shall be as shown on the site layout plan.

Note: Further conditions may be recommended based on any revisions to the application.

ATTACHMENTS

- Staff GIS maps
- Flood Plain Memo
- Public Correspondence

EXP23-0001
Islamic Society of
the New River Valley
1284 N. Main St.

-  Bus Stops
-  Subject Area
-  Parcels







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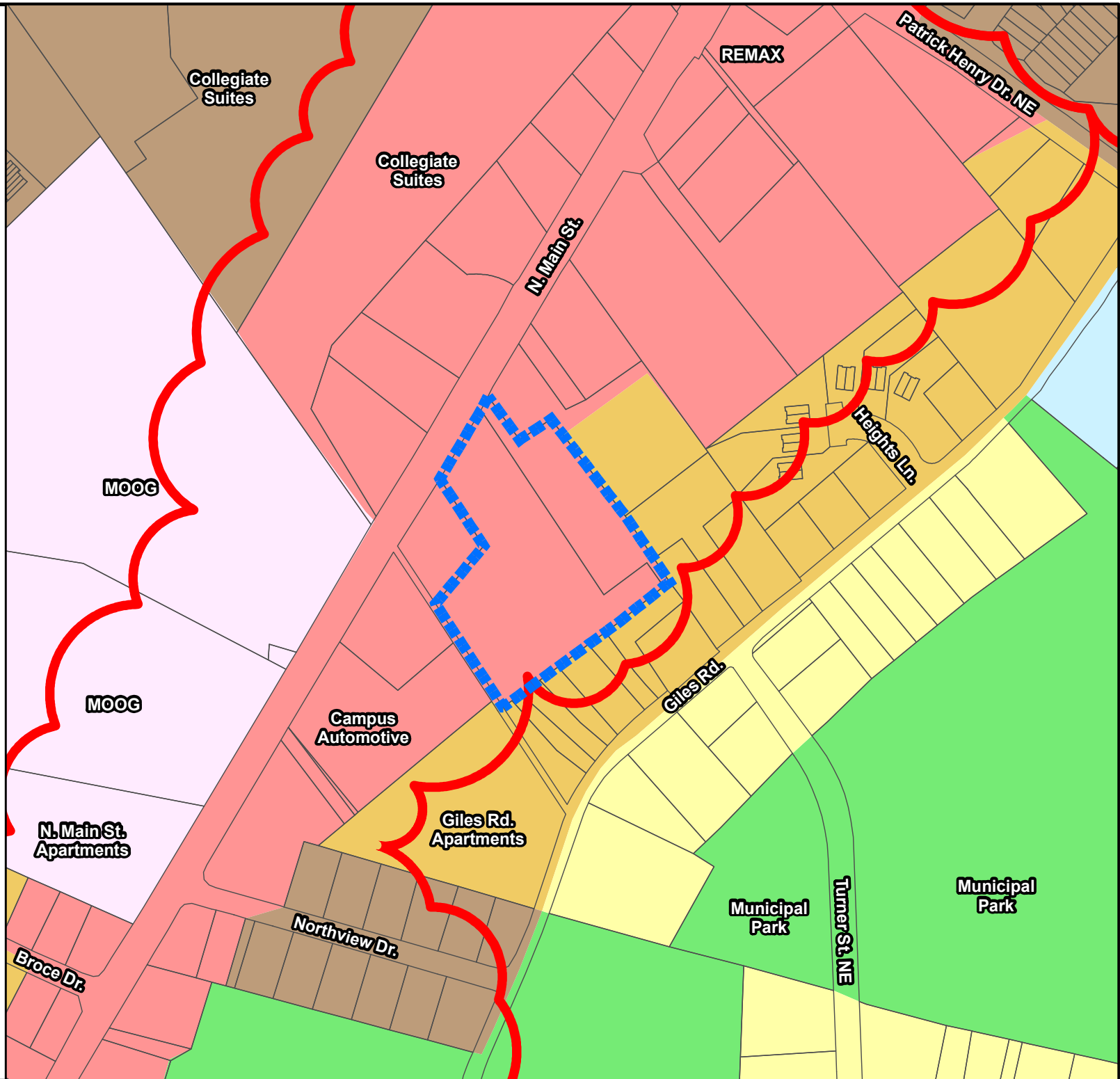
EXP23-0001
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Future Land Use

-  Subject Area
-  Mixed Use
-  Parcels
-  Low Density Residential
-  Medium Density Residential
-  High Density Residential
-  Park Land / Open Space / Resource Protection
-  Civic
-  Commercial
-  Research / Development











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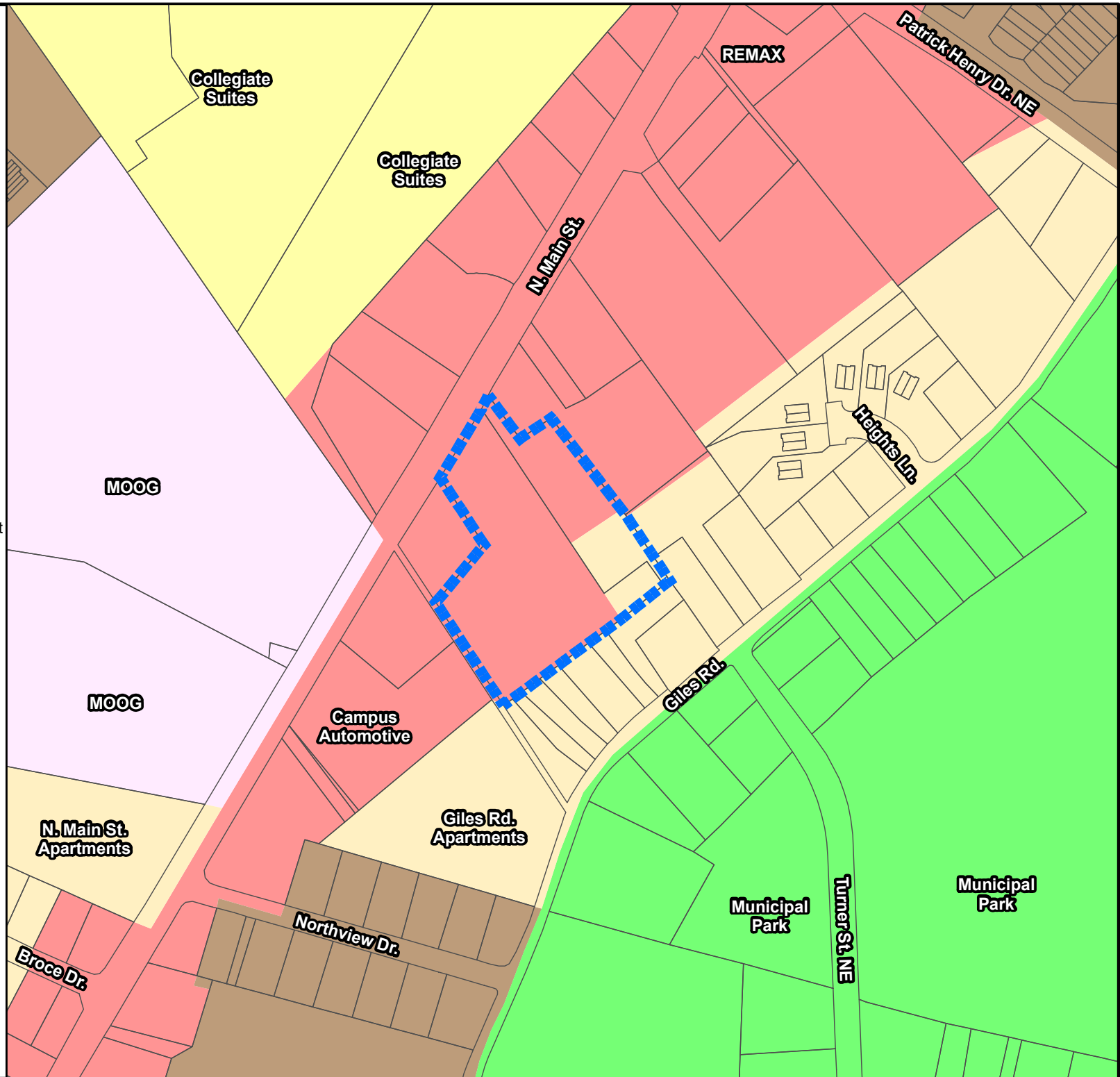
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Current Zoning

-  Subject Area
-  Parcels
-  R-4 Low Density Residential
-  R-5 Transitional Residential
-  RM-48 Medium Density Multiunit Residential
-  GC General Commercial
-  RD Research and Development
-  PR Planned Residential



Blacksburg TOWN OF
VIRGINIA



MEMORANDUM

TO: Matt Sampa
FROM: Kafi Howard, Town Engineer
DATE: April 14, 2023
SUBJECT: EXP23-0001 Islamic Society Parking Exception Request – Floodplain Memo

Floodplain Management:

Due to the small portion of R-5 zoned area on this parcel, the Flood Hazard Overlay District applies to this site. Sufficient information is not available at this time to determine adequacy of this proposed layout to comply with the Flood Hazard Overlay.

- A flood study will need to be performed by the applicant prior to Town approval of a final plat or development plan.
- Because a flood study has not yet been completed, it is not clear whether the proposed layout of the parking interacts with the 100-year floodplain of the Stroubles Creek tributary in the rear of the site.
- Section 3247 of the Flood Hazard Overlay District states: “For areas described in [sub]section 3241(a) and for floodplain areas described in [sub]section 3241(b) no encroachments, including fill, new construction, substantial improvements, or other development shall be permitted unless it has been demonstrated through hydrologic and hydraulic analyses performed in accordance with standard engineering practice that the proposed encroachment would not result in any increase in the 100-year flood elevation.”
- Any proposed plan must meet these requirements of the Flood Hazard Overlay at the time of development.

Matthew Sampa

From: Steven Brinlee <sgbrinlee@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 5, 2023 8:32 PM
To: Matthew Sampa
Subject: Proposed Islamic Society Expansion / North Main

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Just a quick note—the planned building looks really nice and would be a great addition to Blacksburg and our diverse community. Hoping this gets approved. (Would be cool if the Architects expanded the cut-out motif across the entire Main Street frontage of the building, included some down lighting that projects that beautiful pattern onto the surrounding surfaces without creating up-light light pollution.

Anyway. Just wanted to support.

Overall, I believe most pending proposals right now only better Blacksburg as we are actually maturing from just a college town to a town that's a destination.

Best,
Steven