

Proposal to Redevelop the Deteriorating Halifax Office Park

Both of us, Rory Schick and Nazir Bhagat, have been long term residents of Mason District. We own Halifax Office Park, and are now proposing to redevelop its increasingly obsolete and vacant twin buildings on Cherokee Avenue, into high-end residences with on-site amenities, targeted to professionals working from home (who need the easy access to the Beltway to visit their client sites). To be economically feasible, the proposal calls for adding 3 stories to both the 4 story buildings and creating a total of up to 130 luxury units with modern home offices.

Because both the aging buildings are obsolete and deteriorating, they have high, and increasing, vacancy rates. The buildings cannot compete with modern offices at Metro stations or in walkable neighborhoods. Tenants, they seem to attract recently, are high occupancy, high traffic uses, such as a moving company with trucks, a limousine company, 2020 Census station for conducting door to door surveys, an Islamic school, delivery and car rental companies, etc. Such uses generate more noise, traffic, and parking needs, than our proposed redevelopment.

Declining rents have made building systems upgrades unaffordable, and the deterioration has led to a rapid decline in market and Tax Assessed Value of the Office Park, thereby, lowering the County's tax base and local school funding. If redevelopment is blocked, the buildings could end up being completely vacant, and boarded up eyesores that attract crime. It is for this reason that Fairfax and other jurisdictions have passed initiatives that encourage, and some cases even incentivize, the redevelopment of obsolete office buildings to other uses.

Our proposal calls for both buildings to be entirely gutted and modernized. The new facades will have more glass and balconies. The footprint would not be expanded, thereby preserving current parking spaces. Only the height will be increased, which won't have much of an impact because the buildings are surrounded by parkland and trees, have large setbacks, and are at a significantly lower elevation than Windy Hill and the adjacent townhouse community. Whether the units are apartments or condos would depend on what makes the most economic sense, when the project is further along. A modern conference hall and media room, a business center and similar amenities will help attract professionals who desire working from home and need to travel to their client sites throughout the Metro area.

Our plans include upgrading the Indian Run resource protection area, a green roof, and a Leeds Certification. Amenities such as car sharing, a van to the Metro, a walking trail, a tot lot, a dog park, and exercise stations, can be made available to the neighbors, as well. There is no access to Indian Run Park, except through the Halifax Property, and this could also be provided as an easement to the neighborhood.

In response to comments from LPCA members at two meetings we had with them, and in response to an article in the LPCA newsletter about our proposal, we also pledge that, if LPCA wishes, we will subsidize Halifax's new residents to join LPCA and increase its membership.

Halifax residents will also join in neighborhood activities such as crime watches, recreational activities, petitions for bus routes, traffic calming measures, and garage sales.

The proposed redevelopment will have more parking than needed, and some of the excess, as requested by some LPCA members, could be made available for Zip cars, or overflow parking needed by neighbors. The proposed redevelopment will also generate less rush hour traffic, and more of it will be in the same direction, rather than opposing directions, over the Indian Run bridge. Fairfax County analyses come to a similar conclusion. Nevertheless, we remain committed to a thorough analyses of the impact on transportation and parking at the time of the rezoning, intended some years from now. We will also address any environment, public facilities, and fire safety concerns that may arise. Thus:

One choice before the Task Force is to reject redevelopment and continue to let the Buildings deteriorate physically and economically towards being boarded up, even as it struggles with low rent uses with extended, and even 24/7, hours that generate increasing traffic, noise and parking needs from current levels.

OR

The other choice is to permit a creative and thoughtful redevelopment, that becomes economically feasible at a minimum of about 120 to 130 luxury residential units. Such a choice will invest \$20 million or so in the redevelopment of the Office Park and attract affluent professional residents, who will strengthen LPCA and the neighborhood. At the same time, the residences will generate less traffic, improve transportation choices, provide lots of amenities, including those for its neighbors, and lead to rising property values throughout Lincolnia.

We need to act now, rather than later. A couple of office buildings, up the hill on Cherokee, already filed for bankruptcy last year. Moreover, as surrounding areas approve redevelopment in their neighborhoods, and more residences are built, Halifax redevelopment may face an oversupply of housing, and our project may become less viable, and harder to finance.

We welcome your questions, comments, and suggestions, and encourage you to contact Nazir at Bhagat.info@gmail.com or at 703-850-8802 cell.

With kind regards,

Nazir Bhagat and Rory Schick

To see a residential project developed by Mr. Bhagat, and currently under construction by Miller & Smith, visit www.WalhavenKingstowne.com