MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Commission
From: Kinsey O’Shea, AICP; Town Planner for Current Development
Date: September 13, 2019
Subject: RZN19-0007 Gilbert Street Mixed Use Building Amendment to DC with Conditions
CUP19-0006 CUP for Additional Building Height in the DC Zoning District

**SUMMARY OF REQUEST**

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tax Parcel Numbers</td>
<td>226-A-97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parcel(s) Size</td>
<td>3.65 acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Zoning District</td>
<td>DC Downtown Commercial with Conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Use</td>
<td>Commercial; University space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjacent Zoning Districts</td>
<td>North: DC Downtown Commercial; GC General Commercial across Prices Fork Road</td>
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<td></td>
<td>East: DC Downtown Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South: RM-48 Medium Density Multiunit Residential across Turner St.</td>
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<td>West: DC Downtown Commercial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjacent Uses</td>
<td>North: Commercial across Prices Fork Road; St. Luke &amp; Odd Fellows Hall</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East: Commercial; Office; Parking Garage</td>
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<td></td>
<td>South: Tech Electric Power Plant across Turner Street</td>
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<td></td>
<td>West: Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopted Future Land Use</td>
<td>High Impact Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed Uses</td>
<td>Commercial; University Offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed District Standards</td>
<td>100’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Height</td>
<td>100’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Setbacks</td>
<td>Front: 0’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Side: 0’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rear: 0’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximum lot coverage</td>
<td>Not defined; DC allows 100% lot coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed Minimum Parking</td>
<td>238 spaces; 0.82 spaces per 1,000 square feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed Bike Parking</td>
<td>None specified (see minimums in staff report)</td>
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This staff report covers two requests: RZN19-0007 and CUP19-0006. The rezoning request is a request to amend the existing Downtown Commercial with Conditions zoning on parcels located at 400 Turner Street; 220 Gilbert Street; and 211 Prices Fork Road, which are all a part of the North End Center (formerly known as Collegiate Square Shopping Center). The CUP request is a request for additional building height up to 100’ in the DC zoning district for a new building in the former Collegiate Square.

EVALUATION OF APPLICATION
This staff report is divided into topical areas of evaluation. Many of the overarching principles in the Comprehensive Plan, and 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 the staff report. The pertinent text sections from the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance have been included as an appendix to this report.

The staff report also includes a summary of key elements to provide guidance to Planning Commission for discussion at the work session.

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING CONDITIONS
The North End Center in its entirety encompasses a number of different properties owned by the Virginia Tech Foundation. There is one parcel that is not owned by the Foundation but subject to a 99-year lease with the Foundation. The current rezoning request covers the commercial center formerly known as Collegiate Square, which is part of the larger North End Center. For a geography of the entire North End Center, please see RZN19-0008. The commercial center consists of three existing buildings. Building #211 that formerly housed Buffalo Wild Wings, Building #400, which houses the Five Guys restaurant, Blacksburg Wine Lab, as well as the Virginia Tech Landscape Architecture studios. Both of these buildings are proposed for demolition to allow construction of one new building, which will be Building #220. The third building, Building #460, in the commercial center will remain. Building #460 contains tenants such as Next Door Bake Shop, New Image Barbers and J-Petal restaurant.

The commercial center is zoned Downtown Commercial with conditions. This is unusual in that most properties zoned DC have not been subject to a rezoning and do not have parcel specific conditions that apply. The property was originally rezoned in 1994. The rezoning was amended in 2013 when the Foundation purchased the property. The amendment included changes to close the vehicular entrance onto Turner Street, modify the Prices Fork Road entrance, add internal sidewalks, improve internal staircases to Gilbert St., and add the pedestrian terrace along Gilbert Street. These improvements were shown as Phase 1 of the project. The amendment also allowed for a Phase 2, which included construction of a new building between Building #211 and Building #400. This is similar in concept to the current proposal in terms of adding a new building that would front on Gilbert Street but the current proposal is very different in size and scale.

An amendment to the rezoning is needed to reflect the proposed plan to demolish two existing structures, construct Building #220, modify the access and circulation, and to address the impacts of intensification of use on the parcel, and the impacts of the proposed development on supporting infrastructure.

The northern portion of this site is immediately adjacent to the historic St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall, which is owned and operated by the Blacksburg Museum and Cultural Foundation. The proximity of the proposed structure and its impacts to the historic St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall is an important consideration in the evaluation of this request.
DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL
The development proposal entails the demolition of the building at 400 Turner Street, and the building at 211 Gilbert Street. A single building is proposed to be constructed. The building is proposed to have structured parking on the Turner Street and Prices Fork Road ground level (the same level as the current surface parking). Above the parking on the Gilbert Street level, mixed retail and restaurant uses are proposed, and include a plaza at the corner of Gilbert Street and Turner Street. Also on this level will be upper level parking open to the sky above the existing surface lot in front of the 460 Turner Street building. Above this level will be 4 floors of University office space. The top floor is proposed to house a restaurant and event space. In total, the proposed 6-story building will be approximately 95’ tall. A CUP is required to allow the additional height in the DC district. Please see the CUP evaluation section of this staff report.

The gross floor area of the proposed building is approximately 250,000 square feet. A total of approximately 45,500 square feet of retail/restaurant is proposed in the new building, which is an increase of approximately 30,000 square feet over the existing uses in Building #400 and Building #211. The remaining 204,500 square feet will be devoted to University office uses. The proposed commercial uses represent approximately 18% of the gross floor area. The application includes a discussion of the anticipated University tenants and the need for the new building.

The application proposes a landscaped terrace along Prices Fork Road to shield the parking from view of the street, which is best illustrated in the application. New 8’ sidewalks along Gilbert Street are proposed along the front of the building. Sidewalks along Turner Street and Prices Fork Road are not proposed to be changed.

The proposed shared parking for the site will increase from 165 existing spaces to 238 total spaces. Combining the building square footages of the center, a total of approximately 290,200 square feet will exist in the new building and the existing 460 Turner Street building combined. This equates to approximately 0.82 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross floor area. The supplemental application information provided on September 11, 2019 states that 1.22 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet is provided. The staff will work with the applicant to clarify the parking ratio.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION FOR REZONING
There are a number of analysis points for evaluation of a request to rezone a property within Town. The policies and maps in the Comprehensive Plan lend guidance to the Town’s vision of growth in the future, while specific codes and requirements in the Zoning Ordinance, Subdivision Ordinance, and the Town Code ensure that the development meets all applicable regulations. Specifically, the Zoning Ordinance calls out the criteria for evaluation of a rezoning request, as found below:

Section 1151 of the Zoning Ordinance requires the Commission to study all rezoning requests to determine:
1) Whether the proposed amendment conforms to the general guidelines and policies contained in the Comprehensive Plan.
2) The relationship of the proposed amendment to the purposes of the general planning program of the Town, with appropriate consideration as to whether the change will further the purposes of [the Zoning Ordinance] and the general welfare of the entire community.
3) The need and justification for the change.
4) When pertaining to a change in the district classification of the property, the effect of the change, if any, on the property, surrounding property, and on public services and facilities. In addition, the Commission shall consider the appropriateness of the property for the proposed change as related to the purposes set forth at the beginning of each district classification.
Section 1160 of the Zoning Ordinance gives guidance to the evaluation of proffers that may be proffered by the applicant.

**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**Comprehensive Plan Map Series Evaluation of Application**

In evaluating whether the proposed use conforms to the general guidelines and policies contained in the Comprehensive Plan, all 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 Town. The following text identifies the designation of the proposed rezoning property on the maps in the Future Land Use map series. *Other relevant Comprehensive Plan text sections applicable to this request are included in the Staff Appendix.*

**Map A: Future Land Use Designation**

In evaluating whether the proposed planned residential development conforms to the general guidelines and policies contained in the Comprehensive Plan, the Future Land Use designation of the subject property shall be considered. The Future Land Use designation of this area is High Impact Commercial. High Impact Commercial is defined as:

*Small or large commercial developments with a need for high visibility and have a high impact on the surrounding environment, including but not limited to factors such as lighting, noise, parking, traffic, and hours of operation. Examples include large retail establishments, restaurants, hotels/motels, and auto-related uses. Typical implementing zoning districts: Downtown Commercial (DC), General Commercial (GC), Planned Commercial (PC), and Mixed Use (MXD).*

The proposed uses are in keeping with the Future Land Use Designation.

**Map B: Urban Development Areas**

The proposed development does not lie within any Urban Development Area or Mixed Use Area. These designations do not prohibit mixed-use developments outside these areas, nor do they require mixed use developments within the designated areas. There is an Urban Development Area/Mixed Use Area across Prices Fork Road from the development comprising much of the commercial and residential areas near the roundabout from Prices Fork Road to Toms Creek Road, the Kabrich Street/Winston Avenue area, and along North Main Street to Moog.

**Map C: Neighborhood, Employment, and Service Areas Map**

The area is designated as a Commercial Area on Map C. Information regarding this designation and its characteristics are found in the Staff Appendix.

**ZONING ORDINANCE EVALUATION OF APPLICATION**

**Intent of Districts**

There is a statement of purpose for each district in the Zoning Ordinance. *Downtown Commercial §3140*

*The Downtown Commercial district is the heart of Town culturally, geographically, and historically. It lends the Town its small-town architecture, scale, and feel. It is intended to be a predominantly pedestrian area, catering to bicycle and pedestrian traffic with shops and storefronts close to the road, pedestrian scale, wide walkways, street trees, and limited off-street well screened parking. The history of the area is retained with preservation of historic structures and replication of style in additions and expansions. The core of the Downtown exudes the vitality of the interaction of people and activities. Commercial opportunities include a diversity of specialty, retail services, cultural, recreation,*
entertainment activities, and public functions. The district may also contain residential uses suited to a downtown urban environment. Residential uses are limited to locations in the basement of structures or on upper stories above active street level commercial uses. There may be some circumstances and locations within the district where other urban residential use types that promote year round occupancy and contribute to the fabric of the Blacksburg Historic Overlay District within Downtown may be appropriate.

It is the burden of the applicant to prove that the design submitted meets the intent of the requested zoning district. In this instance, the request is not for a change in zoning district, but an amendment to the existing conditional zoning. The rezoning seeks to amend the proffered conditions and master plan of the previous development request. As this is a request for conditional zoning, the proffers, plan, and application are binding. Any substantive changes to the development, if approved, would be required to be reviewed under the public hearing process to further amend the district.

Development Standards
The characteristics of physical site development are regulated by the Zoning District standards. The Downtown Commercial Zoning District has the following district standards:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOWNTOWN COMMERCIAL DISTRICT STANDARDS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MAXIMUM HEIGHT</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>60'; up to 100' with Conditional Use Permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MINIMUM SETBACKS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front: 0'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side: 0'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rear: 0'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MAXIMUM LOT COVERAGE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% impervious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROPOSED PARKING</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>238 spaces; 0.82 spaces per 1,000 square feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MINIMUM PARKING REQUIRED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No parking requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MINIMUM BIKE PARKING REQUIRED</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 spaces; or 1/1,000 sf retail floor space up to 15,000 sf; then 1 per additional 5,000 sf, whichever is greater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROPOSED BIKE PARKING</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None specified</td>
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SITE AND BUILDING DESIGN
Building and site design and layout play an important role in the evaluation of a proposed development. Site design and layout can affect the impact of the proposed development on the surrounding area, as well as affect the experience for all users. Elements such as streetscape and sidewalks, landscaping, and circulation can affect the proposed development’s impacts and compatibility with the surrounding area. Furthermore, the overall design of the building, including its orientation, style, materials, scale, massing, and height affects how a proposed development fits into the surrounding area.

Pedestrian Experience & Sidewalks
Many individual policies and regulations address streetscape, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements as being a high priority to encouraging walkability and contributing to a high quality of life in Town. Providing enhanced pedestrian and bicycle facilities will encourage alternate-transportation behavior and lead to less dependency on personal vehicle trips. These facilities may include wider sidewalks, separation between the street and the sidewalk with a vegetated buffer strip, on or off-street bicycle facilities, covered bicycle parking, and other elements to provide a pleasant and safe streetscape experience. Often, private development serves an important role in providing missing links in the sidewalk and trail network throughout Town, as there is not
enough funding within the Town’s budget to complete all the bicycle and pedestrian projects as the Town grows.

The applicant is proposing 8’ sidewalk along Gilbert Street measured from the back of the curb to the face of the building. There is existing 5’ sidewalk along both Prices Fork Road and Turner Street that are not proposed to change. The applicant is proposing a larger ramp feature from the corner of Turner Street and Gilbert Street as an accessible pedestrian way to the proposed plaza at the Gilbert Street level. The application also shows internal connectivity and pedestrian walks and routes from the other public sidewalks into the development. This map is included in the supplemental information received September 11, 2019.

**Bicycle Facilities & Bicycle Parking**

There are no immediately adjacent on-street or off-street bicycle facilities such as trails, sharrows, or bike lanes on Gilbert Street. Prices Fork Road does have bike lanes in both directions and Turner Street has “Share the Road” signage. Given that this area is highly traveled by both pedestrians and bicyclists, opportunities to improve these facilities should be taken whenever possible. The applicant is not proposing to provide any off-street bicycle facilities such as a trail or sidewalk wide enough to accommodate bicycle traffic along any of the frontages of the development.

Adequate bicycle facilities also include improvements such as adequate bike storage and racks for both patrons and employees in a commercial area. The applicant is working on providing information regarding bicycle parking, either in the form of open air or covered bike racks, or lockable storage in response to the comments from the Corridor Committee. At a minimum, the applicant must meet the requirement in the ordinance which is:

> At least 5 spaces for office uses, and at least 5 spaces or 1 space per 1,000 square feet of floor space devoted to commercial retail up to the first 15,000 square feet, and 1 space per every additional 5,000 square feet, whichever is greater.

This would equate to an estimated minimum of 25 bicycle parking spaces for all uses combined. As bicycle parking areas are frequently full in downtown, particularly adjacent to campus, the Town is working on several projects to increase bicycle parking in the downtown. The applicant should consider providing bicycle parking at ratio significantly above the minimum standard to reflect the higher bicycle traffic volumes found in the downtown area. As a consideration, the applicant should differentiate between parking for patrons and parking for commuters, and ensure that there is adequate parking for both user groups.

**Corridor Committee**

The Corridor Committee reviewed the North End/Gilbert Street redevelopment project and the primary issues discussed were pedestrian circulation to and through the development and bicycle parking. The Committee stressed the need for a rich grid of connectivity on the site to facilitate convenient and safe pedestrian routes to the site as a destination but also through the site to get to campus or Downtown. The applicant has provided a pedestrian connectivity map to illustrate the various pedestrian routes and highlight the ADA accessible routes. The Corridor Committee identified the need to improve pedestrian connectivity from the newly re-opened entrance on Turner Street to the existing businesses in Building #460 which the applicant has now addressed.

The Committee noted the importance of bike parking and storage that is meaningful to employees and visitors in both location and type of storage. Visitors need convenient bike rack locations. Bike racks were suggested at the ends of the building on Gilbert Street. Commuters working in the building would need locked bicycle
storage. A locked bike room/cage in the parking garage was suggested. A ROAM bike share station was also suggested.

Other topics discussed included lowering the speed on Turner Street to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and a general concern about the difficulties for pedestrians to safely and conveniently cross Prices Fork Road. The Committee acknowledges this is an existing condition but it is pertinent to discussion of the project. The Town has engaged Whitman Requardt and Associates to look at pedestrian and bicycle crossing options on Prices Fork Road from the Main St. roundabout to Toms Creek Road and provide strategies for improvements both short term and long term.

**Vehicle Parking**

There is no parking requirement for commercial or office uses in the Downtown Commercial zoning district. Developers may wish to incorporate parking into their projects, but there is no minimum requirement. When parking is proposed, it must meet all applicable standards in the zoning ordinance. The application shows a net gain of 72 parking spaces above the current existing surface parking lot for a total of 238 parking spaces. Using the information provided in the supplemental materials received September 11, 2019, this equates to approximately 0.8 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross floor area. The supplemental materials show this ratio as 1.22 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet. The staff will work with the applicant to clarify the parking ratio.

There is also commercial parking available in the North End garage across Gilbert Street from the development that can be used by patrons of the proposed development. It is anticipated that the number of employees/office users combined with the existing and proposed retail and restaurant tenants may have a significant parking need. However, due to proximity to both the University, downtown, and transit, many users may choose alternate transportation to come to the development.

**Buffering/Landscaping**

The Downtown Commercial zoning district does not have a specific tree canopy coverage requirement like other zoning districts do. Street trees must be provided at a rate of 1 tree per every 30 feet of public road frontage. The applicant has shown street trees appropriately along the street frontages.

Additionally, where parking is provided (no parking is required), developments must provide parking lot landscaping meeting the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance §5427 which requires 1 tree per every 10 parking spaces, and a total canopy coverage of 5% of the entire parking lot. The current surface parking lot appears to have adequate parking lot landscaping that satisfies these requirements, however, more information is needed to determine whether the remainder of the surface parking lot will be adequately landscaped. Furthermore, no plantings have been proposed on the upper level of the parking area, though landscape terraces have been included to shield the parking from view of Prices Fork Road. There will be a significant surface area of parking that is not improved with landscaping. It is not clear if the applicant is proposing the terraces as screening in lieu of interior landscape islands.

The application and plans also show that additional landscaping will be utilized in planters throughout the open terraces and plazas, and that a green roof planted with ground cover will be installed. The plan shows additional plantings around the St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall building. Evergreen trees have been shown to screen the corner of the building nearest to St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall.
Impacts on St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall

The state website (www.virginia.org) listing the St. Luke and Odd Fellow Hall as a museum resource states that “The St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall was built in 1907 in the center of New Town, an African American Community in Blacksburg that emerged after the Civil War. New Town consisted of only a couple of streets and several houses that no longer exist. It was considered an African American neighborhood in Blacksburg, Virginia from the late 19th century until the mid-1960's and consisted of Gilbert Street and a small lane that was home to about 20 families. The only remaining structure today is the St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall. For over 60 years, from 1907 until segregation ended, the hall hosted social events and gatherings for music and enjoyment...”

The property was deeded to the Town in 2005 with the conditions that the St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall (the Hall) be restored and dedicated as a part of the Town's museum. A principal point in the donation offer by the trustees was that the property be dedicated to collecting, preserving, and presenting the contributions of Blacksburg’s African American citizens to the larger Blacksburg community. In 2009-2010 the Town of Blacksburg restored the St. Luke & Odd Fellows Hall as a museum and activity center to preserve the memories and contributions of the many families who lived in New Town. In 2012, the building became part of the Blacksburg Museum and Cultural Foundation. The historic St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall remains an integral piece in the history of the Town of Blacksburg and is host to many cultural and civic events.

Given the importance of this historical landmark, the proposed rezoning was reviewed by both the Historic and Design Review Board (HDRB) and the Blacksburg Museum and Cultural Foundation (BMCF). The HDRB also reviews any new construction over 400 square feet proposed in the Downtown Commercial zoning district.

The HDRB discussed the proposal at its August 26, 2109 meeting with five of the nine members present. Most of the comments related to the impacts of the height and mass of the building given the small size of the adjacent historic structure. The building at ground level is 90’ away from the Hall. The building extension would be closer than 90’. The current interface of the Hall with the commercial center is a paved access driveway and several dumpsters. Both the driveway connection and the dumpsters would be removed and replaced with a grassed area. The applicant indicated that the building height next to The St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall is 68 feet as a building step back was specifically incorporated in the design to try to reduce impacts adjacent to the Hall. More interior portions of the building are taller and closer to the maximum height requested in the CUP. The interface proposed with the redevelopment is a significant improvement over existing conditions. However, it was noted that the new building would still dominate and overshadow the Hall. The BMCF has inquired about impacts of the building on sunlight to the Hall.

There were discussions at the HDRB, the BMCF, and Neighborhood meetings of how to incorporate the history of New Town into the project. The applicant may want to consider working with the BMCF to formalize a commitment to provide educational information on New Town as part of the development. Comments from the BMCF are attached to this staff report.

There were questions about how parking in the development might help to serve the needs of the St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall. The current parking in the commercial center often serves as close and safe parking for meetings or events at the Hall. The applicant is pursuing this with the BMCF. Also requested was the designation of more ADA accessible parking as part of the Town’s on-street parking on Gilbert Street.

There were comments at the HDRB meeting that the elevations shown in the original application did not show street trees or street furniture along Gilbert Street and represented a very stark and uninviting pedestrian way. The applicant has provided a revised graphic to show the required streetscaping. The HDRB members also expressed concerns about changes to the Downtown viewsheds with the building height and mass proposed. It
was noted that service areas on Gilbert Street do not add the pedestrian experience. Also expressed were general concerns about lighting and impacts on adjacent neighborhoods.

**Building Scale, Massing, Materials, Architectural Features**

The proposed building will be larger in scale and massing than any other building in downtown. The façade along Gilbert Street will be approximately 380’ long. The bulk of the building will have a footprint of approximately 330’ x 130’. Floors 3 and 4 will be approximately 420’ long. For comparison, the parking garage on Gilbert Street is 300’ x 120’. The façade of Squires Student Center along College Avenue is approximately 440’ long. Combined with the height of the building, the overall size of the building plays an important role in the character and nature of the area, as well as the experience at the street level.

The building is very modern in appearance, with significant portions of the façade of all the floors covered in windows. There are a number of repeating vertical elements and horizontal elements to add visual interest. The repetition of these features does not adequately break up the bulk of the façade. The longest extension of continuous horizontal design occurs on the Gilbert Street frontage, and perhaps the addition of a vertical element could be added near the center of the building to add additional visual interest. The building features cantilevered overhangs above the plaza on Turner Street at Gilbert Street. The building also features several upper story balconies and plazas. Portions of the roof will be green roof structures. Additionally, the top story will be comprised of a rooftop restaurant and event space featuring both indoor and outdoor space.

The building has been thoughtfully designed with four facades with windows and entrances along multiple facades. The central lobby on the Gilbert Street level has been designed as a pass-through from the upper level of the parking area to Gilbert Street.

More information has been requested of the applicant regarding the interface of the elevated parking area with the existing 460 Building. A portion of the elevated parking will meet the southeast corner of the 460 building. Staff has requested additional information and graphics to show the impacts, and the applicant has been working to provide this information.

The renderings and application text describe a mix of materials including brick, metal panels, and curtain wall, with “limited amounts of Hokie Stone” accents, as well as wood accents at the entrances. The construction of a significant building such as this should provide a developer an opportunity to showcase unique architecture, but it must still be compatible with the existing fabric of the surrounding area. While located across from the University, and housing a significant portion of University tenant space, this building is in the Blacksburg downtown and should thus reflect the Town’s architectural values and styles. The applicant has chosen brick similar to the neighboring North End Center buildings to comprise the majority of the pedestrian level façade on Gilbert Street, and has incorporated brick facades in other parts of the building as well. The limited use of Hokie Stone reflects the adjacency of the building to the Campus and the University tenants. However, as the building is not located on campus, quarried limestone (true Hokie Stone) would not be used for this application, and rather cast or synthetic stone resembling Hokie Stone would be utilized instead. Staff understands the desire to incorporate the Hokie Stone look given the tenants, but the Town prefers that the building and site elements reflect its location in Downtown Blacksburg as much as possible, as opposed to being visually part of the University campus.

**Building Height and Conditional Use Permit Request**

Building height combined with building length and width dictate the building’s mass and scale and can significantly impact the user experience from the street level. The building is proposed to be 94’-6” as measured
from the grade at Gilbert Street. This is a corner lot, and height is measured as an average measurement from the grade to the top along street frontages.

On September 10, 2019 Town Council adopted Ordinance #1900 which approved a Zoning Ordinance Amendment to allow applicants to request additional building height by Conditional Use Permit in the DC district. The by-right building height limitation in the DC district is 60’. The CUP allows an applicant to ask for up to 100’ in height. The Virginia Tech Foundation redevelopment project was the impetus for consideration of the amendment. The amendment created the opportunity for consideration of this or other requests for greater building height but did not presume any outcome of the CUP requested. Each CUP request will be looked at on a case-by-case basis.

Additional height up to a maximum of one hundred (100) feet may be requested through the Conditional Use permit process. Evaluation of all Conditional Use Permit requests includes the following:

1. Conformance to the Comprehensive Plan, or to specific elements of the Plan, and to official Town policies adopted in relation thereto, including the purposes of the Zoning Ordinance.
2. Adherence to minimum adverse impact on the surrounding neighborhood or community. The proposal as submitted shall not cause adverse impacts as defined by Section 1181 (b) of the Zoning Ordinance. Adverse impacts considered may include, but not be limited to, traffic congestion, noise, lights, dust, drainage, water quality, air quality, odor, fumes and vibrations, Due regard is given to the timing of the operation, site design, access, screening, or other matters which might be regulated to mitigate adverse impact.

Specific criteria for consideration of each CUP request for additional building height were included in the amendment. The applicant has provided justification responding to these criteria in the supplemental information received on September 11, 2019. Below is the staff analysis of the application against the evaluation criteria.

Evaluation criteria to determine the appropriateness of the height increase requested include the following:

1. Whether the parcel has frontage on a Major Arterial roadway;

   The parcel fronts on the arterial roadway Prices Fork Road.

2. The parcel is not located within two hundred fifty (250) feet of any parcel zoned R-4, R-5 or OTR;

   The area also falls within the limitation that it must be 250’ from any parcel zoned R-4, R-5, or OTR. A map showing the eligible areas is included in the staff report and the North End area is included.

3. The proposed building has a direct relationship to the street; with pedestrian-level entrances, storefront windows, and plaza areas. Some of these areas are covered by building overhangs, and others are open to the sky.

4. Building mass, scale, architectural features, which should include expression lines or other horizontal building articulation, and step backs for stories above 60’ in height;

   The building mass, scale, and architectural features were discussed in the sections above. The building proposed is more massive than any other in the Blacksburg downtown area. Along Turner Street, only a portion of the plaza and sidewalk are open to the sky. There are building overhangs at the 2nd floor (20’ above the plaza grade), and the 3rd floor (approximately 30’ above the plaza grade) which provide cover for the plaza. There are several expression lines along the Gilbert Street façade enclosing the second
floor. The second floor is somewhat recessed above the first floor, and underneath the third floor and does provide a distinct horizontal band at that level. The façade along Gilbert Street does not feature any significant step-backs in the building, and will thus be 94’-6” from the grade at the sidewalk to the top of the building straight up. The building architecture as proposed could be improved to provide more of a step-back to adequately address the criteria for providing step-backs for stories above 60’ in height.

(5) Building setbacks;
The building is proposed to be constructed along the Gilbert Street property line with 0’ setback. There are a number of building articulations along Gilbert Street that provide some recesses that are not immediately adjacent to the property line. Based on the plans provided, the ground floor façade of the building will be approximately 50’ from the property line along Turner Street where the plaza is proposed, though the overhang on the third floor will be approximately 15’ from the property line. The façade of the building at the ground level will be approximately 90’ from the corner of St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall, while the building overhang will be approximately 80’ from the historic building. The applicant is proposing to provide additional lawn space in the rear of the St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall building that is currently the location of a drive aisle, parking, and dumpsters. While this additional space may be well-used, and provide a more pleasant experience for the citizens enjoying the historic structure, the height of the building may still feel looming over such a small structure. The existing parking garage, located approximately 75’ away from the St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall building, casts shadows on the historic structure during certain parts of the day. More information should be provided regarding the impact of the proposed building on the solar access of the historic structure and surrounding grounds.

(6) Width of sidewalk;
The proposed sidewalk along Gilbert Street is 8’ wide, and is the minimum width required in the Downtown Commercial zoning district standards for all streets other than Main Street. When buildings are constructed at significant height with or without step-backs, a wider sidewalk can help to provide more space so that the sidewalk does not feel cramped. Citizens have expressed that the existing 10’ sidewalk along the Main Street façade of the Brownstone building does not feel 10’ wide, but rather that it feels narrower based on the full 60’ building height at the property line. New construction or redevelopment by private developers is often a mechanism by which the Town receives additional or enhanced pedestrian facilities such as wider sidewalks, or completion of missing links in the sidewalk network. Consideration should be given to further enhance the sidewalk and pedestrian experience beyond the minimum required when developing or redeveloping a site if there are options for doing so. As proposed, the applicant is providing the minimum requirement. The applicant is not proposing any changes to the existing 5’ sidewalk along Turner Street or Prices Fork Road. These sidewalks do not meet current standards for new sidewalk construction, and were designed to fit within the Town right-of-way.

(7) Impact on pedestrian environment;
The existing sidewalk along Gilbert Street is approximately 8’ wide, and also contains wider pull-off areas with benches and tables. There is also a significant area at the back of the sidewalk that is landscaped. The proposed development eliminates the pull-off areas and landscaping and brings the building to the back of the 8’ sidewalk. The proposed sidewalk is 8’ wide, and will also include the Town’s standard downtown street furnishings to help define the streetscape as a part of the Town’s downtown area. Combined with the overall tall feeling of the proposed building, the 8’ sidewalk may not be adequate to provide a comfortable pedestrian experience. This is especially true when
considering the sidewalk space that is taken up by required street trees, and the inclusion of streetscape amenities such as benches, trash cans, bike racks, and pedestrian-scale lighting. As proposed, the impacts of the building on the Gilbert Street sidewalk may create a canyon effect between two large buildings. Furthermore, the application shows that the existing pedestrian plaza on Turner Street between the 460 building and the 400 building will be removed and will be developed as one of two vehicular entrances to the parking for the site. This further affects the pedestrian experience, especially along Turner Street, which is heavily used by pedestrians and cyclists. There will be a vehicular entrance into the site in close proximity to the Gilbert Street intersection and will increase the likelihood of vehicle-pedestrian conflicts. The applicant is proposing a new crosswalk across Gilbert Street on Turner Street to connect the two North End buildings’ plazas.

(8) Impact on adjacent land uses.
As mentioned above, the proposed building will have impacts on the neighboring St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall building. Additionally, while the tenants of the 300 Turner Street building enjoy an exposed northwestern façade, the proposed building will effectively cut off any direct sunlight that the existing building may receive. Gilbert Street will be bounded on both sides of the street by tall buildings, and may feel very enclosed. The North/South orientation of the street will mean that the sidewalks on both sides of the street will receive very little direct sunlight during any part of the year.

Signage
An amendment to the existing Special Signage District has been proposed as a companion to this request. Please see RZN19-0008.

EVALUATION OF IMPACTS
In evaluating the potential effect on public services and facilities that this rezoning would have, the Town Engineering department has reviewed the Master Plan and application and the following comments are provided.

Trash, Recycling, and Loading/Service Areas
The proposed development has limited visible service areas, contributing to a positive experience at the street level. The existing dumpsters for the 460 building will be shielded with a brick enclosure, and the service bay area for the ground floor tenant on Gilbert Street will be located on the north end of the building, across from the service entrance to the 300 Turner Building and parking garage. Additional loading may occur during off hours utilizing the upper level of the parking area into the Gilbert Street level of the building.

Sanitary Sewer
The Town engineering staff has reviewed the application materials with regards to sanitary sewer impacts. The engineering staff provided comments to the applicant stating that the proposed sewer flow values provided in the application are approximately 3 times higher than what the Town specifications require. Town engineering staff used flow values found in the specifications and found no capacity issues. The applicant should clarify if the flow values in the application are accurate with the projected use and occupancy of the building. If so, additional analysis will be required to determine capacity impacts.

Water
Town engineering staff has reviewed the application with regards to the Town’s water system. There are no availability issues with the proposed development, and the system has adequate pressure to accommodate the proposed development. Additional information is needed at the site plan stage to ensure that all parts of the water infrastructure design meet all Town standards and specifications.
Stormwater Management
Town engineering staff has reviewed the stormwater concept plan, and the concept plan is not approved at this time. Comments were provided to the applicant, and additional materials have been provided with the September 11, 2019 submittal. Staff has not had adequate time to review the revised materials.

Traffic & Transportation
The applicant is proposing to modify the existing Prices Fork Road entrance to the site. Additionally, the applicant has proffered to construct extensions on the existing medians in Prices Fork Road to prohibit left turns out of the development, and left turns out of Orchard Street.

The proposed development is anticipated to add a significant number of vehicular trips to the adjoining road network. Impacts are anticipated to be most notable along Turner Street and Prices Fork Road, and at the intersections of Turner Street / Perry Street, Prices Fork Road / Toms Creek and Prices Fork Road / North Main Street. Based on the required revisions needed to both the traffic impact analysis and master plan layout, further review will be needed before the definitive impacts and appropriate mitigation measures can be determined. Further information regarding the Town’s evaluation of the traffic analysis is provided in the attached transportation memo.

Emergency Services
The Town’s rescue and fire services had the opportunity to review the application with regards to emergency services and access. The Fire Code Official provided comments noting that the 2-story parking deck area off Prices Fork Road and Turner Street would have to be tall enough to accommodate emergency vehicles to drive under the second floor to provide access for the retail spaces at 460 Turner Street. The comments provide additional notes to ensure that the building meets fire code standards for sprinklers, pumps, alarms, fire ratings, etc.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING
A neighborhood meeting was held on September 4, 2019. There were a number of attendees. Notes and the sign-in sheets from this meeting are attached.

KEY ELEMENTS:
- Building Height and CUP evaluation criteria
- Pedestrian experience & sidewalk width
- Bicycle parking
- Traffic and Transportation

SUMMARY
The Planning Commission is asked to consider and make a recommendation of approval or denial of the proposed Rezoning request. If the request is approved, the property will be rezoned Downtown Commercial with amended conditions and with any proffers offered by the applicant and accepted by Town Council. Any changes to the application would be required to be reviewed through the public hearing process to amend this district. If denied, the property will continue to be zoned Downtown Commercial with Conditions adopted in 2013 and any such subsequent development application will have to adhere to all the minimum standards found therein. The decision to grant or deny the rezoning request is a discretionary decision, and should be made according to the criteria outlined in §1151, and with the analysis provided.
ATTACHMENTS
Staff Appendix
Staff GIS Maps including aerial of areas eligible for CUP for additional height request
Engineering Transportation memo dated September 13, 2019
Neighborhood Meeting Notes & Sign-in sheets
Memo from the Blacksburg Museum and Cultural Foundation
RZN19-0007 Gilbert Street Mixed-Use Redevelopment Rezoning and CUP Request
Staff Appendix

This appendix is provided to give additional supporting information from the Comprehensive Plan, the Residential Infill Guidelines, and the Zoning Ordinance in order to allow the staff report to focus on the analysis of the application. This appendix is grouped topically, with supporting text from the Comprehensive Plan, Residential Infill Guidelines, and Zoning Ordinance to illustrate the topical concepts.

PHYSICAL SITE DEVELOPMENT
Building Orientation, Scale, Massing, Height

- **Comprehensive Plan Land Use Policy LU.6** Consider the compatibility of development with surrounding uses. Utilize strategies such as landscaping or other buffering techniques along with modification of site design to minimize impacts and facilitate compatibility

- **Downtown Commercial District Site development standards. §3142**
  - Each lot must abut a public street.
  - Maximum residential density: Forty-eight (48) bedrooms per acre.
  - Maximum structure height: Sixty (60) feet.
  - Building facades shall maintain a consistent street edge, with the exception of building articulation variation, passages for pedestrian access and drives to parking areas. The street elevation of principal structures shall have at least one (1) street-oriented entrance, and contain the principal windows of the structure.
  - All roof-top equipment shall be enclosed in building materials that match the structure or which are visually compatible with the structure.
  - Sidewalk width from back of curb to the building at ground level shall be at least ten (10) feet for Main Street frontage and eight (8) feet for all other street frontage in the district. Transitioning to existing sidewalks of narrower widths shall be allowed when existing structures preclude such sidewalks from meeting minimum widths; provided, however, that no structure shall be placed within a transition area that would preclude extension of the sidewalk in the future to the widths required by this section.
  - Automobile entrances to the site shall be minimized and placed in such a way as to maximize safety, maximize efficient traffic circulation, and minimize the impact on the surrounding area. A maximum of two (2) curb cuts shall be allowed per street frontage. Factors including the number of existing curb cuts in the area, the potential for increased traffic hazards and congestion, and the number of travel lanes of the street that serves the site shall be used to determine the number of curb cuts permitted.
  - Sidewalk displays of retail merchandise are permitted, provided that:
    - (1) at least five (5) feet of clearance is maintained at the store front entrance for adequate and uncluttered pedestrian access;
    - (2) the display is located against the building wall and does not extend more than three (3) feet into the sidewalk; and
    - (3) the display area does not exceed seventy-five (75) percent of the length of the storefront
  - All utility lines, electric, telephone, cable television lines, etc., shall be placed underground.

- **Downtown Commercial District Site development standards. §3143**
  - This section applies to all new structures and to additions of four hundred (400) square feet or more to existing structures.
The use of contemporary interpretations of earlier design styles of surrounding structures in the Downtown Commercial District is encouraged; including characteristics such as scale, massing, roof shape, window size, shape and spacing, and exterior materials. The Historic District Advisory Guidelines should also be used as reference materials.

The street elevation of principal structures shall have at least one (1) street-oriented entrance, and contain the principal windows of the structure.

Illustrations submitted for review shall include drawings, renderings, or perspectives of a professional quality which illustrate the scale, massing, roof shape, window size, shape and spacing, and exterior materials of the structure and the context of the structure(s) on the site. Floor plans and samples of building materials shall also be included.

The Historic or Design Review Board shall review the rezoning, conditional use permit, special exception, site plan or other types of development applications when exterior building changes are proposed and make recommendations to the applicant for amendments to achieve consistency with this section. These recommendations are generally advisory only. It is not mandatory that the applicant comply with the recommendations of this Board except (i) in accordance with Zoning Ordinance §§ 3284 and 3287 regarding demolition or relocation of Contributing Structures in the Blacksburg Historic Overlay District or (ii) to obtain the density bonus permitted by Zoning Ordinance § 3142.

General Office Use & Design Standards §4420

Exterior lighting shall be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

Entrances to the site should be minimized and placed in such a way as to maximize safety, maximize efficient traffic circulation, and minimize the impact on any surrounding neighborhood.

The street elevation of the principal structure shall have at least one (1) street-oriented entrance, and contain the principal windows of the office.

Loading areas shall sited in such a way so as to minimize the impact on any surrounding neighborhood. Sufficient screening meeting the standards of Article V, Division 3 of [the Zoning] Ordinance shall be provided to screen and diffuse noise impacts on adjacent residences. A type D buffer yard shall be required when a loading area is located adjacent to a residential use.

The use of alternative paving material, such as brick pavers or porous pavement is permitted.

Additional standards in the...DC...zoning district: parking shall be located behind the front line of the principal building. Town Council may grant a special exception to this requirement as authorized by Section 1112.

General Restaurant Use & Design Standards §4553

Open Air Dining: Restaurants shall be permitted to operate open air dining on private property, including areas but not limited to the front entrance, deck, or courtyard. However the establishment of open air dining on private property cannot have the effect of blocking pedestrian circulation and access to store entrances shall not be impaired. The following standards shall apply to open air dining areas:

- Encroachment onto public property and into the public right-of-way requires a franchise agreement. Using the public right-of-way such as a sidewalk, as a means to access private property to provide wait service is allowed.
- Fencing is allowed to define the area occupied by the open air dining.
- Extended awnings, canopies, or umbrellas are permitted.
- If wait service is not provided, outdoor trash and recycling receptacles shall be provided.
- No additional signage is permitted for the open air dining.
The operators of the open air dining shall maintain a clean, litter-free, and well-kept appearance within and immediately adjacent to the area of open air dining activity.

- Parking shall be located behind the front line of the principal building. Town Council may grant a special exception to this requirement as authorized by Section 1112.

- **Retail Sales Use & Design Standards §4559**
  - A type A buffer yard shall be provided in yards adjacent to a RM-17 or RM-48 zoning district
  - The use of alternative pavements, such as brick pavers or porous pavement is encouraged
  - Parking shall be located behind the front line of the principal building. Town Council may grant a special exception to this requirement as authorized by Section 1112.

**SETBACKS, LOT COVERAGE, LANDSCAPING**

- **Comprehensive Plan Community Character Principle CCP.16** Responsible site design and development practices will minimize environmental impacts within the town

- **Comprehensive Plan Environment Objective E.17** As a part of the development review process, the Town will evaluate a proposed development’s impact and proposed mitigation measures for the following:
  - Open Space
  - Urban forest canopy
  - Watershed

- **Comprehensive Plan Sustainability Objectives & Policy S.6** Promote, protect and enhance the Town’s urban forests through Town initiatives and in the development review process. Minimize site disturbance to protect existing tree canopy, native vegetation, and pervious surfaces to encourage open space.

- **Zoning Ordinance Landscaping Development Standards §5427**: Parking Lot Landscaping:
  - The following provisions are intended to require that 5% of the entire parking lot, excluding the access drive, is landscaped with trees and vegetative ground cover. The area of the parking lot is the square foot of the parking spaces and aisles and interior parking lot islands, excluding access drives that do not contain either parallel or perpendicular parking spaces.
  - Within the parking lot there shall be planted one tree per ten spaces, rounded down to the closest whole number.
  - Planter islands or peninsulas containing trees shall be located within the parking lot, such that each island or planter is surrounded on at least three sides by parking lot or an access road to the parking lot. Their size shall be eighteen feet square in area, or equal total area in irregular shapes such that adequate space is provided for adequate tree canopy maturation.

- **ZO §5428 Street Trees**: In addition to the requirements set out above [in this ordinance division], in every development requiring a site development plan, there shall be planted on or adjacent to the site an average of at least one tree for every thirty feet of public street frontage.

**STREETSCAPE, BICYCLE, AND PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS**

- **Comprehensive Plan Community Character Principles CCP.1**: Well-designed pedestrian and bicycle friendly routes and facilities are essential to the Town’s identity as a walkable and bikeable community.

- **CCP.14**: Transit connections and bus stop facilities are important components to support transit as a viable transportation option in town. These elements should be part of the design of new developments and be coordinated with Blacksburg Transit regarding service availability.

- **Comprehensive Plan Transportation Objective & Policy T.10** Complete the construction of a connected sidewalk system.
• **Comprehensive Plan Environment Objective EN.34:** Support citizens in establishing and reaching vehicle travel reduction goals to reduce air pollution.

• **Comprehensive Plan Transportation Objective & Policy T.10:** Complete the construction of a connected sidewalk system

• **T.11:** Minimize pedestrian and vehicular conflicts.

• **T.12:** Maintain and improve the aesthetic quality of the pedestrian environment by planting street trees and other landscaping, and installing street furniture where appropriate.

• **T.16:** Develop and implement a comprehensive bicycle parking program throughout the Town and in coordination with Blacksburg Transit to install covered bicycle racks at public sites and commercial and residential locations, as well as to coordinate with Montgomery County and the New River Valley Planning District Commission for bicycle and pedestrian connections throughout the region.

• **T.17:** Investigate implementing a bike share program

• **T.20:** Monitor the public transportation provided to ensure effectiveness and efficiency while maintaining the priorities of safety, courtesy and scheduling.

• **T.22:** Enhance transit accessibility and convenience; lower parking demand, energy use, and air pollution by reducing traffic on local roads; and educate the community on the positive environmental impact from using public transit in order to encourage its overall use throughout the Town.

• **T.27:** Increase the number of covered bus shelters and covered bike parking provided at transit stops where appropriate.

• **T.28:** During the development review process, ensure that transit service and access to/from the transit stop and the development are provided.

• **Site Development Plans Minimum Standards and Improvements Required §5120(d)(1)**
  o Sidewalks meeting the design standards of the Subdivision Ordinance shall be provided on public or private land along all parts of a site abutting a developed public street where such sidewalks do not exist as of the date of the application for site plan approval. The provision of these sidewalks will advance the goal of the Blacksburg comprehensive plan of development of “a network of walkways in the Town to increase the safety and convenience of pedestrian travel.” The Town Council finds that the need for such sidewalks in this Town is substantially generated by the development

**PARKING, TRAFFIC, AND CIRCULATION**

• **Comprehensive Plan CCP.13** Increasing the safety and efficiency of traffic flow on arterial and collector roads is important in maximizing the functionality of the transportation network. For commercial developments: minimize curb cuts and driveways, add internal connections between adjacent properties, and optimize signal timing. For residential developments: design an internal connected street grid system as well as connections to the external street system, along with traffic calming measures.

**COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

• **Comprehensive Plan CCP.7** Commercial development should be street-oriented. Pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders are better served by buildings that meet the street with meaningful street-oriented entrances and vehicular parking located to the side or rear. Parking should not be a dominant feature of the development. There should be clearly defined safe pedestrian routes to buildings and to the public sidewalk system across vehicle travel ways.

• **CCP.8** To ensure economic viability over time, commercial structures should be constructed with quality building materials and maintained. Quality construction and materials should be used so that new
buildings withstand the test of time and are not designed for obsolescence. Architectural style should be sensitive to the character of surrounding properties. The conversion of existing residential property to small scale commercial or office uses should use the existing residential structure on-site or construct the new building in a scale and design that does not detract from the character of the neighborhood.

- **CCP.9** With limited availability of commercial land, efficient use of the land is critical to provide services to a growing population. Redevelopment of aging commercial centers is the most significant opportunity to meet this need. Residential development should not encroach in these areas unless incorporated as part of a well-designed mixed use project.

- **CCP.10** Offices are part of the desired mix of uses in the Downtown but should contribute to the vibrancy and vitality of Downtown throughout the day and night.

- **CCP.12** To serve the needs of the community, support opportunities for commercial development and redevelopment in appropriate locations.

**NEIGHBORHOODS, EMPLOYMENT, & SERVICE AREAS**

**Commercial Areas**

Businesses located in the Historic Downtown area tend to be locally owned, while most national chains are located in the other employment and commercial areas. Commercial and employment areas contain a variety of building styles, age and quality. New development in these areas should be designed to fit the character of the area in which they are located; designs should create a community gathering place as well as a commercial center, and should provide convenient pedestrian and bicycle access. In both new construction and in the refurbishment of older structures, quality building materials should be used and maintained to ensure economic viability over time. Offices are part of the desired mix of uses in the Downtown and can contribute to the vibrancy and vitality of Downtown throughout the day and night. Office uses complement retail, restaurant and other commercial uses in the Downtown, and employees of those businesses become patrons of other Downtown businesses. The development of properties, such as the Old Blacksburg Middle School (OBMS) site in accordance with the OBMS Master Plan, provides an opportunity to create office, commercial, and residential uses in a mixed-use development that is street-oriented, pedestrian and bicycle friendly, has easy access to public transportation and is an asset to the vibrant Downtown area.

- The activity in these areas generates traffic and congestion. Mass transit, alternative transportation and other creative options, such as staggered working hours and telecommuting, can mitigate some of these negative impacts.

- Connectivity between the non-residential uses in these areas provides options for employees and customers alike to move between the uses without having to go out into the main road network. Connections should be safe for pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles.

- There is an opportunity to upgrade technology infrastructure in these areas so they can become more economically competitive.

- With a variety of commercial and employment areas throughout the Town, strengthening and expanding that economic vitality while adding to a high quality of life for residents is a primary focus.

- Creating a master plan for site redevelopment in these areas helps to assure that appropriate site design is achieved and fosters successful collaboration.

- Site design elements such as street orientation, preservation of historic landmarks, adequate open space, and effective and efficient use of land are important to these areas and can address the Town’s goal of economic, environmental and social sustainability.

- Implement the pending 2012 Economic Development Strategies once adopted (Refer to the Jobs & Housing Chapter).
RZN 19-0007
&
CUP 19-0006
Gilbert Street
Mixed Use
Redevelopment

Aerial

Subject Properties
Parcels
RZN 19-0007 & CUP 19-0006
Gilbert Street Mixed Use Redevelopment

Future Land Use

- Subject Properties
- Parcels
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Civic
- High Impact Commercial
- University

Town of Blacksburg, P&B Dept., 13SEPT2019
2019 Aerials provided by Pictometry
RZN 19-0007
&
CUP 19-0006
Gilbert Street
Mixed Use
Redevelopment

Zoning

- Subject Properties
- Parcels
- R-5  Transitional Residential
- RM-48  Medium Density Multiunit Residential
- GC  General Commercial
- DC  Downtown Commercial
- PR  Planned Residential
- UNIV  University

Town of Blacksburg, P&B Dept., 13SEPT2019
2019 Aerials provided by Pictometry
MEMORANDUM

TO: Kinsey O’Shea, Development Administrator

FROM: Randy Formica, Director, Engineering and GIS
Joshua Middleton, Town Engineer

DATE: September 13, 2019

SUBJECT: Gilbert Street Mixed-Use – Transportation Comments

*Special Note: During the review of the provided traffic impact analysis errors or omissions were identified that would fundamentally change numerous sections and results within the analysis. The issues have been discussed with the applicant’s engineer and revisions are underway. Once provided, additional review of the analysis will be needed. The following comment letter is intended to provide a general overview of the traffic impact analysis and master plan layout impacts.*

Overview
As indicated by the traffic impact analysis, the proposed development will add a significant amount of vehicular traffic to the existing road network. Trip generation data has been determined with a conservative approach that has sought to provide a reasonable estimate of the potential impacts. The trip generation data indicates the total number of vehicle trips generated by the site to be 8,118 trips per day with AM peak hour volumes of 370 trips and PM peak hour volumes of 583 trips.

The distribution of these trips, onto the adjacent road network, via Prices Fork Road and North Main Street, vary between the commercial and office uses. In total, Prices Fork Road would be expected to receive approximately 64%, or 5195 trips, while North Main Street would be expected to receive the remaining 35%, or 2923 trips. As indicated by the traffic analysis, Prices Fork Road and North Main Street currently operate at approximately 21,000 ADT (average daily traffic) and 19,000 ADT respectively. The proposed development increase of 5195 trips along Prices Fork Road and 2923 trips along North Main Street represent 25% and 15% increase in traffic volumes on the respective roadways.

Traffic to Prices Fork Road and North Main Street is largely distributed via Turner Street with 67%, or 5411 trips, being routed along this cross connection. As indicated by the traffic impact analysis vehicle counts, Turner Street currently operates at approximately 7500 ADT. The proposed development increase, of 5411 trips, represents a 72% increase in traffic volume. This is largely a function of the allocation of office use trips being directed to the existing parking garage accessed from Gilbert Street and Barger Street.

Analysis Area
The analysis area was developed in conformance with the recommendations of the Town Staff and analyzed the impact at eleven (11) existing intersections;
- Prices Fork Road / Toms Creek (signalized)
Prices Fork Road / Turner Street
Prices Fork / Orchard Street
Prices Fork Road / North Main Street (round-about)
North Main Street / Progress Street (signalized)
North Main Street / Gilbert Street
North Main Street / Turner Street (signalized)
Gilbert Street / Turner Street
Perry Street / Stanger Street
Perry Street / Turner Street
Stanger Street / Future BT Entrance (future round-about)

Two (2) day, 12-hour existing traffic counts were obtained at these locations to establish the current volumes and movement distributions.

**Trip Generation**

Land use and applicable trip reduction factors for trip generation volumes were developed in conformance with the recommendations of the Town Staff. The analysis applied the trip generation impact for a mix of development uses, to include:

- 4,500 SF of Fast Food Restaurant space
- 7,000 SF of High Turnover Restaurant space
- 3,000 SF of Quality Restaurant space
- 7,400 SF of Drinking Place (Wine Lab)
- 18,700 SF of Supermarket space
- 3,200 SF of Clinic space
- 140,900 SF of University/College space

As noted previously the total trip generation anticipated is 8,118 trips with 45%, or 3,785 trips, begin generated by the University/College space. Per the rezoning application these trips would be directed to the existing parking garage with over 80% expected to access from Turner Street. The commercial components of the development are expected to utilize the site parking which is split between two levels of parking.

Trip generation was distributed to and from four locations. Two entrances connecting to the proposed development and two entrances to the existing parking garage. The proposed development would maintain and revise the existing entrance along Prices Fork and proposes the addition of a second entrance on Turner Street adjacent to the intersection of Perry Street.

**Site Access**

The existing entrance on Prices Fork Road would be reconfigured to eliminate the out-bound left movement directing this movement instead towards the round-about at the intersection of North Main Street. Similarly, the out-bound left turn movement from Orchard Street would be eliminated, directing all outbound movements towards the intersection of Toms Creek. Though restrictive for some vehicle movements, the combination of these two conditions provide a more functional and safe intersection as it eliminates numerous conflict points within the intersection. This reconfiguration was discussed with Town Staff during preliminary meetings and seems to provide the best application for the proposed development.

This second site entrance on Turner Street would provide full access to the upper parking level as well as in-bound access to the lower parking level. Exit movement from the lower level would be restricted towards Turner Street and all vehicles leaving the lower level would have to exit via Prices Fork Road. The addition of the entrance, adjacent to Perry Street, would re-establish the 4-leg intersection that was previously removed. Per the conclusions in the traffic impact...
analysis, this intersection is recommended to be a 4-way stop controlled intersection. However, a warrant analysis for this application has not been provided and would be needed before the implementation of a 4-way stop control condition could be confirmed.

**Turn Lane Warrant Analysis**
The traffic impact analysis did not include turn lane warrant analyzes, which would be needed to adequately evaluate the impacts and potential mitigations required by the proposed development.

As the existing Prices Fork Road entrance currently includes a left turn lane, information was included in the traffic impact analysis regarding the anticipated storage needed. Based on this information it appears that the reconfigured entrance design would provide sufficient storage within the existing turn lane to support the proposed development. However, a Right Turn Lane analysis should be provided to identify whether a turn lane or taper would be required.

As discussed previously Turner Street is significantly impacted by the proposed development with traffic being directed to and from the intersections at Turner Street / Gilbert Street and Turner Street / Perry Street. Turn Lane warrant analyzes for each intersection should be provided to identify if a turn lane or taper would be required.

**Entrance Design & Layout**
Revisions to the existing Prices Fork Road entrance would include a restriction of the out-bound left turn movement which would require the entrance to be reconfigured. A median island would be added to provided delineation and direction for out-bound traffic to channel them into the one-way northbound direction. The layout of the island and approach from the lower level parking area seem to generally follow the requirements of Access Management. However, an integral part of the design of this type of restrictive entrance requires a small merging taper be provided for the out-bound movement. This taper does not appear to be included as part of the master plan layout. Considerations for this merging taper should be provided and was previously discussed with the applicant during preliminary meetings. This will likely require an adjustment to the proposed landscape terracing proposed just to the north of the entrance as additional space will be needed to shift the sidewalk and provide room for the taper. This should be accomplished as part of the master plan to ensure the required space is provided and configuration of the landscape terrace can be accurately represented.

Concerning the proposed site entrance on Turner Street, as represented on the master plan, the entrance appears to be approximately 50-feet wide at the right of way. This width exceeds the 40-feet maximum standard width required in the Access Management Guidelines. The entrance should be revised to limit the width to meet the requirements of Access Management. This would serve to better align the proposed entrance with the opposing Perry Street connection and provide for better pedestrian movement by limiting the width of the entrance crossing and better align the pedestrian crosswalk crossing Turner Street.

**Additional Impacts**
The Traffic Impact Analysis does not appear to include the additional trip generation volumes proposed by recently approved rezoning’s for the Terrace View, the Frith and 1222 Patrick Henry Drive projects. These projects will add volume to Toms Creek Road, Progress Street and North Main Street and will affect several intersections within the study area. As such, the traffic impact analysis should be updated to include the projected traffic volumes associated with these developments.
Conclusions
The proposed development is anticipated to add a significant number of vehicular trips to the adjoining road network. Impacts are anticipated to be most notable along Turner Street, and Prices Fork Road and at the intersections of Turner Street / Perry Street, Prices Fork Road / Toms Creek and Prices Fork Road / North Main Street.

Based on the required revisions needed to both the traffic impact analysis and master plan layout, further review will be needed before the definitive impacts and appropriate mitigation measures can be determined.

Summary of Recommendations:
- Revise Commercial Trip Distribution to reflect the limitations of the proposed entrance and circulation established by the master plan layout. Once distributions are revised, update all affected analysis data, tables, charts, and conclusions.
- Include additional trip generation data that is anticipated for the recently approved rezoning's on Toms Creek and Patrick Henry Drive.
- Revise Table 2 Land Use codes as appropriate for the proposed use.
- Provide Right Turn Lane warrant analysis for the reconfigured Prices Fork Road entrance.
- Provide Turn Lane warrant analysis for the in-bound movement to the site access proposed at the intersection of Turner Street / Perry Street.
- Provide Turn Lane warrant analysis for the in-bound movement to Gilbert Street at the T-intersection of Turner Street / Gilbert Street.
- Provide 4-way Stop Control warrant analysis for the proposed 4-leg intersection of Turner Street / Perry Street / Site Access.
- Revise the reconfigured Prices Fork Road entrance design to include the exit taper per Access Management Guidelines
- Revise the entrance design for the proposed site access onto Turner Street to reduce the entrance width per Access Management Guidelines.
Gilbert Street (North End Center) Mixed Use Projects
RZN19-0007; RZN19-0008; CUP19-0006; ROW19-0001
Neighborhood Meeting
Wednesday, September 4, 2019
5:30 PM

Town staff in attendance were Anne McClung, Kinsey O’Shea and Kasey Thomsen.

In attendance for the applicant were Carolyn Howard of Draper Aden; Skip Smith, Mark Wawner and Rivers Kelley of W. M. Jordan; Abigail Watson and Becky Ensogna of Hanbury and Lindsey Carney of PWHD (Patten, Wornon, Hatten and Diamonstein, LC).

The meeting began at 5:30 pm.

Anne McClung began the meeting with an overview of the entire scope of the project then delved into the individual requests and gave an overview of each request. She discussed the schedule of meetings yet to come, planning department review and responsibilities in relations to these projects and purpose of the Neighborhood Meeting. Anne McClung and Kinsey O’Shea directed all those in attendance to the Town of Blacksburg website where the current set of applications, meeting schedule and any future documents and additions to the applications could be found.

Skip Smith of W. M. Jordan began his presentation on behalf of the applicant. He gave an overview of the site location of the property in question, proposed requests, proposed traffic and landscaping improvements, pedestrian connectivity and safety, vision behind request and proposed outcome and building look.

Throughout the presentation, attendees were encouraged to ask questions and make comments.

- An attendee asked if the 5-story building included the rooftop terrace, or if it is a 6-story building.
- An attendee asked to be shown the St. Luke’s and Odd Fellows Hall building on the map.
- An attendee noted that currently the space where the former Buffalo Wild Wings restaurant keeps the dumpsters that is now vacant. She wondered what the outcome of this space would be.
- A citizen asked if there would be more opportunities to express concern and make comments about this project or would this (neighborhood meeting) be the only chance? The citizen’s main concern with the proposed project was the amount of traffic (pedestrian, bike and vehicle) that will be added to the already dangerous intersection of Prices Fork and North Main Street. The citizen felt that putting that much extra traffic further exacerbates the safety issues, with the additional consideration that the citizen feels that the intersection is not properly lit. He feels that at the very least, a pedestrian bridge should be added for the safety of all the people who need to cross to get to the housing across from the University. The citizen also had comment about the structure of the building. He felt that a mostly steel structured building would stick out and look awful amongst all the brick buildings in the area. The citizen also asked the applicant and the Town to remember that the Multi-Model (bus) facility is coming to the area and to also consider the other proposed housing projects scheduled for this area. The citizen feels that this is too much growth for this small of an area of town.
- A citizen asked how much of the building will be devoted to commercial square footage compared to the gross square footage of the building?
An attendee commented that this project will be mostly made up of Virginia Tech offices and uses. Retail space (retail and restaurants) only make up a small portion of the total use of the building. The Town will not gain much in taxes if much of the use is VT use.

- Another attendee commented that it is not just the Town of Blacksburg that benefits from taxes from retails and such but Montgomery County as well. Taxes pay for schools, social services, and public services. The citizen feels that the owner should give back to both entities in a “big way”.

- A citizen is concerned that with such a large building in the area, St. Luke’s and Odd Fellows Hall will be edged out and forgotten. The citizen asked if there any plans for directional signs, plaques, or other ways to commemorate the buildings.

- A citizen stated that they should rename the complex New Town Center in honor of the historic name of the area.

- A citizen asked if there were any plans to use Hokie Stone in the construction.

- An attendee asked if the land is terraced due to height or grade.

- A citizen asked the applicant to clarify if the road that currently runs by the Buffalo Wild Wings will no longer be there if the project is approved and built.

- In response to the above answer, a citizen asked if the removed road would have any effect on the nearby Wendy’s fast food restaurant.

- An attendee stated that Odd Fellows would like an agreement with the new development for parking for their monthly meetings.

- A citizen asked if the building that currently houses the Buffalo Wild Wings restaurant is staying.

- An attendee asked if there are plans for future student housing that might exacerbate this situation.

- A citizen reiterated that this overwhelmingly steel structure will not fit in well with the rest of the area.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:29 pm.
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