MEMORANDUM

To: Town Council
From: Kinsey O’Shea, AICP; Town Planner for Current Development
Date: November 15, 2019,
Subject: REVISED REPORT RZN19-0007 Gilbert Street Mixed Use Building Amendment to DC with Conditions and CUP19-0006 CUP for Additional Building Height in the DC Zoning District

SUMMARY OF REQUEST

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<tr>
<td>Tax Parcel Numbers</td>
<td>3.65 acres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parcel(s) Size</td>
<td>DC Downtown Commercial with Conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Present Zoning District</td>
<td>Commercial; University space</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Use</td>
<td>DC Downtown Commercial; GC General Commercial across Prices Fork Road</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjacent Zoning Districts</td>
<td>East: DC Downtown Commercial</td>
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<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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<td>Adjacent Uses</td>
<td>North: 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>
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<td>Adopted Future Land Use</td>
<td>High Impact Commercial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposed Uses</td>
<td>Commercial; University Offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed District Standards</td>
<td>Maximum Height: 100’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Minimum Setbacks: Front: 0’; Side: 0’; Rear: 0’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Maximum lot coverage: Not defined; DC allows 100% lot coverage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposed Minimum Parking</td>
<td>257 spaces; 0.88 spaces/1,000 sf (excludes on-street parking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposed Bike Parking</td>
<td>72 covered/secured plus 48 exterior racks</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.

KEY ELEMENTS ANALYSIS
The key elements are listed below, and do not represent a prioritized list. More in-depth analysis is found in the staff report:

- **CUP criteria for additional building height** should be evaluated taking into consideration all of the criteria, especially with regard to building stepbacks and pedestrian experience.
- **Ways to improve the pedestrian experience & sidewalk width along Turner Street and Gilbert Street should be considered** in exchange for both removal of onstreet parking, and additional building height. Wider sidewalks, lower speed limits on Gilbert Street, downtown street furnishings, and unique crosswalks can enhance the pedestrian experience in an already-heavily traveled corridor. Application of unique treatment of crosswalks on Turner Street at both Perry Street/project entrance, and Gilbert Street can further reinforce this as an area where pedestrian and bicycle transportation is given priority over vehicles.
- **Bicycle and pedestrian improvements along Prices Fork Road should be considered as an alternative to mitigation measures for vehicular impact, and may be an appropriate use of a cash proffer.**
- **Relationship to Odd Fellows Hall** with ways to mitigate impacts and honor the history of the New Town community through a Memorandum of Understanding between BMCF, Virginia Tech Foundation and the Town as property owner.

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.

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. The applicant is requesting up to 100’ in height. 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 walled landscaped terrace along Prices Fork Road to shield the parking from view of the street, which is best illustrated in the application. New 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.

**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.

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 ORDNANCE 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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<tr>
<td><strong>MAXIMUM HEIGHT</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MINIMUM SETBACKS</strong></td>
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<td>Front: 0’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Side: 0’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rear: 0’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MAXIMUM LOT COVERAGE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PROPOSED PARKING</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MINIMUM PARKING REQUIRED</strong></td>
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<td><strong>MINIMUM BIKE PARKING REQUIRED</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PROPOSED BIKE PARKING</strong></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 original proposal included an 8’ wide sidewalk on Gilbert Street. This is the minimum requirement for a Downtown Commercial sidewalk on a side street. The criteria for consideration of the CUP for additional height speak specifically to the nature of the pedestrian experience. Gilbert Street has a significant amount of pedestrian and bicycle activity today and it is expected to increase with the proposed redevelopment.

The applicant has revised the application to propose extending the sidewalk into the Town right-of-way with the removal of the 11 parallel parking spaces on the north side of Gilbert Street. The parking spaces would remain on the south side of the street. As noted in the CUP criteria, the width of the sidewalk and impact on the pedestrian environment are important considerations for additional building height. When buildings are constructed at significant height with or without stepbacks, 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. As now proposed the sidewalk on the Building #220 side of the street will be 17’ in width.

As the applicant is proposing to use Town right-of-way and convert on-street parking to sidewalk, this presents an opportunity to consider how to improve the Gilbert Street streetscape and environment for pedestrians and bicyclists. This amount of space would not be ideal for separated bicycle facilities on Gilbert Street. Since no bicycle facilities are proposed, strong consideration should be given to creating a friendlier on-street environment for bicyclists.

Reducing lane widths, lowering speed limits to 10-15 mph, removing defined curb areas where possible, and changing the street surface in key areas should be considered in order to create a shared street environment. Lower speed limits allow bicyclists to mix with vehicular traffic as the speed differential between the two modes is significantly reduced. Many examples of this condition are found in urban environments – locally, College Avenue is the best example of a shared street experience.

This shared street environment also allows for more comfortable pedestrian movements along and across Gilbert Street. The wider sidewalk width will also allow for additional street furniture along Gilbert Street without impeding the pedestrian flow. This is particularly important as benches and tables are currently available in the existing condition. This may also help to alleviate a canyon effect between two large buildings and could transition easily into the proposed pedestrian plaza along the Turner Street façade.

In further considering the pedestrian environment, street crossings should be given special attention – this includes the crossing at Gilbert Street/Turner Street and also at Perry Street/Turner Street/project entrance. These crossings are opportunities for prioritizing the movement of people rather than the movement of cars as outlined in the Downtown Strategic Plan. The plan recommends “a mobility strategy that prioritizes people over
cars and also supports economic activity and community vibrancy by providing expanded access to jobs, shopping, and small businesses downtown”. The Perry Street/Turner Street/project entrance includes a proposed four-way stop condition which will allow for crosswalks on all legs of the intersection. This intersection is an opportunity to significantly enhance the pedestrian environment by considering unique treatments — this may include patterns, colors, materials, and/or art — that call attention to this space. Addressing these elements is important as outlined in the Downtown Strategic Plan strategy to “Enhance the Public Realm” which notes that, “through improved streetscaping, these streets can better serve pedestrians and bicyclists — while still accommodating cars — and thereby encourage active transportation into downtown”. Staff and the applicant have coordinated to develop a proposal for improving Turner Street and Gilbert Street for pedestrians and bikes with recommendations as follows:

**Turner Street:**
- Crosswalks on all 4 legs of the intersection of Turner St. at the project entrance which will be a 4-way stop condition
- Crosswalks on all 3 legs of the T-intersection of Turner St. and Gilbert St.
- Crosswalks to be 10’ in width, which is wider than the standard
- Crosswalks and intersection to be concrete to provide visual and textural difference

**Gilbert Street:**
- Crosswalk 20’ in width at main project entrance
- Crosswalk at Odd Fellows end of project 10’ in width
- Crosswalk to be concrete to provide visual and textural difference
- Reduce speed on Gilbert St.
- Retain existing lane widths on Gilbert Street
- Add sharrows on Gilbert Street

**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 has included a total of 72 covered/secure bike spaces, as well as 18 exterior bike parking spaces. The covered/secure bike parking is located in the ground level parking underneath the mixed-use building. More specificity at the time of site plan will be required to ensure that the appropriate number of bike racks is included, as well as the required clear spaces.

**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. The applicant responded to the Corridor Committee input on bike racks as discussed above.

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 applicant has clarified the parking ratio for the development. The site will have a total of 257 parking spaces onsite, not including the on-street parking on Gilbert Street, and 290,239 square feet of gross floor area, including the 460 Turner building. This equates to a parking ratio of approximately 0.88 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet.

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. The applicant has indicated employees will park in the North End garage. 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. Parking provided includes use of the existing parking deck, proposed under building parking and new elevated surface parking. Due to the 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 in the Downtown Commercial zoning district), 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. Landscape terraces have been included to shield the parking from view of Prices Fork Road, and to satisfy the requirements for parking lot landscaping.

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

History

The state website ([www.virginia.org](http://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.

Review by HDRB and BMCF

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. In response, the applicant has provided the shadow study graphics. The applicant has also provided renderings showing the proposed building as viewed from the Hall.

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.
Memorandum of Understanding
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 has been 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.

The applicant has been meeting with the BMCF Board and staff to develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to address impacts and concerns. In addition to issues regarding parking for regular board meetings, the view from the Hall, and honoring the history of the area, the applicant is proposing a landscape plan which is included in the amended application and has agreed to maintain this area between the face of the proposed building and the St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall which is a mix of Town- and VTF-owned property.

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.

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. The applicant will provide examples of where the synthetic stone has been used. 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. Below is the staff analysis of the updated 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. Relationship of building to the street;
   *The proposed building has a direct relationship to the street on both Gilbert Street and Turner 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 applicant has prepared and refined several graphics to illustrate the nature of the building stepbacks proposed. There are building stepbacks in certain locations but also building overhangs. Staff requested clarification on building stepbacks particularly at the center of the building along the Gilbert Street frontage. This is where the building is at its tallest point.
Sheet AZ105 displays the building step-backs along the Gilbert Street façade, as well as the Turner Street end, and the St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall end.
- In general, a significant portion of the façade (indicated in blue on the AZ105 sheet) is flush with the sidewalk along Gilbert Street. This area will be approximately 80’ tall, and flush with the face of the sidewalk. While the top level of the building is set back approximately 3’-4” from the sidewalk face, the roof does overhang the step-back, though, according to the diagram, not within 1’ of the sidewalk face, though it appears very close. There is a horizontal step-back for the floor above the retail floor that is approximately 3’-6” deep, though the third through fifth floors will be flush with the sidewalk as described above.
- Above the anchor retail tenant entrance, the building does step back approximately 8’-5” for floors 2-6.
- At the Turner Street end, the building overhangs the plaza area approximately 42’ at the floor of level 3. The building steps back 21’ at level 5, and an additional 43’-8” (for a total of 64’-8”) to the overhang of the roof on level 6.
- At the St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall end, the building overhangs the ground level approximately 15’-6” at the floor of level 3. The building steps back 30’ at level 5, and an additional 14’ (for a total of 44’) to level 6.

As building setbacks or step-backs are one of the criteria for evaluating the Conditional Use Permit request, it should be noted that for the significant portion of the Gilbert Street façade, no step-back above the sidewalk level is provided. From the ground, the building will appear to rise more than 80’ in the air straight up. Building step-backs are intended to provide a more comfortable pedestrian experience by allowing natural light and airflow at the street level, and avoiding a canyon-like feel that can make the sidewalk and street seem crowded and narrow.

(6) Width of sidewalk;
The sidewalk width was discussed in the Pedestrian Experience & Sidewalks section above on Page 5.

(7) Impact on pedestrian environment;
The impact on pedestrian environment was discussed in the Pedestrian Experience & Sidewalks section above on Page 5.
(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 review concluded that there are no downstream capacity issues related to the Town’s sanitary sewer service.

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 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, left turns out of Orchard Street, and through movements between the two. The applicant is also proposing a 4-way stop at the project entrance on Turner 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. The revised transportation impact analysis indicates that a right turn lane is warranted on Prices Fork Road at the site entrance, and an acceleration taper exiting the development onto Prices Fork Road is also warranted.

The applicant has been working with both Town staff and the Town attorney to consider alternatives to mitigating the vehicular impact in an area that has high pedestrian and bicycle traffic expected to grow in the future with the proposed project and other potential redevelopment. The Town is working on developing options for Prices Fork Road from the roundabout to Tom’s Creek Rd. to address pedestrian volumes and pedestrian safety in crossing Prices Fork Rd. Staff and the applicant have discussed bicycle and pedestrian improvements on Prices Fork Road to enhance alternate modes of transportation, rather than provide an improvement that only mitigates the vehicular impact of the development. The applicant, staff, and the Town attorney have been discussing a cash proffer equivalent to the value of the turn lane improvements in order to implement some of the improvements that come out of the Prices Fork Road study currently underway.

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.

SUMMARY
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
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 residential 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 sit 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)**

  - Sidewalks meeting the design standards of the Subdivision Ordinance shall be provide 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

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

Parcels

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

Zoning

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

North Main Street

Prices Fork Road

Gilbert Street

Turner Street

Town of Blacksburg, P&B Dept., 13SEPT2019
2019 Aerials provided by Pictometry
Parcels
Downtown Commercial Zoning
Areas eligible for CUP
(Not within 250' of Residential Zoning R-4, R-5 & OTR)
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)
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 is 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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