



## MEMO

Date: August 22, 2017  
To: Board of Commissioners  
From: Jason Burdette, Planning Director  
Re: Davidson Commons East Hotel – Stakeholder Feedback

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### PURPOSE & PROCESS

This memorandum summarizes feedback gathered from stakeholders from July-August 2017. The feedback concerns a proposed hotel located at 131 Davidson Gateway Drive (Parcel IDs #00323190, #00323191). Staff collected feedback directly from stakeholders over the course of three weeks via the following means:

- **7/31/17, Joint Work Session:** A meeting co-hosted by the Board of Commissioners and Planning Board and at which members offered initial feedback concerning the proposed plan.
- **8/4/17, Site Walk:** A staff-led walk of the site, surrounding parcels, and surrounding streets attended by various stakeholders, including: Area neighbors and adjoining property owners (i.e. Woodies Automotive staff); interested citizens; Community School of Davidson (CSD) parents; and, the property owner and developer.
- **8/4/17, Lunch & Learn:** A staff-led presentation, discussion, and comment period attended by area neighbors and adjoining property owners; interested citizens; CSD parents; and, the property owner and developer.
- **8/10, West Davidson:** A staff-led presentation, discussion, and comment period attended by area neighbors and adjoining property owners from West Davidson, along with other interested citizens and CSD parents.
- **8/10, Spinnaker Cove:** A staff-led presentation, discussion, and comment period attended by area neighbors, including CSD + Davidson Day parents and staff.
- **August 2017, Additional Stakeholders:** Meetings, phone calls, and emails conducted with and shared by adjoining property owners, interested citizens, and stakeholders.

#### REQUEST

The applicant requests a Conditional Master Plan Amendment to develop a commercial hotel on 2.1 acres. The proposed hotel size would be approximately 74,500 square feet, four stories in height, and feature +/- 115 rooms. The proposal includes a pedestrian plaza along Griffith St. and a retail space on the site's northwest corner at the intersection of Griffith St. and Davidson Gateway Dr.

## 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### FEEDBACK OVERVIEW

The main topics of discussion identified by stakeholders are summarized immediately below. Subsequent sections of this memo offer additional information concerning the topics discussed as well as questions asked. The feedback can be summarized as follows:

- **Uses:** Stakeholders expressed varying viewpoints on whether the hotel use, meeting spaces, bistro (i.e. café inside the hotel, potentially serving alcohol), and retail component were desirable.
  - » Visitors: Many shared concerns about a hotel use featuring a constant stream of visitors – specifically, that this was not compatible with adjacent schools and the elderly population living in West Davidson (see the Safety bullet point below).
  - » Destination: On the other hand, stakeholders also stated that the plaza and retail component would be welcome, informal destinations that could be frequented by area residents, students, parents of students, and visitors.
  - » Demand: Several stakeholders questioned whether the demand for an additional hotel was warranted, while others stated that the town’s current options are limited (with one small-scale use downtown and another commercial-scale use at Exit 30).
  - » Right Use, Wrong Location: Many stated that the hotel use was fine but its location on a limited site area and next to a school posed too many irreconcilable challenges.
- **Parking:** All stakeholders, whether for or against the proposed use, identified the future parking implications as a serious concern.
  - » Proposed Amount: Many questioned whether the amount of proposed parking – including on- and off-site/on-street spaces identified – was sufficient to accommodate the hotel, its meeting spaces, employee parking, and retail space.
  - » On-Street: Several people questioned whether on-street parking was safe, esp. in a high-traffic area near the school or along Griffith Street. Others supported the addition of on-street parking, seeing it as an enhancement to parking capacity and pedestrian safety by creating a barrier between sidewalk users and the street.
- **Traffic:** All stakeholders noted that any development, whether a hotel or otherwise, posed a challenge during the schools’ peak arrival/pick-up periods.
- **Safety:** Many stakeholders conveyed serious concerns about a hotel use.
  - » Visitors: Most of the concerns related to the continual presence of visitors adjacent to a school use where children are present; fear of contact or observation of children by visitors was noted. Additionally, West Davidson residents cited concerns about elderly residents being exposed to a frequent stream of visitors at the hotel.
  - » Pedestrian Mobility: Many stakeholders described the movement of pedestrians throughout the site and school area as the most pressing issue related to the proposal. Many voiced support for recommendations included in the Staff Analysis, including the suggested on- and off-site infrastructure improvements pertaining to a multi-use path, crosswalk enhancements, on-street parking, and a mid-block crossing with pedestrian refuge at Spinnaker Cove Drive.
- **Scale:** Stakeholders welcomed the reduction in height from six to four stories; however, many believed that two to three stories would be more appropriate – and would also help to address parking issues since less parking would be needed with a smaller hotel. Some stakeholders noted that the building massing would assist in traffic calming measures.

- **Site:** Stakeholders noted many concerns related to the proposed site design, including the loss of tree canopy on Griffith Street (esp. the three white oaks in the site’s northeast corner); the sufficiency of buffer measures along the eastern boundary; light pollution to adjacent residential properties; stormwater runoff effects; and, the amount of hardscape in the plaza area. Stakeholders voiced support for the Staff Analysis recommendation to pursue LEED certification as a response to these issues.

### 3. USE FEEDBACK

#### PROGRAMMATIC CONSIDERATIONS

- **Parking:**
  - » **Uses/Parking Requirements:** Stakeholders asked whether the proposed parking factored in needs for the meeting space and retail components, emphasizing that these uses along with employee parking must be considered. Others asked whether other jurisdictions allowed on-street parking to be counted towards a project’s overall parking requirements (yes).
  - » **Parking Enforcement:** Adjacent landowners expressed concern about parking from the hotel and CSD users occupying space on nearby streets, lots, and Davidson Commons and asked how this would be handled.
  - » **CSD Needs:**
    - **Functional Changes:** Stakeholders explored possibilities to improve the school’s future parking and pedestrian mobility by the closure of a curb-cut at the parking lot closest to the Griffith Street and Davidson Gateway Drive intersection; the inclusion of on-street parking on the school’s block along Griffith Street; crosswalk improvements; and, construction of a mid-block crossing on Griffith Street at Spinnaker Cove Drive. These changes would allow different internal parking configurations and assignments for CSD, enabling safer movement of children and parents throughout the area.
    - **Future Implications:** Stakeholders acknowledged that any development would present parking problems for CSD (problems that could be mitigated but perhaps not resolved), and asked whether commissioners would take parking for CSD into consideration when they vote on the proposal. Some suggested that extra off-parking for this site be identified.
- **Periods of Use:** Some stakeholders suggested that a different use, such as an office building, would be more appropriate for the site because it would operate during the day. Others suggested that a nighttime-focused use such as the proposed use would be a better fit as the school and Woodies Automotive would not be as busy.
- **User Familiarity:** A few stakeholders considered whether a hotel use attracting a lot of visitors would make vehicular movements more dangerous due to drivers’ unfamiliarity with the surroundings, particularly the school; or, contrarily, whether a different use such as an office building could be dangerous due to drivers’ over-familiarity (and therefore lack of attention) with the surrounding context.
- **Bistro Use:** Some stakeholders asked whether the bistro would carry an alcohol license and questioned whether such a use next to a school was permissible (the Planning Ordinance and Municipal Code do not feature separation requirements).
- **Retail Component:** Stakeholders supported the inclusion of a retail component, esp. one that serves food.

## BENEFITS & DEMAND

- **Benefits:** Stakeholders asked what benefits would be associated with the project and what groups, specifically, desired an additional hotel use in Davidson. Specifically, they wanted to know how much tax revenue the project would generate. They also inquired about what types of/how many of jobs would be created (25 Full-Time; 9 Part-Time) and the salary range of employees.
- **Demand:** Stakeholders asked whether there was enough demand for a hotel and whether the applicant and/or town had conducted market studies to understand potential demand. Some asked about the occupancy rate of hotels in neighboring jurisdictions.

## 4. SITE FEEDBACK

### ON-SITE

- **Multi-Use Path:** Stakeholders supported the inclusion of a ten-foot wide pathway along Griffith Street in accordance with the approved Walks & Rolls Plan. They also encouraged the construction of this path along the full extent of the property and over the stream crossing at the eastern boundary. Where possible, stakeholders recommended the path be set back from the street to allow users greater safety between the path and moving vehicles.
- **Trees/Buffer:**
  - » **Preservation:** Stakeholders discussed the tradeoffs of the building location being pulled up close to Griffith Street – the creation of a plaza versus the preservation of an existing tree stand. On the site walk stakeholders stressed the importance of preserving the three white oak trees in the site’s northeastern corner; participants noted how these trees offer the chance for a distinct focal point and canopy cover that distinguishes this stand from other stands on site. It was recommended that building footprint alternatives be explored to allow the preservation and celebration of this stand.
  - » **Buffer:** All stakeholders emphasized the need for an adequate vegetated buffer between the project’s building/parking areas and the adjacent residential properties to the southeast. Stakeholders recommended a mix of evergreen and deciduous trees.
- **Retaining Wall Height:** Stakeholders inquired about the height of the proposed retaining wall on the parking lot’s eastern edge, and the distance of this feature from adjacent properties.
- **Runoff:** Stakeholders emphasized the importance of effectively managing stormwater runoff and impacts on surrounding properties as well as Lake Davidson, an identified critical watershed. They voiced support for the Staff Analysis recommendation to pursue LEED certification as an enhanced response to this issue.
- **Architecture:** Stakeholders expressed a desire that the area feel more like a neighborhood with a commercial mix rather than a commercial area with a residential mix. They recommended that any development on the site should have a residential feel, and suggested the proposed conceptual design be revised to achieve a more residential look. Stakeholders asked how this could be guaranteed if the plan were approved.
- **Signage:** Several stakeholders noted that the signage should conform to the town’s existing character and requirements.
- **Bicycle Parking/Sharing:** Some stakeholders suggested that the site provide bicycles for visitors to utilize around town and/or to host/participate in a bike sharing station as part of a town-wide program.
- **Plaza:** Stakeholders noted the importance of access to the plaza from multiple points, and supported the proposed integration of the ADA-accessible entrance. They also recommended

that the hardscape amount of the plaza be reduced and/or increased plantings be added to this area.

## OFF-SITE

- **Traffic:** Stakeholders recommended traffic calming techniques to slow vehicular movements in the area; however, some questioned whether features such as on-street parking would slow traffic too much.
- **Light Pollution:** All stakeholders noted the importance of mitigating the effects of nighttime lighting on adjacent properties while still keeping users of the site safe. Stakeholders recommended the achievement LEED certification as a response to this issue.
- **Massing/Vantage Point:** Several stakeholders asked what the view of the proposed site/building would be if the project was constructed, particularly what view would be seen from adjacent properties to the southeast and east.

## 5. ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK

### SEQUENCING

- **Construction Sequence:** Stakeholders asked whether the timing of the proposal's off-site, street and pedestrian improvements could be scheduled to occur in the summer to minimize disruption to the school and provide a safe environment when school opens.