



March 11, 2026 Planning Commission Meeting

Title

Consider a request to rezone at 435, 445, 457, 473, 483 & 495 South Main Street and 282, 288, 294 & 298 South Liberty Street — Thanh Dang, Community Development

Summary

Project name	The Link Apartments
Address/Location	435, 445, 457, 473, 483 & 495 South Main Street and 282, 288, 294 & 298 South Liberty Street
Tax Map Parcels	25-J-2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 15, 16, 17 and 18
Total Land Area	+/- 2.75-acres
Property Owner	Trenton Inc. and Bernard L C
Owner's Representative	Timberwolf Capital Partners LLC
Present Zoning	R-3, Medium Density Residential District
Proposed Zoning	B-1C, Central Business District Conditional
Planning Commission	July 9, 2025 (Invalid Public Hearing Date) March 11, 2026 (Public Hearing)
City Council	August 12, 2025 (Invalid First Reading/Public Hearing) Anticipated April 14, 2026 (First Reading/Public Hearing) Anticipated April 28, 2026 (Second Reading)

Recommendation

Option 1. Recommend approval of the rezoning request.

Context & Analysis

The following land uses are located on and adjacent to the property:

- Site: Lindsey Funeral Home and vacant office building, zoned R-3
- North: City Hall, Turner Pavilion, parking lots, zoned B-1
- East: Across South Main Street, commercial properties, zoned B-1C and B-2C
- South: Harrisonburg Baptist Church, zoned R-3
- West: Across South Liberty Street, residential uses, zoned R-3

The applicant is requesting to rezone a +/- 2.75-acre site consisting of 10 parcels from R-3, Medium Density Residential District to B-1C, Central Business District Conditional. If the request is approved, the applicant plans to construct a 6-story apartment building consisting of a maximum of 250 units and 2,000 to 5,000 square feet of commercial space, with a parking garage consisting of a minimum of 480 off-street parking spaces.

Planning Commission reviewed a request to rezone the subject property on July 9, 2025. Due to an error in advertising for the July 2025 Planning Commission public hearing, a new public hearing must be held for the request. Before staff realized there was an advertising error, City Council held a public hearing on August 12, 2025, where they tabled the request and directed staff to facilitate a process in engaging the applicant and residents for discussion of the project. Previous staff reports, application materials, and public comments are available at: <https://harrisonburg-va.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7507770&GUID=BCCA5060-6091-4F84-B392-674CDE97EBE5&Options=&Search=>.

Since August 2025, the applicant worked with facilitators to engage with community members, updated the Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA), completed a cut-through analysis of Paul Street, and updated the rezoning application.

Proffers

The applicant has organized their proffer statement into five sections:

- I. Development Standards
- II. Transportation Improvements
- III. Parking/Access Improvements
- IV. Amenities
- V. Implementation

Please refer to the attached file “Application and supporting documents,” which includes a document titled “Rezoning Request Proffer Statement” for the entire proffer statement.

Proffers within *Section I. Development Standards* control the layout and design of structures on the property, including general layout and architectural features and screening on the parking garage’s north facing wall and west facing building plane (Proffer I.a., I.g., and I.i.). Additionally, with recent applications to rezone property to B-1, staff has encouraged applicants to consider proffering to prohibit drive-through facilities and that no parking lot would be located between any building and public streets. Both drive-throughs and parking lots between any building and public streets would be prohibited through the details of Proffer I.a., which requires that the development substantially conforms with the Concept Plan.

The applicant has proffered sustainability features including, but not limited to, rough-in measures to allow for future installation of solar panels (Proffer I.j.), a minimum of 14 electrical vehicle

(EV) charging stations (Proffer III.c.), a minimum of 120 secure indoor bicycle parking spaces, and a minimum of 16 exterior bicycle parking spaces (Proffer III.d.).

Proffers related to the Downtown Park, Land Use, Transportation, Parking, and Cash Proffers are discussed in the following sections.

Downtown Park

Providing a downtown park in the area between the subject site and the Turner Pavilion (home to the Harrisonburg Farmers Market) has been discussed for a number of years. On September 24, 2024, City Council approved a conceptual plan for the park, which included a stage for performances. Later that year, on November 26th, City Council unanimously voted to accept a Downtown Park Donation Agreement, which was then executed between the City of Harrisonburg and Build Our Park's Board of Directors on December 10, 2024. The agreement formally defines the process of constructing and operating the downtown park. General next steps for the park include fundraising, completing final design plans, and securing a contractor for park construction.

With this rezoning request, Proffer III.e. includes commitments by the applicant to coordinate back-of-stage access and a vehicle turnaround for the downtown park as generally shown on the Concept Plan and includes the dedication of an ingress and egress easement across the applicant's property to the park.

Land Use

The Comprehensive Plan designates this site as Mixed Use and states:

The Mixed Use category includes both existing and proposed areas for mixed use. Mixed Use areas shown on the Land Use Guide map are intended to combine residential and non-residential uses in neighborhoods, where the different uses are finely mixed instead of separated. Mixed Use can take the form of a single building, a single parcel, a city block, or entire neighborhoods. Quality architectural design features and strategic placement of green spaces for large scale developments will ensure development compatibility of a mixed use neighborhood with the surrounding area. These areas are prime candidates for "live-work" and traditional neighborhood developments (TND). Live-work developments combine residential and commercial uses allowing people to both live and work in the same area. The scale and massing of buildings is an important consideration when developing in Mixed Use areas. Commercial uses would be expected to have an intensity equivalent to a Floor Area Ratio of at least 0.4, although the City does not measure commercial intensity in that way. Downtown is an existing area that exhibits and is planned to continue to contain a mix of land uses.

The downtown Mixed Use area often has no maximum residential density, however, development should take into consideration the services and resources

that are available (such as off-street parking) and plan accordingly. Residential density in Mixed Use areas outside of downtown should be around 24 dwelling units per acre, and all types of residential units are permitted: single-family detached, single-family attached (duplexes and townhomes), and multi-family buildings. Large scale developments, which include multi-family buildings are encouraged to include single-family detached and/or attached dwellings.

Proffer I.b. restricts the number of dwelling units on the property to a maximum of 250 units putting the development at about 91 units per acre. The table below compares Lineweaver Apartments, The Colonnade, Urban Exchange, and The Link Apartments:

Apartment Name	Acres	Units	Units/Acre(rounded up)	Bedrooms	Bedrooms/Acre (rounded up)
Lineweaver, 265 North Main Street	+/- 1.98	121	62	121	62
The Colonnade, 351 North Mason Street	+/- 2.20	60	28	126	58
Urban Exchange, 238 East Water Street	+/- 2.63	196	75	407	155
The Link Apartments	+/- 2.75	250 (max. Proffered)	91	555 (max. Proffered)	202

Staff believes that there is a high probability that college students would be interested in residing at this location. The applicant is planning for a mixture of 1-, 2-, 3-, and 4-bedroom apartments and has stated that the 4-bedroom units will be designed as 4-bedrooms/4-bathrooms. Staff encourages developers to provide a balanced mix of bedrooms per unit so that such buildings can serve a variety of needs. There can be disadvantages to providing too many 4-bedroom/4-bathroom units as they typically best serve college students and can be difficult to accommodate other users. However, staff also recognizes the advantages of providing student housing in close and walkable proximity (about ¼-mile) to the James Madison University campus as well as to the downtown area. Providing college housing in such locations can help reduce daily vehicle trips on City streets—especially Reservoir Street and Port Republic Road, off of which many college students currently reside.

The applicant has proffered a minimum of 110 studio or one-bedroom apartments (Proffer I.c.), a maximum of 85 four-bedroom units (Proffer I.d.), and that no units will consist of more than 4-bedrooms (Proffer I.d). While the exact bedroom count and unit type composition is not known at this time, if there are 110 one-bedroom units and 85 four-bedroom units, then the remaining 55 units would be made up of a combination of 2 or 3-bedroom units. However, there could be other combinations if there are more than 110 one-bedroom units or less than 85 four-bedroom units.

Additionally, the applicant has proffered restrictions on occupancy; that studio and one-bedroom units may be leased to a family or no more than two unrelated individuals and that all other residential units may be leased to a family or no more than one unrelated individual per bedroom (Proffer I.f.). In the B-1 district, without proffers, zoning occupancy regulations allow a family or no more than four individuals in each dwelling unit. While staff can accept the occupancy related proffer, we have concerns that such a proffer can be overly restrictive. The proffered constraint, applied to two- or three- bedroom units, could limit choices for non-student, non-family households such as a married couple and their friend seeking a two-bedroom unit, or a three-person family that wishes to include a roommate seeking a 3-bedroom unit. For market-rate rentals, these types of shared housing scenario may be what makes housing costs affordable and attainable for Harrisonburg's non-student population.

With regard to non-residential uses, the applicant proffered a minimum of 2,000 square feet and a maximum of 5,000 square feet of commercial space to be on the southeast corner (Paul Street and South Main Street) of the building (Proffer I.e.). The proffered 5,000-square-foot maximum reflects the largest commercial space evaluated in the TIA. As a comparison with commercial spaces within Urban Exchange, Coffee Hound occupies about 1,600 square feet and Benny Sorrentino's occupies about 1,400 square feet.

At this time, the proposed 6-story building is planned to be close to the maximum height allowed in the B-1 district of 75-feet, which is about the same height as Urban Exchange. The applicant has proffered that the fifth and sixth floors of the building will contain stepped back elevations along the South Liberty Street and South Main Street frontages as generally shown in the exhibits provided (Proffer I.h.).

Staff believes that the proposed uses, with the submitted proffers, generally conform with the Mixed Use area designation.

Additionally, the proposed development would support the Harrisonburg Downtown 2040 Plan goal to "Grow Downtown as a Neighborhood." The development would further support the following two action items from the same plan:

- #16: Encourage mixed-use and residential development in key clusters (page 58) and
- #17: In the long-term, seek opportunities to add density and improve the urban design at key Downtown sites (page 58).

The Harrisonburg Downtown 2040 plan describes that "[w]hile the number of housing units and residents have grown Downtown, there is need for more housing to support local businesses." Additionally, the subject property is within a key cluster area for potential residential development identified as "South Downtown." The Harrisonburg Downtown 2040 plan is available at the following link: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/downtown-2040>.

Transportation and Traffic

A traffic impact analysis (TIA) was first accepted by the Department of Public Works on March 31, 2025. Since August 2025, the TIA was revised to account for changes to proffered conditions (namely, reducing the unit count from 290 to 265 – which has been proffered to be lower at 250 - and increase the commercial space to 5,000 square feet). A new acceptance letter was issued by the Department of Public Works on January 12, 2026.

The TIA models “showed that both controlled delay and queueing increases minimally at all intersection movements within the study area, none of which were deemed to warrant mitigation to be borne by this development.” Additionally, the study noted that multiple movements within the study area have a level of service categorized as failing under current traffic conditions, even without the proposed development and that such movements may warrant further study by the City. These locations include:

- The westbound left-turn movement from East Grattan Street onto South Main Street,
- The westbound through movement from East Grace Street across the South Main Street intersection, and
- The eastbound left turn from West Grace Street onto South Main Street.

Since the August 2025 City Council presentation, the applicant completed a cut-through analysis of Paul Street to evaluate concerns raised by community members. The cut-through analysis “[found] no evidence that any significant traffic will opt for the cut-through route over the existing, traditional route” and “[t]he existing traffic calming measures on Paul St are expected to continue in their effectiveness to deter cut-through traffic.”

The Department of Public Works will be making changes to the intersection of South Main Street, Liberty Street, and East Grattan Street as part of the Liberty Street project. The Liberty Street Project proposes to transform one lane of South Liberty Street in the downtown area (starting at Noll Drive at Kratzer Avenue, moving south on Liberty Street to South Main Street) into two-way separated bicycle lanes protected by a median separating the bike lanes from traffic and to make other improvements along the corridor. The project is anticipated to begin construction in 2028. Changes associated with the Liberty Street Project were assumed as part of the completed TIA for this project for the future conditions. More information on the Liberty Street Project is available at the following link: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/transportation-projects#LibertyStreetProject>.

The *Transportation Improvement* proffer II.a. explains that the applicant would design and construct a public street extension of Paul Street between South Liberty Street and South Main Street, adding to the gridded street network encouraged by the Comprehensive Plan and staff. The Paul Street extension would include sidewalks on both sides of the street. Proffer II.b. describes how the Paul Street extension could accommodate new entrances from the existing Harrisonburg

Baptist Church (HBC) parking lot to the new street. While the applicant has been in communications with representatives from HBC, HBC has not formally committed to this change and completion of this proffer will require HBC's approval during the engineered comprehensive site plan (ECSP) phase of the project. Proffer II.b. also includes the installation of street bump-outs (curb extensions) along South Main Street by the applicant. Street bump-outs have many safety benefits including, but not limited to, improving pedestrian visibility and reducing crossing distance, prohibiting vehicle parking close to the intersection, and reducing vehicle speeds (both for through and turning vehicles). While at this time, staff does not foresee waiving the requirement for the applicant to complete the bump-outs, staff requested language in the proffer to allow the Department of Public Works to waive the requirement in case there were unforeseen reasons why the bump-outs should not be constructed in the future.

The applicant's completion of proffers II.c. and d. would help improve the pedestrian experience with improved sidewalks along the development's South Main Street and South Liberty Street frontages to match the width, material, and appearance of sidewalk fronting the adjacent City Hall and future downtown park properties. These improvements will be complemented by pedestrian-scale lighting, street furniture, and landscaping (Proffers IV.b. and c.). The applicant has also proffered a minimum of two sidewalk connections from the project site to City Hall and to the future Downtown Park (Proffer II.d.).

The applicant is aware that if the rezoning request is approved, they must request approval from City Council for any needed Subdivision Ordinance and Design & Construction Standards Manual (DCSM) variances prior to the Department of Public Works' approval of an ECSP for extending Paul Street. The applicant has identified on the Concept Plan that they intend to request a variance to Subdivision Ordinance Section 10-2-41 (a) to allow alternative street design for curb radii and access (entrance) spacing on the Paul Street extension. The Concept Plan illustrates a street width that does not meet DCSM standards, and thus a variance would be needed for such a design. Staff will further evaluate these and any other variances at the time they are requested.

Parking

The applicant has proffered to provide a minimum of 480 structured parking spaces on the property (Proffer III.a.). Proffer III.a. includes language that the structured parking spaces shall be "substantially completed" and open for public use prior to the first issuance of any Certificate of Occupancy (or Temporary Certificate of Occupancy) for the property. "Substantial completion" is a term used in construction to describe a milestone occurring when a project is sufficiently complete for its intended use, even if minor "punch list" items remain. For the parking garage, this means that it is safe and can be open for use as determined by the Building Official and Zoning Administrator, but there is minor work to be completed prior to overall project completion.

Proffer III.b. states that the applicant would enter into a Parking Agreement with the City consistent with the attached Memorandum of Understanding to reserve up to 65 parking spaces for municipal/public uses in the parking garage.

A parking occupancy count completed in April 2019 as part of the most recent Downtown Parking Study (April 2020) indicated that the midday count period for the Municipal Lot (identified as ID# 44B in the Study and described as “Harrisonburg Farmers Market”) had an 80% utilization rate (145 parking spaces occupied out of 181 parking spaces). Utilization rates reflect the ability of a motorist to find convenient and available parking within a particular area. It is a generally accepted principle that a supply of parking operates at optimum efficiency when peak occupancy is at 85% to 95% of capacity.

The Downtown Parking Study evaluated 17 potential developments that could impact parking dynamics in the near future. Within the study, Figure 21, Long Term Peak Hour (long term being described as 6 to 10 years from 2020), illustrated a peak hour demand with greater than 95% utilization for Block 43, which constituted the subject site. The proposal for 250 apartment units and 2,000 to 5,000 square feet of commercial space on the subject site was not known or studied in 2020. Staff believes the applicant’s proffer to provide a minimum of 480 parking spaces on the property will assist in mitigating parking pressures resulting from this development, the Downtown Park, and the surrounding area.

More information on the Downtown Parking study is available at the following link: <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/transportation-studies-plans#DowntownParkingStudy>.

On-street parking on the South Main Street and South Liberty Street frontages of the subject site has a 10-hour time limit. The on-street parking on South Liberty Street will be removed by the City as part of the South Liberty Street Project. If the proposed development is constructed, staff recommends the City evaluate whether on-street parking on South Main Street should be converted to different time-limits.

Cash Proffers

The Applicant has proffered cash contributions for

- Proffer II.c. Traffic calming (\$30,000),
- Proffer III.f. Parking enforcement (\$30,000), and
- Proffer V. Affordable housing (\$93,738).

The applicant commissioned a report completed by Virginia Proffer Solutions titled “Proffer Analysis for Housing Affordability, The Link Project, City of Harrisonburg, VA” (January 2026). The report details impact to affordable housing in the City related to the project. The applicant has based the amount of the affordable housing cash proffer on the report.

Staff notes that parking enforcement and affordable housing fall outside of the specific categories of cash contributions for off-site infrastructure under Virginia Code Section 15.2-2303.4. Additionally, the Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) and cut-through analysis submitted for the project did not identify a specific need for transportation mitigations.

The Applicant submits these proffers pursuant to Virginia Code Section 15.2-2303.4(D)(1), which states that an applicant may submit any offsite proffer they "deem reasonable and appropriate, as conclusively evidenced by the signed proffers" and the Applicant has "conclusively evidenced" their belief that these are reasonable by signing the proffer statement.

Public Water and Sanitary Sewer

The applicant has been advised that they will be responsible for completing a study of the water and sanitary sewer capacity prior to submittal of an engineered comprehensive site plan. Any public system improvements required to meet the increased demands resulting from the project will be the responsibility of the developer.

Housing Study

Matters related to housing have been discussed in the *Land Use* section of this report. Additionally, the City's Comprehensive Housing Assessment and Market Study (Housing Study) has this property in a Census block group that is classified as "No Data" according to market types. This block group did not have any housing sales data at the time of the study. The Housing Study identified that there is strong demand for expanding rental housing inventory at the lowest and highest income spectrum because the number of households in the lowest and highest income groups significantly exceed the number of housing units available for and affordable to them.

Public Schools

The City contracted with the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service to complete a report titled "Population and School Enrollment Projections for the City of Harrisonburg" (April 2025). The report can be found at the following link: https://harrisonburgva.gov/sites/default/files/city-manager/HarrisonburgSchoolEnrollment_2025-04-30_Final.pdf. This report provides overall student enrollment projections through 2034 as well as estimated student generation by housing type for each elementary school attendance zone.

Based on the Weldon Cooper Center report's calculation, the proposed 250 apartment units are estimated to generate 83 K-12 students at full build-out. According to the School Board's current attendance boundaries, Keister Elementary School, Thomas Harrison Middle School, and Harrisonburg High School would serve the students residing in this development.

Conclusion

Staff believes rezoning the property to B-1C has more advantages than disadvantages and it generally conforms with the City's Comprehensive Plan and the Harrisonburg Downtown 2040 Plan.

Options

1. Recommend approval of the rezoning request.
2. Recommend denial of the rezoning request.

Attachments

- Site maps
- Application and supporting documents
- Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) report, December 2025
- TIA Supplement Cut-Through Analysis, January 2026
- Public comments