

Albemarle County Board of Supervisors
401 McIntire Road
Charlottesville, VA 22902

August 11, 2022

**Regarding: Fifth St. Landing Self Storage Request for Special Exception
Section 4.20(a) Stepback in conventional commercial district**

Centennial American Properties (herein referred to as “CAP” or the “applicant”) seeks to develop a self-service storage facility on a portion of Albemarle County tax parcel 76-55A (the “property”). CAP is the contract purchaser of a portion of the property, which is owned by FTV Investments LLC. CAP seeks to construct a self-service storage facility. The building is proposed to be four (4) stories in height which, per Sec. 4.20(a) would require a 15-foot stepback. In accordance with Sec. 4.20(a)(4), the applicant respectfully requests a special exception be granted by the Board of Supervisors to waive the minimum stepback requirement in Sec. 4.20(a).

In your review of this request, please consider the following:

The proposed building is located over 300’ feet from 5th Street, behind the Fifth Street Landing commercial strip development; these factors combined will contribute to minimizing the visual presence of the proposed four-story building. The distance of the proposed building from the 5th Street corridor largely negates the need for a stepback, which is an architectural design feature that is incorporated into building design to provide relief from a monolithic streetscape, to mitigate the shadowing of a streetscape, and to avoid a canyon effect¹. Given the distance of the proposed building from 5th Street, and the immediate surrounding context, which includes a six-story hotel closer to the corridor than the proposed four-story building, the visual impact is expected to be minimal.

The zoning ordinance requiring the 15-foot stepback was adopted in order to implement the Neighborhood Model². In their June 3, 2015 meeting, the Board of Supervisors adopted the zoning text amendment to change the requirement for buildings of 35 feet or higher to have an additional setback requirement of two feet for each foot of building height. In lieu of this regulation, buildings 40 feet or higher now require a 15-foot stepback. With the context of the stepback regulation being furtherance of the Neighborhood Model principles, the following factors should be considered.

Elements of the Neighborhood Model are present within the context of this site; for example, new pedestrian connections were constructed as part of the somewhat recent development of the commercial

¹ Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes, June 3, 2015 (p. 99). Ron Higgins, Deputy Zoning Administrator, noted that the stepback requirement “avoids a ‘canyon’ effect”

² Staff report recommends approval of ZTA 2014-00003, noting the zoning text amendment is “further implementing the Neighborhood Model.

strip along Fifth Street Landing and parcels will continue to become more interconnected with the extension of Fifth Street Landing. The human-scale commercial strip along 5th Street shields the drive-through lane and some parking spaces from view from the 5th Street corridor, relegating those elements.

In review of this request, the final build-out condition of Fifth Street Landing should be considered. The commercial properties along Fifth Street Landing are largely bound by the Interstate 64 exit 120 ramp, Moore's Creek, and Fifth Street Landing. Due to this unique location, there is a disconnect between the proposed building and the pedestrian and other streetscape activity, where a building stepback would have no significant impact to the on-the-ground experience.

The Proposed Special Exceptions Supports the Goals of the Comprehensive Plan

The site design as proposed would follow the guidance of promoting infill and redevelopment. Specifically, the stepback from 5th Street allows for appropriate "screening, buffering and physical separation"³. Additionally, new development is encouraged within the defined growth area, in which the property is located. New commercial square footage on this site would provide for a greater efficiency in transportation, utility, and service provisions⁴, especially due to its proximity to a County Center and location along the 5th Street Corridor. The property is adjacent to the 5th Street Station Center and properties within the City of Charlottesville. This area of Southern Albemarle is largely residential, and these residents would be well-served by a strong commercial center.

For these reasons, the applicant requests a special exception from Section 4.20(a) as applied to the proposed four-story self-service storage facility. Granting the requested special exception would support goals of the Comprehensive Plan and Neighborhood Model without adverse impacts, due to the building's detached location from the streetscape.

³ Strategy 6c under Objective 6 of the Development Area chapter of the adopted Comprehensive Plan encourages "screening, buffering, and physical separation where necessary", page 261

⁴ Objective 6 of Development Areas in the County's Comprehensive Plan promotes infill and development. Infill on vacant land shall be prioritized and thus available for new development, page 260.