



NRCA, P.O. Box 3242, Alexandria, VA 22302

December 5, 2021

Planning Commission
c/o Department of Planning & Zoning
P.O. Box 178
Alexandria, VA 22314

Delivered Via Email: PlanComm@alexandriava.gov

Re: December 7, 2021, Docket Item #8, SUP #2021-00094—401 High Street

Dear Chairman Macek and Planning Commission Members:

North Ridge Citizens' Association ("NRCA") shares the following concerns regarding the above-referenced application and, more generally, relevant City zoning code provisions.

According to P&Z staff and the developer, the proposed replacement house meets the City's height, setback, and bulk (floor area) rules. Nonetheless, the result would be a structure of over 6,000 gross square feet that is taller than all the surrounding houses. Some of the new height and size would be due to the basement, which—while partially above-ground—is completely excluded from the floor area calculation.

If the proposed structure is indeed compliant with the City's zoning code, we strongly urge a reconsideration of the code itself. In particular, the basement exclusion is so over-broad that it essentially swallows the floor area rule. In addition, the "average pre-construction grade" criterion is difficult to visualize and understand (except through a surveyor's transit), and is susceptible to confusion and possible manipulation. Application of the basement exception and/or "average pre-construction grade" has already resulted in houses that to the eyes of neighborhood residents are clearly not compatible. An example in North Ridge is 3202 Old Dominion Drive. We encourage Commission members to look at that house, three stories tall viewed from the street, and judge if it is compatible with the surrounding houses. Is this what the City code is intended to allow?

Stormwater also is a significant concern. While the management of stormwater runoff is not an element of the SUP process, we urge that Transportation and Environmental Services and the developer give special attention to runoff in the review and permitting process. We understand that the property currently receives a good deal of stormwater from uphill properties and that the project may exacerbate drainage issues. This case offers yet another reason and opportunity for Alexandria to improve its stormwater management.

We appreciate the time and patience of the developer Mike Dameron and P&Z staff Ashley Labadie and Ann Horowitz in discussing the proposal with us. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Fehrenbach, President

cc: Yon Lambert, T&ES