

GREENCOURT AT PARKLAWN – SITE PLAN APPLICATION NO. 820130180

AMENDED STATEMENT OF JUSTIFICATION

In support of Site Plan No. 820130180, the Applicant provides the following Amended Statement of Justification to address how the Greencourt at Parklawn project complies with relevant provisions of the Montgomery County Zoning Ordinance, the Twinbrook Sector Plan and the Twinbrook Urban Design Guidelines.

I. BACKGROUND

- A. The “Greencourt at Parklawn” project (a.k.a. Washington-Rockville Industrial Park) is located within the Transit Station Development Area of the Twinbrook Sector Plan’s planning boundary.
- B. The subject property is zoned I-4 and consists of four existing lots recorded as follows: Lot 6 and part of Lot 7 on Plat No. 7016 and Lot 17 and part of Lot 16 on Plat No. 7995, both titled “Washington-Rockville Industrial Park”.
- C. The total gross tract area of the property is 110,623 square feet. The existing lot area is 88,961 square feet. The property is a ‘through lot’ with street frontage on both Parklawn Drive and Wilkins Avenue.
- D. Existing improvements include 85,273 square feet of gross floor area in three (3) adjoining light industrial warehouse buildings and one (1) stand-alone deli / restaurant.
- E. This Site Plan Application seeks approval to convert the three (3) adjoining buildings¹, along with surrounding surface parking areas, into one fully integrated building and site that will include approximately 109,318 square feet of light-

¹ The stand-alone restaurant structure (presently located on Lot 17, a.k.a. Smokey’s) is proposed to remain ‘as is’ under this Site Plan Application.

industrial/research & development office space with amenities, 548 square feet of patron area in the stand-alone restaurant (to remain ‘as is’) and a total of 123 off-street parking spaces. Of the 123 provided parking spaces, 49 spaces will be located in a new covered garage incorporated into the ground level of the southern section of the newly integrated building. A new third story addition will increase the height of the existing structures (currently only two stories) up to the maximum allowable of 42 feet under the I-4 zone. In addition, a new central atrium lobby adjacent to a landscaped entry courtyard will unify and organize the renovated buildings into a new and coherent whole.

II. TWINBROOK SECTOR PLAN

- A. **Special Standards for Light Industrial, Low Intensity (I-4) Zoned Properties in Transit Station Development Area** – The Sector Plan proposed that the I-4 zone be amended “to increase development flexibility and provide an accessory residential use option in this area of urban oriented light industrial uses”. (Plan, p. 46) In that regard, special standards designed to increase development flexibility for certain I-4 zoned properties have been codified in Section 59-C-5.44(f), which allow the Planning Board to waive or reduce development requirements relating to lot size, building and parking setbacks, green area, and off-street parking in Transit Station Development Areas. (Plan, p. 46) The Greencourt at Parklawn site is eligible for these special standards and, indeed, requires waivers from strict compliance with (1) parking setbacks, (2) minimum off-street parking requirements, and (3) green area requirements in order to achieve the type of redevelopment envisioned by the Sector Plan.

1. Parking Setbacks: Section 59-C-5.44(f)(5) provides that the

Planning Board may waive the minimum parking setback requirements of Article 59-E (specifically Sections 59-E-2.71 and 59-E-2.72) to achieve a better development design. For a redevelopment project that seeks to adapt existing buildings on a site to reuse (actually, encouraged by the Twinbrook Sector Plan), keeping the original building footprint and site layout largely intact, waivers from parking setback requirements are not just necessary to achieve better development design, they are critical to achieving redevelopment at all.

The relevant provisions of Article 59-E, from which waivers are required for the Greencourt at Parklawn project, are Sections 59-E-2.71 and 59-E-2.72 which require that parking facilities provide a 10 foot wide landscape strip adjacent to street right-of-way and a 4 foot wide perimeter landscape strip from adjoining properties, respectively. These landscape strip provisions essentially serve as parking facility setback requirements that if strictly imposed on the Greencourt project would eliminate most if not all of the site's existing surface parking spaces.

Allowing for flexibility in the application of development standards such as parking setbacks to sites such as the subject property is critical to achieving one of the stated goals in the Twinbrook Sector Plan and Twinbrook Urban Design Guidelines, which is to promote adaptive reuse of existing buildings as a means of reducing the carbon footprint of development in the area and maintaining the area's unique character. But to be able to do so successfully, especially in an area such as Twinbrook where many properties were originally developed under a previous Zoning

Ordinance that allowed for less stringent parking, open space and setback standards, requires development flexibility under today's code.

Here, the subject site is severely constrained in terms of available land area to accommodate sufficient off-street parking. The Applicant is proposing to undertake extraordinary measures to help offset this deficiency and facilitate a successful adaptive reuse by converting the entire ground floor of one of the existing buildings into a parking garage to create additional parking spaces. This will bring the total number of parking spaces provided on-site to 123 spaces – 49 of which will be located in the newly converted parking structure along with 74 spaces located on the site's existing surface parking areas. Efforts by the Applicant to create structured parking where none existed previously will result in a 66% increase in the number of total off-street parking spaces that will be available to serve the site. The total number of spaces to be provided even with the structured parking garage (123 spaces), however, still falls well short of the minimum required under Article 59-E (calculated to be 178 spaces) and will require approval of a separate waiver from the Planning Board (discussed further below).

The simple fact is that the imposition of the landscape buffer (or parking setback) requirements of Section 59-E-2.71 and 59-E-2.72 on the Greencourt project will result in the elimination of valuable surface parking areas that currently exist along the site's boundaries. If not waived, these setback requirements will effectively negate Applicant's significant efforts to increase the number of on-site parking by

incorporating structured parking into the existing building. Without the setback waivers, the project will lose valuable existing surface parking spaces, essentially negating the parking gains achieved by the new structured parking. The Applicant believes that the total number of parking spaces proposed by the project (123 spaces) is the minimal amount necessary for this adaptive reuse project to be competitive, and therefore, feasible.

With that said, the project is not insensitive to the need to alleviate the visual impacts of its existing surface parking areas. The project proposes to significantly improve its existing street frontage along Parklawn Drive by incorporating on-site planting beds adjacent to right-of-way where feasible and proposes to improve existing streetscapes within the right-of-way along both Wilkins Avenue and Parklawn Drive with the addition of green panels to accommodate shade/street trees. Applicant believes the frontage improvements proposed by the project will constitute a significant mitigation of the visual impacts of the site's existing parking facilities.

2. Off-Street Parking: With a "required parking" figure calculated for the entire site to be 178 spaces and only 123 spaced provided, a waiver from the off-street parking requirements of Article 59-E of approximately 31% will be required in order to facilitate the Greencourt project. The "required parking" number of 178 was calculated as follows: (a) 109,318 s.f. GFA – light industrial, manufacturing or warehouse rate of 1.5 spaces per 1,000 s.f. = 164 spaces, PLUS (b) 548 s.f. GFA – restaurant patron

area rate of 25 spaces per 1,000 s.f. = 14 spaces => TOTAL of 178 spaces required.

The Zoning Ordinance does not provide a specific rate for the types of uses that are allowable in the I-4 zone and that are expected to be accommodated by the Greencourt project such as “computer programming”, “software sales/services” or even for “research and development”. Therefore, the closest available parking rate category that relates to industrial-type uses was used to calculate the “required parking” figure, which is the “industrial, manufacturing establishment or warehouse” rate of 1.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet of gross floor area.

The proposed Zoning Ordinance Rewrite, as drafted so far, does have a parking rate for “other industrial uses not specifically listed” at 1.0 space per 1,000 square feet of gross floor area within a parking benefits district, but of course that rate is not yet applicable. It is notable, however, that if the requested parking waiver of 31% is granted, the resulting “provided parking” figure for the light industrial type uses proposed for the project’s consolidated main building (i.e., 109 spaces) would comply with the 1.0 space per 1,000 square feet of gross floor area standard contained in the Zoning Ordinance Rewrite.

The Planning Board has general authority pursuant to Section 59-E-4.5 to waive any requirement of Article 59-E (including the number of parking spaces provided) where justified. The Applicant believes that the requested parking waiver of 31% is justified for the Greencourt project for the following reasons:

- a. *Proximity and Accessibility to Metro:* The project is located within one-half mile of the Twinbrook Metrorail Station on the Red Line. The closest WMATA and Ride-On bus stop is located only 60 feet north of the project site and the nearest bus stop providing direct access to the Twinbrook station is located only 120 feet north of the site, both on Parklawn Drive. It is worth noting that if the subject property was in the CR (Commercial-Residential) zone, the site's one-half mile proximity to the Twinbrook Metrorail Station alone would qualify the project for transit reductions that would bring the project into compliance with minimum parking requirements without a waiver. Moreover, the Twinbrook Sector Plan specifically recommends approval of parking waivers for properties located in "Light Industrial Area 9" within which Greencourt is located, recognizing the area's close proximity to transit. (See Plan, p. 43)
- b. *Provision of Transportation Related Improvements and Amenities, Both On-Site and Off-Site, in order to Facilitate Increased Transit Use by Occupants of Project and Others in the Surrounding Area:* The site's existing accessibility to transit will be further enhanced by the following transportation related improvements proposed by the Applicant: (i) subsidizing metro fares to facilitate transit use by future tenants, (ii) providing a new bus shelter on-site, (iii) providing

more than the minimum required number of bicycle facilities on-site, (iv) sidewalk improvements and enhancements to the public realm along the site's frontages that will improve pedestrian safety, comfort and convenience.

c. *Existence of On-Street Parking Along Wilkins Avenue:* There is convenient on-street/metered parking along Wilkins Avenue that is available and currently underutilized.

3. Green Area: The Greencourt project seeks a reduction of the standard 20% green area requirement to 10% as permitted under Section 59-C-5.44(f)(6). The reasons that justify a green area reduction are very much the same reasons that support Applicant's request for waivers of the parking setbacks and off-street parking requirements. There is simply insufficient land area for the project to be able to achieve a 20% on-site green area requirement and at the same time maintain adequate site circulation and surface parking. This is despite the fact that the project seeks to incorporate new design elements that create usable green areas by "carving out" interior space from the main building and converting it into outdoor amenity space where none existed previously.

The renovated main building will feature two new atrium entrances – a large atrium entrance located on the Wilkins Avenue side of the building and a smaller atrium entrance located on the Parklawn Drive side. Both atriums will include decorative plantings, water features and stone benches for use and enjoyment by visitors and building occupants.

These atrium entrances along with on-site planting islands/beds

(identified by the medium green color on the attached Green Area Exhibit) amount to 7,964 square feet of green area, which equates to 7.2% of the site's gross tract area. In addition, the Green Area Exhibit also identifies in light and dark green colors, green areas that encompass sidewalks and green panels that either will be dedicated (light green) or were previously dedicated (dark green) to public use from the subject property. These areas amount to a total of 5,727 square feet of additional green area or 5.2% of the gross tract area. Assuming the Planning Board approves an overall reduction of the green area requirement to 10% of the gross tract area, Section 59-C-5.44(f)(g) allows for a maximum of 50% of the required green area to be located "off-site" in the same Transit Station Development Area. Considering the fact that the green area requirement is calculated based on a property's "gross tract area" as opposed to "net lot area", the Applicant believes that sidewalks and green panels within right-of-way attributable to the subject property must be allowed to be counted as "off-site" green areas, especially where the project is being required to make significant streetscape improvements within those areas. As such, the combined "on-site" and "off-site" green areas provided by the Greencourt project will amount to a total of 13,691 square feet or 12.4% of the site's gross tract area.

- B. Street / Pedestrian / Bikeway Networks** – One of the Plan's overarching goals is to achieve a connected system of streets, sidewalks and bike routes to make Twinbrook a functioning transit-oriented community. (Plan, p. 15) Specifically, the Greencourt project addresses the Plan's streetscape recommendations as

follows:

1. *“Construct streetscape sidewalks throughout the Plan area. They should be eight to 10 feet wide, set off the curb, and buffered by street trees.”*

There are existing sidewalks of varying widths along the site’s Parklawn and Wilkins frontages. Due to limited available right-of-way in this area, sidewalk widths of 8-10 feet are difficult to achieve as recommended in the Plan. The Greencourt project proposes, however, to reconfigure and improve the existing sidewalk system and streetscape along its two frontages in a manner that will achieve a more cohesive design (with green panels and street trees) as well as ADA compliant access.

2. *“Redevelopment projects should devise a streetscape plan that includes bicycle facilities, and coordinates all aspects of the street and building relationship to create pedestrian safety, comfort, and convenience.”*

The Plan recommends bicycle facilities in the nature of an on-street bike lane or signed shared roadway along Parklawn Drive in the area of the subject property. As part of the minor subdivision plan submitted to consolidate the three existing lots of the subject property, five additional feet of land along the site’s Parklawn frontage is being dedicated to right-of-way which will help accommodate future on-street bicycle facilities in accordance with the Plan.

In addition, the Greencourt project proposes to provide six bike

racks on-site, four of which are located in the parking garage and one each located close to the entrances along Wilkins Avenue and Parklawn Drive. Each bike rack will accommodate two bicycles hence the site as a whole will have the capacity to park a total of twelve bicycles, which is almost twice the minimum required of seven.

As indicated previously, the project proposes to reconfigure and improve the existing sidewalk system and streetscape along its two frontages in a manner that will achieve a more cohesive design (with green panels and street trees) as well as ADA compliant access. The new streetscape and sidewalk configurations now allow for pedestrian connections between the sidewalks along the site's two frontages to the new atrium entrances on either side of the building that vastly enhance pedestrian safety, convenience and comfort.

3. *"Buildings should be sided and designed to create clear street front entrances and active street facades."*

As evidenced by the architectural elevations submitted with this application, the Greencourt project constitutes a visually stunning transformation of the once dark and foreboding warehouse structures into a modern, more airy and transparent industrial office building. Street front atrium entrances will be created where none existed along both the Parklawn Drive and Wilkins Avenue frontages that will not only visually invite eyes from the street into the building, but will activate the building facades by offering functional amenity areas for building occupants and visitors to gather. The incorporation of design elements such as a 'flying

bridge' connection across the atrium along the Parklawn Drive façade will provide both function and striking architectural interest.

C. **Environment** – The Greencourt at Parklawn project achieves the Plan's overarching environmental goal which is "to move beyond the benefits of location through green building and site design". (Plan, p. 28) Specifically, the Greencourt project addresses the Plan's environmental recommendations as follows:

1. *"Increase the amount of pervious surface to improve the quality and reduce the quantity of stormwater run-off, mitigate heat island effects, and contribute to a green and pedestrian-friendly environment."*

Due to the fact that the Greencourt project is not proposing to raze the site, but rather is seeking to adaptively reuse the existing industrial warehouse structures, opportunities to increase pervious surface area on the site is limited. Nonetheless, the project will improve mitigation of heat island effects by the introduction of landscape islands and green panels to a site where very little has existed. Moreover, the renovated building will incorporate a new 'green roof' that will significantly reduce the quantity of stormwater run-off from the site, contributing far more to achieving a greener environment than existing conditions. Finally, as previously discussed, the project's proposed sidewalk and streetscape improvements along both Parklawn Drive and Wilkins Avenue will significantly advance the Plan's goal of achieving a more transit-oriented pedestrian-friendly environment for the area.

2. *“A significant portion of paved area should be shaded through trees within five years of occupancy or paved with reflective materials.... Improve air quality through development decisions that increase tree canopy and pervious surfaces, and the use of reflective materials.”*

The project complies with the 5% minimum surface parking landscaping requirement of Section 59-E-2.37. It is not feasible for the project to provide more than the minimum due to the site's extremely limited stormwater management options under the new stormwater regulations.

The stormwater concept that was approved by the Department of Permitting Services for the project requires compliance with all of the site's stormwater management requirements via a green roof. As a result, the amount of total land area disturbed (which dictates the extent/amount of stormwater management that is required on a site) had to be carefully limited since there is only a fixed amount of roof area available for a green roof to occupy. The limits of disturbance as shown on the revised Site Plan constitute the maximum that can be accommodated by the project's green roof. Applicant's design for the building's green roof had initially incorporated a roof deck area that would have allowed building occupants and visitors access to the green roof. However, as the stormwater management needs/demands of the project increased (mostly due to increased limits of disturbance for required streetscape improvements and ADA upgrades to access drives, etc.) the observation deck had to be sacrificed for additional green roof coverage, which now occupies the

entire roof area.

3. *“Street trees should be spaced and sized to create 30 percent canopy coverage on redeveloped areas, and open space should be planted and substantially pervious.”*

The project is proposing to plant deciduous shade trees along both its Parklawn Drive and Wilkins Avenue frontages to the maximum extent feasible as shown on the Landscape Plan.

III. TWINBROOK URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

- A. *Supports adaptive reuse of light industrial uses and the creation of an appropriate pedestrian-oriented environment through streetscape improvements. (p. 33)*

The Greencourt project is the epitome of an ‘adaptive reuse of light industrial uses’ as contemplated in the Design Guidelines. The project seeks to retain the best aspects of the existing warehouse buildings by exposing their ‘structural bones’ and integrating them into a modern, more airy and transparent design that wholly transforms the look and feel of the space without losing the property’s original industrial soul. As discussed previously, the project encompasses significant streetscape improvements that Applicant believes will directly promote a more pedestrian-oriented environment as recommended by the Design Guidelines. However, it is Applicant’s belief that good architectural design can serve as much, if not more, to improve streetscape and enhance the pedestrian’s experience, especially in an urbanized area such as Twinbrook, and has accordingly chosen to invest considerable more time and effort in perfecting the design of the proposed building to that end.

- B. *Encourages that open spaces provide a benefit to the occupants of a building. (p. 33)*

The project creates green area amenity spaces with water features in the two entrance atriums that are usable by and provide a benefit to the occupants as well as visitors of the building.

- C. *Environmental recommendations support proposed green roof, which also will be accessible to occupants of the building.*

As previously discussed, the project is proposing a green roof system as a means of meeting its stormwater management requirements, which is consistent with the Design Guidelines. Unfortunately, the initial design of making the green roof accessible to occupants and visitors of the building could not be retained due to the extent/amount of stormwater management required by the on-site and off-site improvements, resulting in the entire roof area being needed for green roof application.

- D. *Promotes limiting the parking supply through the Zoning Ordinance based on Metro Station proximity by allowing parking waivers in the Light Industrial Area and encourages shared and structured parking rather than surface lots. (p. 22)*

As discussed previously, the project is seeking a parking waiver of 31% from the minimum requirements of the Zoning Ordinance based on among other things the site's proximity (within one-half mile) to the Twinbrook Metrorail Station, which is supported by the Design Guidelines. Approval of limiting the on-site parking supply will be counter-balanced by measures undertaken by the Applicant in accordance with the Traffic Mitigation Agreement, which are

designed to promote and/or make more convenient the use of transit or other non-vehicular modes of transportation by occupants and visitors of the building. Also, as previously discussed, the project is undertaking the extraordinary measure of creating additional structured parking spaces through the conversion of the ground floor of one of the existing buildings into a covered garage, which is supported by the Design Guidelines.

- E. *Surface parking should be located at the "rear or side of building, away from primary streets and sidewalks..." (p. 23)*

Due to the location of the existing warehouse structures being adapted for reuse, it is not feasible to comply with this Design Guideline, but on-site landscaping to mitigate heat island warming as required by Section 59-E-2.37 will be provided as well as street trees along the site's two frontages to provide additional environmental benefits and visual relief.

IV. SITE PLAN REVIEW

In reaching its decision to approve this Site Plan Application, the Planning Board must make the following findings as required by Section 59-D-3.4(c):

- A. *"The site plan is consistent with an approved project plan for the optional method of development, if required."*

This finding is not applicable. The subject property is zoned I-4 and not subject to project plan approval. Application of the I-4 optional method of development standards is permitted under Section 59-C-5.44(e) of the Zoning Ordinance, subject only to the site plan approval procedures of Division 59-D-3.

- B. *"The site plan meets all of the requirements of the I-4 zone within a Transit Station Development Area (TSDA)."*

The data and information Tables found on the face of the Site Plan detail how this Site Plan Application intends to comply with the development standards and other requirements under the I-4 optional method of development within a Transit Station Development Area. With the exception of the several waivers from development standards requested and discussed in Section II.A. herein, the Site Plan Application complies with all other requirements.

- C. *“The locations of buildings and structures, open spaces, landscaping, recreation facilities, and pedestrian and vehicular circulation systems are adequate, safe and efficient.”*

The Site Plan Application for the “Greencourt at Parklawn” project includes a program of enhanced open space, landscaping and pedestrian circulation that will improve the sidewalk environment along its Parklawn Drive and Wilkins Avenue frontages and will provide attractive amenities for the building’s tenants as well as passers-by.

- D. *“Each structure and use is compatible with other uses and other site plans and with existing and proposed adjacent development.”*

The Greencourt at Parklawn project achieves the Twinbrook Sector Plan goals of encouraging redevelopment of existing sites that will allow more urban development patterns and small business development. The project’s architectural vision is to retain and expose as much of the existing structural components of the building as possible in order to allow a direct experience and connection to the surrounding area’s industrial character, achieving compatibility both in function and design.

- E. *“The site plan meets all applicable requirements of Chapter 22A (Forest*

Conservation), Chapter 19 (Water Resource Protection) and any other applicable laws.”

The Applicant is proposing to drastically reduce the stormwater run-off impacts of the existing buildings by utilizing a green-roof system on top of the new third story addition, which directly addresses one of the Twinbrook Sector Plan’s recommendations to “encourage redevelopment projects [that] contribute to the area’s environmental and urban design goals, including accommodating stormwater management.” (See page 43 of the Twinbrook Sector Plan.)

The application also satisfies all forest conservation requirements applicable to this property.