

Fifeville neighborhood wants small-area plan for Cherry Avenue
written by Newpack Team | June 20, 2016



As Charlottesville continues to experience a development boom, the Fifeville Neighborhood Association wants the City Council's help in guiding the future of its main thoroughfare.

"Cherry Avenue urgently needs a small-area plan," Carmelita Wood, the association's president, said in a written request to the city. "This part of Charlottesville is poised for rapid change because of its location between the University of Virginia and downtown."

The 2013 update of Charlottesville's Comprehensive Plan called for city officials to "examine opportunities" in several specific geographic areas within the locality's 10.4 square miles.

The plan's No. 1 land-use goal is to create a "sense of place" through small-area plans to guide public investment in infrastructure.

Charlottesville has conducted two such plans in the past few years. The first was the Strategic Investment Area to guide development of 330 acres south of the Downtown Mall. Cunningham & Quill was paid \$190,000 for their work on the plan.

The city next hired Rhodeside & Harwell for \$475,000 for work on the West Main Streetscape. In March, the City Council agreed to create construction documents for a new layout for the street. The city currently is in negotiations with the company to do that work, as well.

This spring, the council allocated \$50,000 toward another small-area plan in the fiscal year that begins

July 1. No decision has been made as to which location should be studied.

Cherry Avenue is one of 10 possible locations for the next plan. Other possibilities include the Fontaine neighborhood commercial district, Fifth Street Extended and Preston Avenue. Commissioners also toured the Woolen Mills area in May.

"The Planning Commission plans to continue their tours of the areas to gain further data leading to a possible prioritization," said city planning manager Missy Creasy.

Members of the Fifeville Neighborhood Association have been lobbying city officials to consider putting Cherry Avenue at the top of the list. Many are still alarmed that a 120-bed hotel will be built at the corner of Cherry and Ridge Street.

"Cherry Avenue is really quite a corridor and right now there is not a lot going on except for hotels, which aren't really going to benefit particularly directly the people who live in Fifeville," said Missy Wernstrom, a Fifeville resident who made a formal request of the City Council at a recent Our Town meeting.

"People traveling along there — what they're seeing are mostly empty lots or places where one can go in and buy beer, and that's not really that tempting for people," Wernstrom said.

After the City Council agreed to amend a rezoning to allow a hotel in the William Taylor Plaza development, the Fifeville Neighborhood Association formed a subcommittee to do preliminary legwork for a small-area plan. The group held a series of visioning meetings and surveyed residents and businesses.

Their work culminated in a 20-page vision statement that its authors say will capture the hopes and dreams of a "cultural gem" that was predominantly inhabited by African-Americans for much of the 20th century.

"Fifeville has also seen significant demographic shifts in more recent decades that have diversified the residential communities surrounding Cherry Avenue, including an influx of white, Latino and African residents," reads the narrative. "Many long-term and generational residents worry about the stability of the neighborhood and their place in it as neighborhood demographics shift."

Preservation of existing housing is a premium goal, but residents also stated they do not want to see large apartment buildings.

Participating residents said they also want the speed limit on Cherry Avenue lowered to 25 mph, flashing lights at all crosswalks, publicly maintained trash cans and more events in Tonsler Park.

The Cherry Avenue Committee's work has been welcomed by some members of the Planning Commission.

"Many other commissioners have been receiving emails and other communication from residents of the Cherry Avenue area who have put together some work on starting their own small-area plan," said Commissioner Genevieve Keller. "That's a community initiative to be applauded and commended, and I hope we'll find some way to work with them."

The Planning Commission will take a tour of the Cherry Avenue corridor at a work session next week.

"If other neighborhoods that are considering small-area plans did a little bit of homework and wanted to pass that on to the Planning Commission, we'd probably be very appreciative," said John Santoski, chairman of the commission.

Further debate over small-area plan locations comes at a time when the city also is preparing for a full review of the city's zoning code.

The long-awaited "code audit" is expected to begin sometime after the City Council adopts the Streets That Work transportation planning initiative.

In the meantime, Wernstrom told the City Council that many in Fifeville want to see a review of the zoning code to open up the possibilities for a grocery store on Cherry Avenue.

The city's director of neighborhood development services responded that the city would work with anyone willing to invest in a grocery store in the downtown area, which he called a "food desert."

"We'd certainly be glad to work with the person in terms of expediting the required regulatory requirements," Alexander Ikefuna told Wernstrom.

Meanwhile development continues at the eastern end of the Cherry Avenue commercial zoning district. The Piedmont Development Group is in the final stages of site plan approval for a 36,000-square-foot, mixed-use building on vacant land on Roosevelt Brown Boulevard.

"We are working on the architecture and looking for tenants," said the company's president, Katurah Roell.