



January 8, 2018

VIA U.S. MAIL AND EMAIL

The Honorable Nikuyah Walker, The Honorable Heather Hill, The Honorable Wes Bellamy,
The Honorable Kathy Galvin, The Honorable Mike Signer
via email: council@charlottesville.org

Charlottesville Planning Commission
via email: planningcommission@charlottesville.org

Mr. Maurice Jones
Charlottesville City Manager
via email: mjones@charlottesville.org

Dear Mayor Walker, Members of City Council, Planning Commissioners, and Mr. Jones:

I am writing to you as a long-time resident, business owner and investor in Charlottesville. Over the past many months, the Staff and Planning Commission have been undertaking what many believe is a vitally important task on an impossible timeframe – an update to the City’s Comprehensive Plan. The mismatch between the scope of the task and the time allocated for completion was underscored the evening of January 3, 2018 as the Planning Commission worksession which I attended unfolded.

If you agree that the City’s Comprehensive Plan is the most important and informed expression of the community’s vision for the future of the City, then I trust you will agree that it should be researched, analyzed, prepared and thoroughly vetted by and through all City stakeholders to enjoy the maximum public support and buy-in by the governed.

The timeframe under which the Commission has been operating was very ambitious from the beginning, and with good intentions. However, as events have unfolded since the process began, and in light of other City studies and initiatives that are proceeding independently of the Comprehensive Plan, it is clear to many in the community that the Comprehensive Plan process should be extended to allow for appropriate incorporation of peripheral studies. I am referring specifically, but not exclusively, to the Housing Needs Assessment due to be available for review by City Staff in DRAFT form at the end of March.

E-mail: Steven.Blaine@leclairryan.com
Direct Phone: (434) 245-3423
Direct Fax: (434) 296-0905

123 East Main Street, Suite 800
Charlottesville, Virginia 22902
Phone: 434.245.3444 \ Fax: 434.296.0905

CALIFORNIA \ COLORADO \ CONNECTICUT \ MARYLAND \ MASSACHUSETTS \ MICHIGAN \ NEW JERSEY \ NEW YORK \ PENNSYLVANIA \ VIRGINIA \ WASHINGTON, D.C.

ATTORNEYS AT LAW \ WWW.LECLAIRRYAN.COM

January 8, 2018

Page 2

It is fair to say that among the most pressing, important and impactful issues facing the City today is the lack of affordable housing. The Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) was recently expanded under the contract with the vendor to extend beyond the SIA to the entire City, and that is a good thing. In order to establish the goals, objectives and strategies of both the Housing and Land Use elements of the Comprehensive Plan, as well as other inter-related plan elements, the Planning Commission must have adequate time to evaluate the findings of the HNA and piece together the many disparate and complicated elements of housing and land use policy needed to overcome identified deficiencies and provide a workable plan that can be implemented with the support and consent of those most involved and affected.

Another matter of serious concern arose during the worksession on January 3, and that has to do with public engagement and involvement. Some Commissioners expressed the belief that if stakeholders are merely informed of the Commission's efforts, that is sufficient. Public input is vital to public ownership of a plan, and without that, the City may well find itself stymied for the foreseeable future as it attempts to implement strategies and objectives that are not consistent with the many and various stakeholders' wishes, wants, needs and abilities to deliver. Given the dynamics of a City with empowered citizens and neighborhood groups and an increasingly active and committed private sector development community, it would seem the most prudent path forward would be for much more focused and structured dialogue between and among these groups and the City so that consensus principals can be identified and formalized and the steps needed to accomplish those principals can be established and assigned as appropriate.

Three minutes at a microphone by citizens and other stakeholder groups does not constitute dialogue and discussion – it literally gives lip service to the concerns of the governed whereas frank and open discussion about concerns and options for addressing them requires a two-way communication process.

Please give the citizens, Planning Commission and Staff the time and tools they need to do the best work possible on behalf of the entire City. At a minimum, an additional 6-8 months would seem to be necessary for such a meaningful dialogue to take place.

Respectfully,



Steven W. Blaine

cc: Stacy Pethia and Alex Ikefuna, NDS; Brenda Kelley and Mike Murphy, City Manager's office; Kaki Dimock, Human Services; Elaine Poon, CLIHC; Greg Powe, CADRe; Anthony Haro, TJACH; Sean Tubbs, *Cville Tomorrow (via email)*