



To: Harrisonburg City Council
From: Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition
Date: 8/12/2025
Subject: Comments on the Link Development Rezoning and Site Plan

Dear Harrisonburg City Council Members,

On behalf of the Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Link development. As an organization dedicated to building better communities for biking and walking, we believe projects of this scale deserve careful consideration, not just for their impact on adjoining parcels but also for how they shape the future of our transportation network, land use patterns, and downtown's overall vibrancy.

We approach this project with our mission in mind: advancing safe, accessible, and equitable opportunities for walking and biking. Housing, transportation, and land use are inseparable. Choices made here will ripple across our community for decades.

Why do Developments such as the Link Matter:

Walkability and Bikeability

The project's downtown location, adjacent to existing and planned bike/ped infrastructure (including the future Liberty Street two-way cycle track), makes it easier for residents to choose walking and biking for daily trips. Placing more homes within a short ride or walk of jobs, groceries, schools, and services reduces car dependence and builds a stronger, more connected downtown.

This location is within a short walk or ride to JMU, downtown jobs, grocery stores, the farmers market, and multiple transit stops. We should add housing in places like this in our downtown core to reduce car dependency and give people real transportation choices.

Downtown Housing Density

Harrisonburg's adopted Comprehensive Plan and the Downtown 2040 plan call for more people to live downtown. We believe this is essential for our region and will support local businesses, reduce sprawl, and preserve surrounding green space and agricultural lands. Higher residential density in the urban core also supports transit and makes active transportation more practical.

Parking Policy

The reduced parking ratio is a meaningful shift toward a more walkable and bikeable future. We appreciate that the project is not overbuilt with parking, which can otherwise inflate costs and encourage car use. We believe more developments should separate the cost of parking from the monthly rent.



Building Frontage & Street Activation

We commend the city staff's work securing the proposal to front the building directly on the street with active ground-floor uses. This creates a better, more engaging pedestrian environment by reducing dead zones and making the block feel shorter and more walkable. Developments that meet the sidewalk with entrances, windows, and activity—not blank walls or surface parking—make walking and biking more appealing and safer.

Areas for Improvement and Caution

Neighborhood Impacts

We acknowledge resident concerns about parking spillover, the building's scale and design, and compatibility with surrounding streets. Solutions could include targeted permit parking, enhanced architectural detailing, and landscaping that softens the visual impact.

Housing Affordability & Inclusion

While the project increases supply, it does not guarantee affordability. We urge the city and developer to explore ways to include a range of price points or to contribute to housing affordability programs so that the benefits of downtown living are accessible to more people.

Shared Micromobility (Bike Share/Scooter Share)

We would love to see the City of Harrisonburg further explore a shared micromobility solution integrated with James Madison University and developers of properties like the Link. Such a system could consist of shared bikes, scooters, or other small electric mobility devices for residents to rent short-term. We believe this is an important step towards a city with more trips taken by human-scale transportation options.

Street-Level Activation & Mixed Use Potential

While we commend the proposal to front the building directly on the street with active ground-floor uses, we believe this is a rare opportunity to go further. True street activation comes from ground-floor spaces alive throughout the day and evening, where residents and visitors can run errands, grab a coffee, browse a shop, or access community services without getting in a car.

We encourage the developer to increase the mixed-use space at the street level. More retail, service, and community-oriented uses would help knit this project into the surrounding downtown fabric, support local businesses, and create a more engaging and welcoming experience for people walking, biking, or taking transit along Liberty Street. The more reasons



people have to linger at street level, the safer, more connected, and more vibrant our downtown becomes.

Why the Bicycle Coalition is Commenting

Some may ask why a Bicycle Coalition is weighing in on a private development. The answer is simple: how and where we build determines how and whether people can walk and bike. Development in the urban core often makes active transportation safer and more appealing, while building on the outskirts or more suburban settings often makes active transportation harder and more dangerous.

We are not taking a blanket position of support or opposition. Instead, we highlight what works for a walkable, bikeable Harrisonburg and where refinements could better serve the community. We believe our city is strongest when development decisions reflect adopted plans, respond to resident concerns, and advance a future that allows for more transportation choices while making a range of active transportation options easier.

Of course, no project is perfect. It's also valid to raise questions about affordability, design, and long-term neighborhood impact. But we also believe in confronting those questions without defaulting to fear of change.

Thank you for your service and for considering these comments as part of your deliberation.

Sincerely,

Kyle Lawrence

On behalf of the Board of the Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition