

Statement to Richmond Board of Zoning Appeals
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On behalf of the trustees, faculty, students, staff, alumni/ae, and friends of Union Presbyterian Seminary, I would like to thank the Board for the opportunity to speak with you today about our request for a Special Exception to the nonconforming use of the 8 structures on the land we call the Westwood Tract.

I would like to orient the Board to the broader circumstances of this situation and hopefully give some indication as to why the Special Exception would be helpful to the seminary's ability to accomplish an important part of its mission.

While I have been president of the seminary since 2007, attempts to realize the mission and fiduciary potential of the Westwood Tract are longstanding and in fact date back to the institution's very roots in Ginter Park 120 years ago. Let me share a brief history:

- In 1895, President Walter Moore sought an urban area in which to relocate the seminary, which was originally in Farmville. He felt that giving students the ability to learn how to be part of a bigger community would benefit them in their service to the church, which is a key part of our mission today. Major Lewis Ginter made it possible to relocate to Richmond by generously donating the 12 acres of land that forms the seminary's main quadrangle located between Brook Road and Chamberlayne Avenue.
- That donation served the seminary's interests and proved to serve Major Ginter's as well. At the time, his dream to build a community was struggling—only one homeowner had chosen to purchase land and build in what would become Ginter Park—*until* the seminary became the area's anchor institution.
- In 1901, in order to ensure that the seminary had sufficient real estate holdings to support its larger mission, 12 seminary supporters formed the Westwood Land Company and purchased the 34-acre piece of land called the Westwood Tract for the seminary's expansion. The land was completely transferred to the seminary by 1910.
- Early plans called for the *full* development of the land. A capital campaign was launched to bring those plans to fruition, but was unfortunately halted by the stock market crash of 1929. Had the campaign been successful, the full 34 acres would have been occupied by:
 - a library and an unassigned building along Brook Road
 - dormitory complexes

- a refectory
 - faculty homes
 - a gymnasium, and
 - an athletic field
- Since 1929, multiple attempts to realize the intent of the gift of the land we received in 1901 have reached varied levels of success. In the absence of an opportunity to develop the land since that time, the seminary has been pleased to allow anyone and every one from every part of the city free and unencumbered access to the land.

Fast forward to Union today. Our mission is simple: to equip the next generation of faith leaders—many of whom stay in Richmond to enrich our community as leaders in churches, hospitals and non-profit agencies. In order to accomplish that mission, Union must attract the strongest students. And in the competitive environment in which Union finds itself, attracting the strongest students means providing those prospective students with the best we can offer in faculty, curriculum, library, classroom facilities, internship possibilities, and housing and recreation facilities. Our ability to create competitive housing is directly related to our mission. We are at long last in a position to put the land to use to do just that.

Our outmoded facilities simply do not compare with new housing facilities boasted by peer seminaries along the East Coast. I know, I have visited each and every one. Not addressing housing means we become further and further disadvantaged when students compare our housing facilities to facilities at other schools they visit around the country. Young students who have just graduated from college are used to modern, functional facilities like those on the undergraduate campuses from which they come

We set out to build apartments through a partnership with Bristol Corporation, believing it to be our best option for overcoming this competitive disadvantage. From the beginning, we listened and responded to neighborhood concerns and desires. Because of the desire to preserve open space, we spent over 8 months trying to find a way to use state tax credits as an incentive for potential buyers to purchase the land from the seminary and then donate the land as open space. When it became clear that the complexity of the model and the lack of sufficient donor-investors made it unlikely this plan could succeed, our board of trustees voted to complete the relationship with Bristol and move forward with plans to build 300 apartments on the 15 eastern acres of the Westwood Tract.

The adjustments we made during what has now been a two-year conversation have been significant. We responded to concerns on everything from the size and density of the tract to be developed to architectural details to building heights, which alone was quite costly for the

seminary. Unfortunately, further delays will make it more difficult for the seminary to attract new students because we simply don't have adequate space to house them.

When the City notified us of the zoning issue, we understood that we could have simply removed the 8 homes and the physical plant and moved on without further delay. We are here today to ask for a Special Exception so that we do not have to relocate the families living there or have to pay to have these structures demolished

Thank you for giving your attention to our request.