

Has Rite Aid definitively promised to come? Has Council voted on it? Is it a done deal? Should I transfer my prescriptions Rite Aid now?

No. No. No. And “We wouldn’t.” Everyone has signed a non-binding letter-of-intent already. Here’s the process from this point forward:

- Council will hold a public hearing about this on August 9. On the 9th, or sometime thereafter, Council will vote on the proposed sale.
- Assuming the Council has approved, Rite-Aid will get the final blessing of their powers-that-be.
- The parties will sign a contract conforming to the terms of the letter-of-intent.
- Rite Aid will have 60 days to nose around the property and terminate the deal if they find something wrong. Note that they’ve already been nosing around plenty. They’ve been the guys with white coats standing up on little platforms. (Sorry—pharmacy joke.)
- They plan to open pretty soon, but we’re just taking things one step at a time.

Why has the staff been seeking a pharmacy?

The Council’s resolution of January 14, 2020, declared that Bridgewater’s “people cannot go without a pharmacy” and directed the manager to seek and recruit pharmacies.

Was Rite Aid your only contact?

Not at all. We reached out to dozens of pharmacy companies, from nation’s largest pharmacy chain to sole proprietorships all over Virginia. CVS and Walgreen’s were aloof. Supermarkets with in-house pharmacies seemed mostly amused. The proprietorships were overwhelmed just trying to stay afloat. (In fact, Gwen contacted some members of the General Assembly about the various issues afflicting independent pharmacies. There doesn’t appear to be much relief in sight for them.)

We gained significant traction with two local companies: Harrisonburg Community Health Center, Inc. (“HCHC”) and Augusta Health Care, Inc. HCHC expressed a desire to build a clinic and pharmacy in Bridgewater, but they are dependent upon federal funding, which evidently has diminished. Augusta Health responded to our expression of need, and they have been strong allies, both intrepid and resourceful. Their tentative plan involved bringing a profitable specialty to Bridgewater along with a pharmacy, hoping that the specialty’s upside would offset the pharmacy’s downside.

We are beholden to both HCHC and Augusta Health for their efforts. It is fair to say that neither entity will be upset that someone else will be building a pharmacy in town, but we will keep working with them to bring other services here.

Why did Rite Aid choose 425 North Main?

Rite Aid had been negotiating with a private landowner on North Main Street, but they could not find a mutually acceptable price. Then they turned their attention to our site. They liked the site for the same reason it appealed to HCHC and Augusta Health: with the Mt. Washington Connector on the horizon, the pharmacy will be located at an important intersection.

The parcel is a portion of the land we purchased from Sergio and Jodi Coppola. All told, Rite Aid asks to purchase about 0.4 acres.

The Town announced it would give the property to HCHC. Will it charge Rite Aid?

Yep. Rite Aid isn't a 501(c)(3), so it's in a different boat from HCHC. At the same time, the resolution made plain that our objective was landing the pharmacy, not maximizing one-time dollars in the transaction.

So knowing that (i) we wouldn't give the land away but (ii) we didn't want to price ourselves out of a pharmacy, with Rite Aid already having walked away from one negotiation, we set the price fairly low. We used the same square-foot price as had been offered to us for some nearby land recently.

Of course, the deal will require that Rite Aid open a pharmacy. They won't be allowed to flip the property to a mudflap distributor.

What will become of the stormwater pilot project?

Recall that our plans had been to give HCHC the southern end of the property, use the former Supply Room as museum space, and create a grass parking lot on the rest of the land. That was probably a bad plan. Augusta Health advised that people arriving for health care or pharmacy services might not be able to navigate a soft surface.

Accordingly, Rite Aid's 0.4 acres includes enough land for them to build their own parking lot. We haven't yet found an appropriate use for the Supply Room building, so it's too soon to say what will remain of the pilot project on the site.

All that said, note that we are well along in the design of our other stormwater pilot project at Grove and College.

What does this mean for the Mt. Washington Connector?

We know that the Coppola and Talliaferro land was purchased in large part to support the Mt. Washington Connector. Accordingly, we reserved easements everywhere they might be needed for the Connector.

