

MEMORANDUM

Westchase District Long Range Plan Update

TO: Westchase LRP Update Consultant Team

FROM: Ed, Project Manager, Asakura Robinson

DATE: September 4, 2026

RE: 2900 Wilcrest deed restriction request: evolving District and Westchase Community Association posture on setbacks, and implications for the Long Range Plan Update

1. Purpose

This memorandum documents the Westchase District Board of Directors discussion of the 2900 Wilcrest deed restriction request at the September 3, 2026 board meeting, records how the positions of District board members and Westchase Community Association (WCA) leadership shifted over the course of that discussion, and identifies what the exchange means for the Long Range Plan Update. It closes with a recommendation regarding Steering Committee composition.

2. Bottom Line

- The District board and WCA leadership are converging on a position that dimensional deed restrictions written for 1970s and 1980s development economics are now an obstacle to reinvestment, and that relief should be granted in exchange for negotiated design and landscape commitments rather than withheld on principle.
- Jim Russ made the strongest and clearest case for that position, framing setback relief as a precondition for attracting the Class B and C office replacement the District has been seeking for years, and stating plainly that he would accept tree loss or relocation to get it.
- Phillip Schneidau opened cautiously, presenting the request neutrally and identifying the mature live oaks as the issue that troubled the WCA more than the setback itself. Over the course of the discussion he moved toward the board's position and closed in general agreement, committing to advise Alliance Residential Company that the WCA can support the setback modification subject to specific conditions.
- The board asked for something in return, principally a landscape plan, an increased replacement tree count, and some form of aesthetic review of the Wilcrest frontage. No District mechanism currently exists to deliver that review. The Long Range Plan Update is the logical place to create one.
- Recommendation: add Jim Russ to the Long Range Plan Update Steering Committee.

3. The Request

The office building at 2900 Wilcrest is under negotiation for acquisition by Alliance Residential Company, which proposes to demolish the existing structure and develop a four-story apartment community of approximately 300 units on a site estimated at four to six acres. The design is a “Texas donut” with the parking structure held in the interior of the block, which several board members contrasted favorably with the exposed structures on

Wilcrest and Richmond. The existing building is fully vacant and was characterized at the table as a marginal Class B or, more realistically, a Class C asset with no credible near-term leasing prospect.

The applicant has asked the WCA for three things:

- A use change under the applicable deed restrictions. The WCA treats this as routine in substance, though procedurally involved.
- A setback modification on two frontages, summarized below.
- Amendment or elimination of additional restrictive clauses. The initial ask was framed as striking the setback clause outright, and after the first meeting expanded to roughly nine items including utilities, permitted uses, architectural design, setback lines, park and landscaping requirements, screening, signage, parking, and distribution lines.

3.1 Setback modification requested

Frontage	Current	Requested	Character
Wilcrest	38 feet	25 feet	Primary thoroughfare and the frontage that carries the District's public image
Meadow Glen	25 feet	15 feet	Side street; also the frontage where the corner live oaks stand

The WCA declined to eliminate the setback clause and will consider only an amendment to the numeric standard. It also declined the broader request to strike additional clauses, on the reasoning that doing so would give the owner unrestricted latitude on the property in perpetuity. Phillip Schneidau asked the applicant to identify specific language objections in writing and has not yet received a response. A related request to run overhead electrical service in place of underground was refused outright, on the grounds that Westchase has no overhead distribution and the distance to the CenterPoint connection is short.

4. The Applicant

Alliance Residential Company is headquartered in Scottsdale, Arizona and operates sixteen regional offices across the West, Southwest, South Central, Southeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Northeast. Its South Texas regional office is at 820 Gessner Road, Suite 1000, Houston, Texas 77024, with a second Texas office in Austin at 1111 West 6th Street, Suite 320, and a North Texas office in Dallas.

The Gessner Road address is worth noting for the Long Range Plan Update. The applicant is not an out-of-market buyer taking a flyer on an unfamiliar submarket. Its South Texas platform is based immediately adjacent to the District, on a corridor the plan is already examining.

Board members characterized the firm as a high-volume national developer that builds on the order of forty properties annually, that does not cut corners on landscaping or architecture, and that would likely bring an institutional equity partner into the deal. That characterization did substantial work in the discussion. It allowed members to treat the setback request as the cost of attracting a credible sponsor rather than as a concession to a marginal one.

5. The Tree Question

The mature trees, not the setback dimension, were the actual point of contention. Irma Sanchez arranged an informal arborist review, which reported:

- The trees are in good condition overall but have not received the maintenance they should have had.
- The significant specimens are four live oaks at the corner of Meadow Glen and Wilcrest and five live oaks south of Meadow Glen near the parking garage. The trees between them, including several elms, have effectively lived out their useful life.
- Off-site relocation is not feasible. The specimens exceed transport clearance limits.
- Internal relocation to a courtyard might be possible for one or possibly two trees at a cost in the range of \$90,000 to \$100,000, with no survival guarantee and a required one-year maintenance program.
- Excavation depth for the structured parking is likely to sever significant root systems regardless of protection measures.

Against that, the applicant has indicated it would plant approximately 118 replacement trees and would contribute to a Westchase tree reserve or foundation. The latter entity does not currently exist at the district level (though there is such a provision for the City of Houston's forestry fund) and is not contemplated in WCA bylaws. City of Houston tree mitigation requirements are expected to apply on a caliper inch basis in any event.

Two experiences shaped the room. Irma Sanchez recounted a District corridor reconstruction in which 116 trees were removed and replaced with a higher overall canopy, producing no public complaints because the finished condition read as better than what it replaced. A board member with private development experience described a \$125,000 tree relocation at Lakeside Country Club that did not survive. Both anecdotes pointed the same direction: replacement is more reliable than preservation, and the visible outcome matters more to the public than the individual specimens.

6. How the Positions Evolved

6.1 Jim Russ: setback relief as economic development policy

Jim Russ was the most forceful voice in the room and the one who reframed the question. His argument, assembled across several exchanges, ran as follows.

- The 38-foot setback is an artifact. It reflects a period in the mid-1970s and early 1980s when this was the edge of Houston, land was cheap, and surface parking was the default. Land is now bought by the foot. A standard written for one land economics cannot be applied unchanged under another.
- Flexibility to modify the setback is what allows a project to fit today's numbers. Without it, the pro forma does not close and the site stays vacant.
- If the District makes itself difficult to build in, fewer sponsors will try. He tied this directly to the board's own long-standing question of what to do with obsolete office buildings, and observed that the board cannot ask that question for years and then obstruct the first credible answer to it.
- On trees, he was unambiguous. His view, drawn from his own development practice, is that neglected mature trees on a redevelopment site should come down and be replaced with new plantings, because they will not survive construction in any case and the replacement canopy will outperform them. He was open to relocation where feasible but did not treat preservation as a condition of support.

- He also pressed a broader point about product type, arguing for higher-density single family alternatives on other obsolete office sites, including zero lot line and gated garden home communities, alongside multifamily.

Jim Russ's position was not simply pro-developer. It was an argument that dimensional standards are a policy instrument and that the District should be deliberate about what it buys with them. That is the same argument the Long Range Plan Update needs to make in writing.

6.2 Phillip Schneidau: from reticence to general agreement

Phillip Schneidau opened in a notably different register. He presented the request procedurally, explained the WCA's enforcement role and the divergence between association and District boundaries, and was careful to note that the WCA board of three had its own view but wanted input from the room before acting. His stated concern was specific and did not center on the setback:

The setback modification was something the WCA board could live with. What stopped them was seeing the mature trees that would be affected, which he described as bothering the three of them more than the dimensional change itself.

He was firmest on scope. He rejected the applicant's attempt to strike the setback clause entirely rather than amend the number, and rejected the follow-on request to remove three or four additional restrictions, describing that as carte blanche on the property forever. He held that line throughout and did not soften it.

On the trees and the setback, though, his position moved as the discussion accumulated. Several things appear to have shifted it: the arborist's finding that the trees were unmaintained and that the significant specimens could not be relocated; Irma Sanchez's account of the 116-tree reconstruction and its higher replacement canopy; the board's near-unanimous framing of the project as the catalyst the District has waited for; and the practical observation that if the WCA withholds support the applicant can still pursue the proxy route, in which case the modification most likely fails and the site stays as it is.

By the close of the item he had committed to going back to Alliance with the WCA's general support for the setback modification, subject to specific amendment language, a landscape plan, and a negotiated replacement tree count. He asked the board for backing if organized opposition materializes over the tree removals, which is itself a signal that he expects to defend an approval rather than a denial.

6.3 The rest of the board

The remaining discussion was close to consensus and largely reinforcing. Recurring themes:

- The District has no recent catalytic new construction and needs a demonstration project. Members expected a successful Alliance project to convince outside capital to buy and upgrade Westchase properties, naming other national multifamily builders as likely followers.
- There is a real gap in higher-quality residential product, which in turn constrains the District's retail. Members connected residential quality directly to retail patronage.
- The fiscal case was made explicitly: roughly 400 or more new residents, and a potential appraised value on the order of \$200,000 per unit or more.
- Several members asked that the WCA and District extract something in return. The most concrete ask was for an approval or review process giving the District input on the Wilcrest frontage, with the District's work on Walnut Bend cited as the standard for how sidewalks and frontage treatment should look.

- Members also asked whether the deed restrictions as a whole should be reviewed for developer friendliness, noting that no one at the table could recall the last time they were examined. Phillip Schneidau responded that the signage and parking provisions are not onerous, that requests over the years have been almost exclusively use changes, and that this is the first setback request in his memory.

7. Implications for the Long Range Plan Update

7.1 Deed restrictions are the operative regulatory layer

In the absence of zoning, the binding dimensional controls on redevelopment in Westchase sit in private deed restrictions administered by the WCA, and the approval pathway is a proxy solicitation requiring owners of 51 percent of association land acreage, measured by acreage rather than by building. Every landowner in the association will receive a proxy on this request, likely within two months. The plan should treat the deed restriction regime, and the WCA's administration of it, as a primary implementation instrument rather than as background context.

7.2 This is a precedent, not a one-off

Phillip Schneidau's observation that this is the first setback request in association memory is the single most useful fact from the meeting. Whatever the WCA negotiates here becomes the template for the next Class B or C office site. That argues for the plan recommending a standing framework, so the next applicant is not negotiated from scratch and the District is not dependent on the composition of a three-member WCA board at a given moment.

7.3 The design review gap

The board asked for aesthetic input on the Wilcrest frontage and no one could say how that would be delivered. There is no District design review mechanism, and the WCA's authority runs to enforcing existing restrictions rather than to negotiating frontage quality. This is a concrete, board-originated request with no institutional home, which makes it an unusually well-positioned recommendation for the plan to carry. The Walnut Bend work gives us an in-District precedent to point to.

7.4 Canopy policy

The board is converging on replacement rather than preservation. The plan should give that a defensible structure: a replacement standard tied to caliper inches and to frontage condition, guidance on where replacement canopy is placed so it delivers public realm value rather than interior amenity, and a decision on whether the Westchase tree reserve concept the applicant floated should actually be established, by whom, and with what governance. Right now it exists only as an offer with no recipient.

7.5 Node alignment

2900 Wilcrest sits squarely in the Richmond and Wilcrest node and its Class B and C office repositioning focus, and it advances three of the plan's four goals at once: repositioning obsolete assets, building the public realm through the frontage and landscape conditions the board wants attached, and growing the tax base. It is a live test case running on roughly the same schedule as the plan. We should track it as one and use it in the Envision and Act tasks.

8. Recommendation: Add Jim Russ to the Steering Committee

Following the meeting, Ed Pettitt recommended to Chester Jacinto that Jim Russ be added to the Long Range Plan Update Steering Committee. The reasons:

- He articulates the redevelopment economics case more clearly than anyone else at the table. The plan will have to make an argument about regulatory flexibility, and it will be stronger if that argument has been pressure tested by someone who underwrites deals.
- He moves the room. His framing of the 38-foot setback as an artifact of a prior land economics did more to shift the WCA position than any other single contribution. That capacity is more valuable inside the Steering Committee than outside it.
- He supplies a developer's reality check on implementability. Recommendations that will not pencil are the most common failure mode in plans of this type, and he will say so early.
- He is already engaged on the specific question the plan has to answer, which is what happens to obsolete office product. He noted that he and Mark were asked to look at that question four years ago. That is institutional memory we should capture.

9. Risks and Watch Items

- The proxy vote is not assured. It requires 51 percent of association acreage and organized opposition over the live oaks could defeat it. Phillip Schneidau's own estimate was that the modification would fail if the WCA board opposed it and the applicant forced it through.
- The transaction itself is not closed. The applicant is still negotiating the purchase and has not advanced past a preliminary site plan. Nothing here is final.
- The applicant has not responded to the WCA's request to specify its objections to the other clauses. If the broader clause removal comes back, the WCA's position hardens and the setback item may be pulled along with it.
- The replacement tree commitment, the landscape plan, and any frontage review are currently verbal. They need to be written into the amendment language or an accompanying agreement before the proxy goes out.
- If the tree reserve contribution is accepted without an established recipient and governance, it becomes a commitment no one can administer.

10. Next Steps

Action	Owner	Timing
Confirm with Chester Jacinto whether Jim Russ will be seated on the Steering Committee, and whether a WCA seat should be added alongside	Ed / Chester Jacinto	Next coordination call
Request a copy of the applicable deed restrictions and the proposed amendment language from the WCA	Ed / Bill Fulton	Near term
Track the WCA response to Alliance and the content of any landscape plan or tree count commitment	Ed	Ongoing

Action	Owner	Timing
Develop a District frontage and design review framework recommendation for the Envision task, referencing Walnut Bend	AR / Lionheart Places	Envision task
Develop canopy replacement guidance and evaluate the Westchase tree reserve concept	AR / LP	Envision task
Add 2900 Wilcrest to the Richmond and Wilcrest node case study material	AR / LP	Understand task
Monitor the proxy solicitation to association landowners	Ed / Bill	Approximately two months