

Richmond 300: Code Refresh Advisory Council Meeting Notes

Date: September 11, 2024, 4 P.M.
Location: Plan RVA Board Room
424 Hull Street, Suite 300
Microsoft Teams (<https://bit.ly/CodeRefreshAC>)



DEPARTMENT OF
**PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT
REVIEW**

Members Present: Wayne Credle (virtual), Bennie Gates, Elizabeth Greenfield, Philip Hart, David Johannas, Jennifer Mullen, Kendra Norrell, Casey Overton, Michelle Parrish, Martiza Pechin, Charlie Wilson, Roger York

Members Absent: Chenice Brown, Yanina James, Preston Lloyd, Eric Mai, Burt Pinnock, Damian Pitt, Ellen Robertson

CALL TO ORDER

Roll Call

Chair Greenfield called the meeting to order at 4:05 P.M. and called the roll. A quorum was present.

Chair's Comments

Chair Greenfield thanked everyone for attending. She reminded everyone of the purpose of the Council is to advise the Planning Commission, Department of Planning and Development Review, and the consultant team on the zoning ordinance revision process.

Approval August Meeting Notes

Mr. Hart motioned to approve the August meeting notes, and the motion was seconded by Ms. Pechin. The board voted to approve the minutes.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Greenfield opened the floor to public comment. Seeing no one requesting to comment, Chair Greenfield closed the public comment period.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION OF AUGUST ADVISORY COUNCIL PRESENTATION

Chair Greenfield opened the floor to public comment. Seeing no one requesting to comment, Chair Greenfield closed the public comment period.

CONSULTANT PRESENTATIONS AND COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Mr. Rene Biberstein, project manager from Code Studio, provided a brief overview of the project timeline. He also gave a recap of the August Open House and pop-up events, where the consultant team and city staff engaged in deep discussion with attendees. Major takeaways from the engagement included: a preference amongst attendees to balance speed, quality, and affordability when allowing for residential development; general support for multi-family residential development along major streets; and mixed views on maximum height allowances. Mr. Biberstein informed the Council that the comment period was still open, and people were able to provide their feedback online.

Draft Pattern Book Update (Utile)

Mr. Carlos Sainz Caccia (of Utile) presented updates on their work regarding the draft Pattern Book. Mr. Sainz Caccia reviewed the most recent analyses for the Jackson Ward and Oak Grove neighborhoods, as well as the R-5 and R-6 zoning districts city-wide. Distribution graphs were shown for each of these neighborhoods and zoning districts, illustrating how existing parcel sizes and parcel width compared to the zoning district requirements. One major finding showed that the Oak Grove neighborhood (which is largely zoned R-5) had smaller parcel sizes and widths when compared to similarly-zoned R-5 parcels citywide. The differences in the shapes of these distribution graphs revealed that the parcels in Oak Grove do not seem to match the other R-5 parcels throughout the city.

Ms. Pechin noted that the distribution graphs only show the number of parcels within each size range, and iterated that the graphs do not clearly show the parcels that are conforming/ nonconforming with respects to their use and corresponding minimum requirements (for example, the graphs do not show the extent of two-family parcels that do not conform to the two-family minimum parcel size requirement).

Mr. Wilson recommended that consideration be given to the terms “abutting” and “attached” while drafting any text amendments in the future. Under the current zoning code, these two words differ in their definitions, and it causes problems for staff and developers during building permit review. Clarifying and/or simplifying the terms should be examined.

Draft Zoning Code Framework – Residential and Neighborhood Mixed Use Focus (Code Studio)

Mr. Biberstein provided an overview of the facilitated small group discussions planned for the present meeting. To inform Council’s discussion, Mr. Biberstein began presenting on the Residential land use designation. He noted key policy questions for the Council to consider, and overviewed current zoning districts R-1 through R-6 along with their corresponding requirements. Mr. Colin Scarff spoke on the consideration of whether to regulate minimum lot size and encouraged the Council to consider if regulating lot size is necessary. He provided a case study on Durham’s approach to regulating lot size (Durham’s “Small House/Small Lot” program). The city witnessed an effect on housing costs, where the program opened up housing affordability in higher-priced neighborhoods (for example, smaller \$400k homes being built and sold in neighborhoods with \$800k average home values). Mr. Johannas asked how the program was received by the public and how did it affect property values. Mr. Scarff stated that the program was not well-received by Durham neighbors, and that it may be too soon to assess effects on property values in these neighborhoods. Mr. York asked whether there is a market for small housing in Richmond. Open discussion about market demand and developer affordability ensued amongst the Council. Mr. Biberstein presented on preferences for affordable dwelling units (ADUs) versus duplexes, a potential approach to increasing residential density along major streets, and concepts for new zoning districts (RN-1, RN-2, RN-2 Bonus, and RN-3).

Next, Mr. Biberstein presented on the Neighborhood Mixed Use land use designation. He noted key policy questions for the Council to consider, and overviewed current zoning districts R-43 through R-63 along with their corresponding requirements. Lastly, he presented the concepts for the new zoning districts (RN-3, RX-3, and RX-5). Mr. Hart noted that the Richmond 300 Master Plan does not characterize Neighborhood Mixed Used as a strictly multi-family area, but instead mentions single family and small multifamily as primary uses. Mr. Biberstein was appreciative of the comment and encouraged the Council to consider where some areas may be more appropriate for multi-family developments up to 10 units, and other areas that may be more appropriate for fewer units or single-family development within this Neighborhood Mixed Use designation. Mr. Colin Scarf presented on Charlottesville’s approach to incentivizing affordable housing to ensure affordability for its residents.

FACILITATED SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

The Council broke out into four groups to discuss the concept zoning districts and key policy questions for the Residential and Neighborhood Mixed Use areas of the city.

SMALL GROUP REPORT BACK

In the interest of time, Chair Greenfield announced that the reports from each group would be tabled for the next Council meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting of the Advisory Council is October 9, 2024, at 4 P.M. at PlanRVA Boardroom (424 Hull St Suite 300, Richmond, VA 23224). Ms. Greenfield invited councilmembers and the general public to attend the Code Refresh Zoning Panel Discussion at 7 P.M. at Dogwood Middle School immediately following the meeting.

Chair Greenfield adjourned the meeting at 6:01 P.M.