

# Richmond 300: Code Refresh Advisory Council Meeting Notes

Date: January 15, 2025, 4 P.M.  
Location: City Hall, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room  
900 E. Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23219  
Microsoft Teams (<https://bit.ly/CodeRefreshAC>)



DEPARTMENT OF  
**PLANNING AND  
DEVELOPMENT  
REVIEW**

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**Members Present:** Wayne Credle, Elizabeth Greenfield, Yanina James, David Johannas, Kendra Norrell, Casey Overton, Martiza Pechin, Damian Pitt, Ellen Robertson, Charlie Wilson, Roger York

**Members Absent:** Bennie Gates, Philip Hart, Preston Lloyd, Eric Mai, Jennifer Mullen, Michelle Parrish, Brian White

## CALL TO ORDER

### Roll Call

Chair Greenfield called the meeting to order at 4:06 P.M. Chair Greenfield 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 of December Meeting Notes

Ms. Pechin made a motion to approve the December meeting notes. Mr. Wilson seconded her motion. The Council voted to approve the meeting notes.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Greenfield opened the floor to public comment.

Mr. Thomas Courtney, a resident of the 1<sup>st</sup> District, expressed his desires for the zoning code to be easier to use and easier to interpret by Richmond citizens. He also expressed his concerns surrounding the city's routine approval of zoning/special use permits (particularly for industrial and light industrial uses) where the project neither complies with the zoning ordinance nor aligns with the Richmond 300 Master Plan. As an example, he mentioned the VMFA warehouse storage project, which he believed to be an incompatible industrial use for the historic residential neighborhood in which he lives.

Ms. Ivelina Metcheva, a Floyd Avenue resident, also expressed her concerns about the VMFA warehouse storage project. She suspected there may be a conflict of interest and commented on the lack of transparency with this project.

A brief discussion amongst the Council ensued. Mr. York sought clarification as to whether the VMFA was a state agency, to which Mr. Wilson confirmed they are. Mr. Wilson also added that the VMFA also has a private foundation, but the work is being undertaken by the VMFA currently (not their private foundation). Mr. Kevin Vonck added that state agencies like the VMFA are exempt from zoning code requirements.

The public comment period resumed. Seeing no other members of the public wishing to speak, Chair Greenfield closed the public comment period.

## **COUNCIL RECAP AND MEETING INTRODUCTION**

Ms. Marianne Pitts provided an overview of what would be discussed at the present meeting.

## **COUNCIL OPEN DISCUSSION**

Chair Greenfield opened the floor for an open discussion amongst the Council. Mr. Johannas began by stating his goal for Richmond to be an “car-optional” growth city, characterized by higher density development that is accessible by foot and transit. He noted the positive impacts this would have on equity, household cost-savings, and the environment. He stressed the importance of considering both housing and transportation costs in determining the affordability of living in the city. Car ownership and low-density development patterns that necessitate a reliance on automobiles generally raise these costs.

In furtherance of this point, Mr. Johannas expressed his thoughts about where higher densities are most appropriate. Focusing higher densities within the city’s nodes would allow a more concerted effort to focus development where there will be adequate transit access. He stressed that if lower-income communities would be living in new high-density housing developments, those communities should have access to high-quality transit. He urged that the proposed high-density zoning districts be mapped so they align only with the nodes of the Richmond 300 Master Plan and the high-frequency GRTC bus route maps.

Councilmember Robertson thanked Mr. Johannas for his comments and stated how wonderful the Richmond 300 is. She acknowledged that the surrounding counties are also engaged in a zoning rewrite effort of their own and recommended that we examine where those counties are adding density so Richmond can regionally coordinate and align our growth with theirs. She also recommended the City coordinate with the CVTA regarding regional transit plans. Additionally, she suggested that they city examine the zoning mapping from an equity lens to ensure that investments are being provided in historically-neglected communities. She also urged the City to consider future budgets when creating the new zoning code, because ultimately the city will have to find the money within its budget to support new proposed initiatives.

Mr. Wilson expressed his agreement with Mr. Johannas’s comments.

Dr. Pitt stated he didn’t want the low-density neighborhoods to “get a free pass” in not absorbing some of the city’s growth. He felt adding density in those areas would be part of the solution and wished to see duplexes added back into the proposed R-B and R-C zoning districts.

Ms. Overton agreed with Dr. Pitt. She questioned how a consensus was reached regarding the removal of duplexes in R-B and R-C districts. She also recommended that the Council discuss the potential issue of displacement that could arise. Mr. Wilson asked if there would be an opportunity to discuss duplexes citywide at the current meeting, to which staff confirmed.

Ms. Pechin commented that the Richmond 300 Master Plan was already aligned with the GRTC bus routes because staff was conscience of this during the plan’s creation. She also agreed with Mr. Pitt about incorporating higher densities into the less dense areas, and echoed Ms. Robertson’s concerns about not wanting to concentrate poverty in anywhere in the city. She recognized that it will be balancing act.

Rev. Dr. Credle addressed the “industrial use” definition, and how the nomenclature and labeling of zoning districts can have an impacts on communities. He also expressed concerns about not being able

to address all of the discussion questions at the previous Council meeting's group activity and cited it as unacceptable. Chair Elizabeth appreciated Rev. Dr. Credle's feedback and stated there may be an opportunity to have more detailed and extended conversation in the working groups outside of the monthly Advisory Council meetings. She also stated she would talk to staff about the time allotments.

Mr. Johannas asked the zoning ordinance would have design suggestions, like those in the BRT plan, to control the quality of building design. Specifically, he mentioned building façade length requirements, and if variations in the façade's design would be regulated within the zoning code or addressed during the Plan of Development (POD) review. Ms. Pechin pointed out that building width maximums are proposed under the new zoning code, and staff affirmed that they would be developed and shared with the Advisory Council in the coming months. Chair Greenfield agreed on the need to champion good-quality buildings, but cautioned on regulating the aesthetics, appearance, and materials of buildings (which drives higher costs).

Mr. York urged the City to take a wholistic look at the new code to make sure changes to the current code address impacts. He provided an example of how Buffalo instituted parking demand management requirements when the city eliminated their minimum parking requirements. Under the new parking demand management requirements, if developers wanted to provide less parking, they were required to reduce parking demand through transit support and other impacts. Ms. Robertson stated she would like to learn more about Buffalo's approach.

Ms. Robertson reminded Council about the goal to reduce the number of special use permits (SUPs) received. She asked if any analysis had been done to examine the most common triggers for SUP requests (for example, setbacks or other factors). Ms. Pitts explained that the city-scale analysis within the Pattern Book examines some of that. Ms. Robertson asked if there were past instances where a complete rezoning should have been sought (instead of a SUP), and how often is that the case. Mr. Vonck overviewed the Pattern Book, and how it will inform the City on how best to craft new zoning districts that bring a lot of existing properties into conformity and build new development that match the neighborhood patterns Richmonders cherish.

## **CONSULTANT PRESENTATION AND ADVISORY COUNCIL DISCUSSION**

### **Summary of Engagement to Date (Brick & Story)**

Ms. LaToya Thomas, of Brick & Story, presented a summary of engagement efforts completed thus far (phases 1-4) in the Code Refresh process. Engagement efforts included: launching the Code Refresh website; hosting zoning webinars, open houses, and a panel discussion; organizing stakeholder roundtables and interviews; staging pop-up engagements; and holding monthly Zoning Advisory Council meetings. In total, this has resulted in about 400 stakeholders being directly engaged so far (about 20% of the stated goal for the entire two-year process). She highlighted key takeaways, some of which included: the support for mixed-use neighborhoods near transit options in Southside, the desire for businesses to operate with longer hours outside of the 9-5 routine, and support for zoning flexibility that allows for aging in place. She also shared some major reflections and lessons learned as we step into phase 5 of Code Refresh engagement, such as the need for more education around zoning topics and the need to fold other city departments into public engagement effort so Richmonders can have more holistic discussions about zoning's impacts on projects/initiatives they are familiar with. Lastly, she overviewed the engagement framework planned for the upcoming year (including "Code Connect" sessions, meetings with neighborhood associations, and the launching of the ambassadors program).

Rev. Dr. Credle asked about attendance at the roundtable. Ms. Thomas explained that the Renters Roundtable, about 13 people, which is a great size for deep discussion and tailored conversations. On the other hand, the Latino Roundtable was not very well attended despite coordinated promotion efforts and high pre-registration numbers. She shared that the next roundtable will take place tomorrow at Pops Bingo Hall from 6-8pm, and is being organized and promoted by the 9<sup>th</sup> District Councilmember's Office as a town hall event.

## **2025-2026 Timeline (Code Studio/Brick & Story)**

Mr. Biberstein reviewed the project timeline. He also reviewed the events and deliverables for January and February, which included the panel discussion and public open houses). Looking further ahead, he explained that the proposed zoning code would be developed and shared with Council in three batches (referred to as "Modules"):

- Module 1: Districts, Uses & Maps (March, April, May)
- Module 2: Development Standards (June, July, August)
- Module 3: Administration & Other Provisions (September)

He explained that open house and panel discussion events are planned for June and October. Following the delivery of all modules, further discussion with Council is planned for October, November, and December to revise and finalize the full zoning code. After the complete Zoning Code is finalized, it will be ready for the public hearing/adoption process in winter/spring 2026.

Mr. York asked if citywide remapping would occur during this process, and if the remapping would be considered for adoption at the same time as the proposed zoning code. Mr. Biberstein and staff confirmed that it would happen altogether at the same time.

## **Working Groups (City)**

Ms. Pitts explained the intended goal of the working groups, which are to be bodies that review the content of the draft zoning code through the lens of their specific working group topic as the modules get released. From the Working Group Topic Survey circulated to Advisory Councilmembers, the following potential topics were identified: Housing affordability, Sustainability and resiliency, Places of worship, small business and entrepreneurship support, Community safety, Technical review of the zoning text (to be activated later in the process, perhaps module 3), Transportation, Placemaking, and Historic preservation.

Discussion was had around the idea of the Technical Review of the Zoning Text working group. It was discussed that this working group would not be activated until later in the process (perhaps Module 3).

In response to a question from Mr. York, staff stated that regulations for historic districts and design overlays would not be drafted as part of this zoning code rewrite effort but would instead be examined separately at a later date.

Dr. Pitt suggested combining similar working groups to reduce the number of them (for example, transportation/sustainability or placemaking/historic preservation).

Mr. Johannas asked for clarification about the nature and structure of the working groups. Ms. Pitt explained that it would be comprised of Advisory Council members knowledgeable staff, and also knowledgeable members of the public. Mr. Vonck added that, because of time constraints at Advisory Council meetings, working groups would have to convene outside of the monthly Advisory Council meetings. Councilmembers are being asked to commit to a leadership role on the working groups they wish to be a part of. Staff will be sending out a new survey to poll Councilmembers on their preferred working groups.

Recognizing that the working group topics were very broad, Ms. Pechin recommended narrowing them down to more specific aspects. She also recommended reducing the number of working groups, so it is more manageable to administer.

## **Updated Zoning Districts (Code Studio)**

Mr. Biberstein reviewed the revisions made to the zoning districts since the previous meeting. Notable changes included:

- New names/nomenclature for the districts

- Additional districts for residential, commercial, and open space
- Elimination of some residential and industrial mixed-use districts
- Expansion of R-A scope
- Removal of duplexes in R-B and R-C, and creation of a new duplex district

Mr. Johannas showed appreciation for the new RC (Residential Cottage) district, which promotes smaller-sized residential units at higher density (such as tiny homes and cottage court development). In response to Mr. Johannas's question about anticipated locations for this district, Mr. Biberstein stated this district would be applied to the existing manufactured home districts and could be used by future developers looking to create new communities that fit this development pattern. Noting the 20,000 sq. ft. minimum size requirement, Mr. Wilson talked through how this district could be applied effectively on smaller sites if so desired, but also recognized the potential for spot zoning allegations. He suggested Council revisit this conversation, as it may be a key tool in providing housing affordability.

Mr. Wilson also wanted to reopen the discussion about duplexes, particularly in which districts they should be allowed in. He referred the Richmond 300 Master Plan's explicit call-out to duplexes being allowed within Residential areas only along major streets and sought a consensus from the Advisory Council on the duplex decision. He also noted the contentious debate over the ADU review process (regarding fire hydrant access requirements) and asked that Councilmembers keep that issue in mind while they balance the two sides of the duplex decision.

Dr. Pitt expressed his frustration with the new changes, citing that these proposed districts reflect what is existing today and would change nothing within the context of Richmond zoning unless the districts are mapped differently. Mr. Biberstein confirmed that the city would be mapped differently, and that the proposed zoning districts would be carefully applied to areas after individual examination.

Ms. Pechin talked about the new district nomenclature (RS-L, RS-M, RS-H), which signified residential low, medium, and high density. She recounted how city staff considered a similar naming scheme for the Future Land Use categories during the drafting of Richmond 300, the debate surrounding the definition of low vs. high density during those discussions, and how it was decided that higher densities should also be part of an urban mixed-use setting.

Mr. Vonck stated the Richmond 300 Master Plan gives explicit direction regarding single family residential units, whereas factors like the minimum lot sizes and requirements for ADUs are more discretionary and very important for Council to think about during this Code Refresh process. To facilitate more housing development, he recommended identifying changing to the current ordinance that would reduce zoning's hinderance within the market and instead induce more activity to meet housing demand.

Ms. Overton expressed her views regarding the tension found in the Richmond 300 Master Plan, which has an equity-focus while also preventing duplexes within existing single-family neighborhoods. She stated that the preservation of single-family neighborhoods as they exist today (with large lots and 3,000 square foot homes) will continue to exclude lower-income individuals from living within these areas and further entrench the concentrations of wealth and poverty. She posed the question to Council: "Do we our work to tell people where they can and can't live, in a way that is clearly going to fall on economic lines?" She reminded Council that despite Richmond 300's best efforts, it was not fully representative of marginalized groups. She asked that the Code Refresh revisit these conversations so that the Richmond 300's tensions surrounding duplex prohibition and equity be resolved.

Cognizant of limited time, Chair Greenfield wanted to continue the discussion around this topic and asked staff if there was an opportunity to reinstate the February Advisory Council meeting. Ms. Pitts stated the goal was to have the draft Pattern Book and Zoning District Framework presented at a public meeting in February in place of the Advisory Council Meeting. Ms. Pechin ask if this discussion and these questions could be posed to the public at the public meetings. Chair Greenfield appreciated Ms. Pechin's suggestion and hoped it could help the Council gain some insight and direction from the public's desire. She also recognized that the most engaged members of the public who attend these types of public meetings are generally not representative of all Richmonders. Mr. Colin Scarff of Code Studio

recommended presenting the districts at the public meetings with duplexes as permitted uses, and then have the public respond accordingly. Mr. Biberstein stated that duplexes would be rewritten into the draft residential districts and be presented to the public for discussion.

Mr. Wilson revisited the issue of the branding/naming of the industrial mixed-use districts, which may give off a negative perception, and suggested that the districts not be separated out from the other mixed-use categories. Mr. Biberstein explained the reason for the separation (to specifically accommodate lighter industrial uses). He also suggested that the districts do not have to be separate, but instead could be considered a flexible “add-on” to the other mixed-use districts. Ms. Thomas suggested the consultants and staff could arrange specific roundtables for these questions in February, if desired. Regarding nomenclature, Dr. Pitt added that the residential districts should remove the terms “Single Unit/Multi Unit” now that the Council has decided to write duplexes back into these districts as an allowed use. He favored the previous alphabetical nomenclature instead (for example: R-A, R-B, R-C). Mr. Vonck asked if there was anything that Council did not feel comfortable about being presented at the open houses. Chair Greenfield thought it was best to proceed with as much information as possible, rather than holding back information for public introduction later.

Chair Greenfield request that 30-40 minutes be reserved for further discussion about residential districts at the next meeting. Regarding outreach to underrepresented populations, Rev. Dr. Credle asked if the consultants were using the list of organizations that were identified at an earlier Advisory Council meeting a few months prior at the start of the Code Refresh process. The consultants and staff confirmed that the list was being used.

Mr. Biberstein finished the presentation, summarizing edits made since the previous meeting. Staff indicated they would send the presentation and working group survey to the Councilmembers.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Greenfield announced the February meeting of the Advisory Council is cancelled to accommodate Code Refresh public meetings/engagement events scheduled in February:

- Panel Discussion on Housing and Zoning, February 11<sup>th</sup>
- Open Houses for Draft Pattern Book and Zoning Districts, February 12<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup>

The Advisory Council will reconvene at its next meeting on March 12, 2025, at 4 P.M. in the 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room at City Hall (900 E. Broad St, Richmond, VA 23219).

Chair Greenfield adjourned the meeting at 6:03 P.M.