

Richmond 300: Code Refresh Advisory Council Meeting Notes

Date: June 11, 2025, 4 P.M.
Location: City Hall, 5th Floor Conference Room
900 E. Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23219
Microsoft Teams (<https://bit.ly/CodeRefreshAC>)



DEPARTMENT OF
**PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT
REVIEW**

Members Present: Wayne Credle, Bennie Gates, Elizabeth Greenfield, Philip Hart, David Johannas, Preston Lloyd, Eric Mai (virtually), Jennifer Mullen, Kendra Norrell (virtually), Casey Overton, Maritza Pechin (virtually), Damian Pitt, Ellen Robertson, Brian White, Charlie Wilson

Members Absent: Yanina James, Charles Menges, Michelle Parrish

CALL TO ORDER

Roll Call

Chair Greenfield called the meeting to order at 4:01 P.M. and then called the roll.

Ms. Pechin appeared online and requested to participate virtually. Vice Chair Lloyd motioned to allow Ms. Pechin to participate virtually, seconded by Ms. Mullen. The motion passed.

Following audio difficulties, staff announced Mr. Mai's and Ms. Norrell's requests to participate virtually. Mr. Hart motioned to allow their participation virtually, seconded by Mr. Wilson. The motion passed.

At Mr. Johannas's request, Chair Greenfield asked Advisory Councilmembers who were participating virtually to appear on camera as they made their comments throughout the meeting.

Chair's Comments

Chair Greenfield thanked everyone for attending. She reminded everyone that 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 May Meeting Notes

Motioned by Mr. White and seconded by Vice Chair Lloyd, the Council approved the May meeting notes.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Greenfield opened the floor to public comment.

Richard Hankins, executive director of the Partnership for Smarter Growth, praised the Council for taking bold steps towards dense urban growth, a departure from the current ordinance's encouragement of more suburban-style development with low density and separate uses. He thought the draft zoning map did a great job of "unlocking underutilized strip malls and undeveloped parts of the city for future potential nodes of development." He urged the Council to continue these efforts by reducing minimum lot width requirements in the draft RD districts, especially in the RD-A district. He wanted to incentivize more walkable neighborhoods and encourage the "15-minute city."

Joseph Carlisle, a Church Hill resident, expressed concerns that the draft zoning map did not prepare Richmond for the future. He advocated for duplexes to be permitted in all residential districts and that no neighborhood be exempt from change. He called for the removal of the MX-3 district, and for the reinstatement of MX-4. He felt MX-6 was appropriate for all of the city's commercial and transit-rich neighborhoods, and called for future upzoning in the city's densest neighborhoods like Downtown, The Fan, Museum District, Carytown, Scotts Addition, Manchester, Northside, and Church Hill. He also called for upzoning to MX-6 and higher along the existing Pulse corridor, the proposed north-south BRT line, and within ½ mile of each existing and proposed BRT station.

Andrew Bryant, a 7th District resident living in Shockoe Bottom, expressed concerns about the draft zoning map, and stated it does not go far enough to address Richmond's housing needs. He wanted the draft code to move away from single family zoning and permit duplexes across the city. He deemed his "mixed-use, transit-rich, multimodal" neighborhood as one of the city's jewels and recommended more density in this already dense urban setting. Where the draft zoning map largely designated Shockoe Bottom as MX-3, he noted the zoning should be MX-6 and higher.

Nora Thompson, a resident of the Henry Place neighborhood, stated her neighborhood was given the RD-C district on the draft zoning map and urged that this designation be reconsidered. She stated that recent condominium development nearby was sitting vacant because of their high costs of ownership, and that these prices were impacting home values and assessments in her neighborhood, making it unaffordable to new and existing families. She didn't see the need to rezone her neighborhood since it is already welcoming, inclusive, diverse and offers a high quality of life. She also questioned why other less diverse neighborhoods nearby were largely retaining their large-lot zoning pattern and were not being similarly rezoned to become more welcoming, inclusive, and diverse. She also expressed concerns about losing access to sunlight in her neighborhood, which would impact trees and gardens.

Kevin Cianfarini, a Fulton resident, spoke about his neighborhood and the city at-large. He noted the heart of Fulton, designated as a node with medium growth potential in the Richmond 300 master plan, was mapped as MX-3 and RX-4, and believed the area should be zoned higher to MX-8. He also asked that the Rocketts Landing node be mapped as fully MX-13 rather than the mix of MX-6, MX-8, and MX-13 as was depicted on the draft map, particularly to allow more people to live near the Pulse transit station. He stated he emailed Director Kevin Vonck a "laundry list of concerns" regarding citywide zoning matters, with the most important matter being limits on duplexes. He expressed both disappointment and disagreement in hearing comments that duplexes were not appropriate in some RD districts. His area of the Fulton neighborhood was mapped as RD-B, and he supported duplexes as a way to welcome more diverse neighbors to this area. He mentioned that the City's Affordable Housing Plan calls for duplexes and triplexes in all residential areas and asked that the Council fully support two- and three-unit dwellings.

Mary Meadows, a long-time 1st District resident, opposed the density increases in her Colonial Place neighborhood. She informed the Council of a currently-proposed Special Use Permit (SUP) of six townhomes on her street (Hanover Avenue). She noted that zoning should protect and respect the neighborhood. She explained that Colonial Place is characterized by single-family homes with yards, big trees, and mature plantings, and that not all neighborhoods need to be like Scott's Addition.

William Johnson, a Northern Barton Heights resident, bought his home in the year 2000 under the city's first-time homebuyer's program and largely renovated it by hand over the decades. He understood that the zoning rules would protect the integrity and character of his home and neighborhood. He felt that the proposed zoning as depicted on the draft map would destroy that integrity and character. He opposed multiplexes in front and behind his house. He noted existing parking problems and how additional density would exacerbate those problems. He also predicted new and larger developments would displace existing homes and the existing long-time residents. While he felt it was more appropriate to have increased density on Brookland Park Boulevard, he expressed concerns about the negative impact this would have on the merchants who have done business along that corridor for many years and might get priced out of the neighborhood. Ultimately, he felt the zoning was moving in the wrong direction.

Meg Lawrence, a Ginter Park resident, was unsure about whether MX-3 was appropriate but felt it was certainly more appropriate than MX-4, especially when she looked at how it was mapped. She expressed appreciation for the process. She reminded the Council that Chamberlayne Avenue is designated as Corridor Mixed Use in the Richmond 300 master plan, where residential uses are considered a secondary use. She informed Council that the portion of Chamberlayne Avenue in Ginter Park, from Azalea Ave to Brookland Park Blvd is entirely zoned residential (except for one medical office building and a few parcels along Azalea Ave). She believed this was the only area in the city that was designated from residential to Corridor Mixed Use, and was concerned that the corridor would lose its residential character.

Joh Gehlbach represented RVA YIMBY, a local chapter of a national group advocating for more housing in cities. As a Henrico County resident, Joh shared their desire to live in the city one day. Joh stressed that this zoning code update would impact not only Richmonders, but also those who want to move to the city, whether they live in the metro region or elsewhere in the country. They looked forward to becoming a Richmond resident.

Don O'Keefe, a resident of The Fan and professional architect/planner/historian, wanted the city to be bold and ambitious during this zoning process. He believed the current zoning had always been a mistake, and mentioned its negative impacts on health, economics, social justice. He stressed that obstacles to building in the city makes it more attractive to build in the surrounding counties, which causes a lot of greenfield development and loss of open land. He wanted to see the city become more walkable, more beautiful and more equitable. He recognized the city would experience some growing pains, but stated that the zoning code rewrite process was a once-in-a-generation opportunity to abandon the established system, which had contributed to many negative outcomes since WWII. He expressed his view that a lot of the recommendations of Richmond 300 had yet to be enacted, but they deserved to be. He recommended looking to other cities as models for how to get it right.

Brock Hall, a 6th District resident living in Manchester, stated that his goal was to emphasize that the city must do things differently. He worried that the draft zoning map continued the development practices that American cities had encouraged for the past 50-70 years. He felt that duplexes and low-rise buildings would not produce enough housing units to make a difference in the housing supply issue, and that allowing such small increases would not lead to much development from an economic standpoint. He stated more should be done. He illustrated some benefits of having a few larger, mixed-use enclaves in the city, all situated away from existing single-family homes so as not to disrupt neighborhoods. He also found it frustrating that the draft map clustered mixed-use zoning along high-traffic corridors with speeding cars, which contributes to traffic fatalities and injuries. He suggested that mixed-use development be focused on areas of the city that do not have a lot of car traffic.

Copeland Casati, a resident on West Grace Street, welcomed development and density on the southern side of Broad St. She stated Grace Street was one of the densest parts of the city and that Grace Street residents loved their diversity of living. Of high important to them was access to sunlight. She described Richmond rowhouses as long, narrow, close together, and with windows that are thoughtfully placed to allow in sunlight. She noted sunlight was important for health and energy efficiency costs, as evidenced by numerous studies. She emphasized that Grace Street residents did not want tall buildings on Broad Street to overshadow them, but would welcome 2- to 4-story buildings instead. She urged Council to save their access to sunlight.

Seeing no other members of the public wishing to speak, Chair Greenfield closed the public comment period. She was excited to see how much attention the process had garnered and thanked the public for their statements.

COUNCIL RECAP AND MEETING INTRODUCTION

Ms. Marianne Pitts provided a brief recap of the previous meeting that included discussion about the Use Provisions. She informed everyone that the initial first-draft zoning maps were made available online for public viewing, and for the Council to provide comments during a two-week period. She stated the

consultants were still working on incorporating Council advice into the draft code. At the present meeting, the consultants would lead Councilmembers in discussing the general themes and additional questions that emerged from their comments.

Dr. Pitt asked if any revisions had been made to the map since the Council's comment period. Mr. Rene Biberstein, of Code Studio, answered that no changes were made to the draft map and that the present meeting's discussion would inform changes that should be made in the production of a revised draft map.

WORKING GROUPS UPDATE

In the interest of time following the robust public comment period, Chair Elizabeth asked staff to provide a quick report on the working groups. Ms. Pitts informed Council that the direct notes from the working group meetings were provided as handout in the meeting materials, and stated she would provide summaries on the notes and how those comments are being incorporated into the draft code at the next meeting. She stated more than 100 people participated in the five working groups, and that the next High Quality Places working group meeting was scheduled for the following day (June 12). Chair Elizabeth asked Councilmembers to review the working group notes and prepare for discussion prior to the next Council meeting.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION ON DRAFT ZONING MAP

Mr. Biberstein reviewed the updated project timeline, highlighting the upcoming panel discussion and open houses at the end of June which will serve as an endcap to Module 1. He then overviewed Modules 2 and 3, future open houses, and the final process for releasing the complete draft code for public review.

Mr. Biberstein also overviewed the Council's draft map comments. Overall, a total of 138 comments and 78 replies were received from nine of the 18 Councilmembers. Mr. Biberstein generally summarized the major themes that emerged from the comments, the proposed action that the consultants would take in revising the map, and questions they had for Council to further advise on.

Theme: Trouble Understanding Changes

Mr. Biberstein reported that some Councilmembers requested clearer depictions of how the draft code differed from the current zoning ordinance in terms of regulations and development standards. Mr. Biberstein stated that while it would be technically challenging to accomplish this, they would attempt to provide solutions in time for the open houses. He anticipated developing an updated electronic map with layers that could be toggled on and off to show existing zoning and the possible proposed zoning. He mentioned the possibility of display boards at the open houses showing selected comparisons of changes, in order for attendees to compare the existing and proposed districts side-by-side.

Theme: Concerns about MX-3

Mr. Biberstein recapped public feedback on the MX-4 district and the resulting decision to reduce it down to an MX-3 district. He then explained recent feedback about the MX-3 district, with some people concerned that the allowed density is too low. As a compromise, Mr. Biberstein explained the intention to keep the MX-3 district for sparse use in neighborhood pockets or areas of great intensity differentials where it is more appropriate, forego the MX-4 district, and more generally apply MX-6 and MX-8 along key corridors. Mr. Johannas did not agree with this approach. He felt MX-4 was a stronger, more appropriate density for the areas in questions, whereas MX-3 would not prove to be useful or advantageous and MX-6 would be too dense. In support of keeping MX-4, he offered the premise that most people would not perceive a noticeable difference in the extra story of height. Mr. Wilson agreed with Mr. Johannas, noting that the draft maps tended to limit density along the MX-3 corridors while increase heights interior to the neighborhood with RX-4. He added that "rear-incline plane" transition requirements might help to alleviate fears over taller heights near residential neighborhoods. Dr. Pitt, who struggled with the replacement of MX-4 to MX-3 at the start, could not picture an area of the city where three stories was appropriate while four stories was not. He lent his support for MX-4, stating 4 stories

should be the minimum height for commercial areas. Dr. Pitt supported increasing densities along the corridors to MX-6 and MX-8.

Mr. Hart supported the MX-3 district and thought it was appropriate. He mentioned that Richmond 300 clearly states three stories should be the limit for at least one neighborhood, and asserted that the MX-3 district is needed in order to comply with the master plan. He briefly offered the idea of keeping both MX-3 and MX-4. He supported the consultant's compromise, stating one key advantage of increasing densities along the corridors to MX-6 and MX-8 would be its ability to greatly increase density in the city without the need for permitting duplexes in all residential neighborhood.

Ms. Overton supported MX-4, stating it would allow for more affordable housing. If MX-3 were to be retained, she asked if an extra story could be written into the code to incentivize affordable housing and ensure new development provided a community benefit to the adjacent neighborhoods it impacted most. Mr. Johannas reiterated that he felt the MX-3 was too low. He cited examples (such as the Cary Street corridor, Arthur Ashe Boulevard, and the Carytown node) where a three-story height limit would be downzoning or limiting future growth and where a six-story building would be unreasonable. He felt four stories provided a sweet middle ground.

Chair Elizabeth summarized the feedback she heard from the discussion and asked Council to weight in on the proposal to increase densities along the corridor to MX-6 and MX-8. In accordance with his map comments, Mr. Wilson was generally supportive of increasing the density along the corridors beyond what was shown on the initial draft map. Mr. Johannas supported MX-6, MX-8, and MX-13 along a lot of corridors; however, he was not supportive of MX-6 and higher on the Chamberlayne corridor. He felt MX-4 was most appropriate. After hearing all of the feedback, Mr. Biberstein stated they could consider keeping all of the discussed districts (including reintroducing MX-4) but stated the intention was to keep the number of districts to a minimum. He also stated they would revisit the affordable housing suggestion.

Theme: Height Limits (RA-A and RA-C)

Mr. Biberstein explained that height limits in the RA-A and RA-C districts were each lowered by five feet, as recommended by staff. He added that comments they received suggested the new heights were too limiting. Ms. Pitts elaborated on the rationale for the reduction, explaining that the new 35' height for RA-A more closely matched the current zoning's height limit, was sufficient for building designs, and helped to alleviate concerns about incompatible heights in historic districts.

Mr. Johannas felt the 35-foot height constraint would limit development and lead to a high number of Special Use Permit (SUP) applications. He provided a few examples of single-family homes where just 5 feet of additional height allowance would have made a big difference (a project along West Grace Street, one at 2200 West Cary Street, and an addition on his own home in The Fan that matched the house's existing height). He also stated the additional height would lead to better-quality multifamily development. Dr. Pitt suspected the locations that Mr. Johannas mentioned were not mapped as RA-A on the draft map. Ms. Pitts informed the Council that the change was recommended after hearing concerns from the Oregon Hill neighborhood (which is mapped as RA-A on the draft map).

Relating to the RA-C district, Ms. Mullen echoed Mr. Johannas's concerns. She also felt that the new height was too limiting, asserted that the extra height could produce higher-quality buildings, and agreed that the extra height would reduce the number of SUP applications. Ms. Pitts explained the intent was to find an appropriate height limit for the RA-A district and then increase these limits incrementally within the subsequent districts. Ms. Pechin asked if other neighborhoods expressed concerns about this issue. Ms. Pitts stated that staff was anticipating it after received general feedback about height. Chair Greenfield and staff provided clarification that the public feedback were being heard outside the Advisory Council meetings and in other forums. Vice Chair Lloyd wanted everyone to be mindful that new construction as well as existing buildings would be governed by the reduction in height, and warned of creating nonconformity. Ms. Pitts referenced that the Pattern Book did not reveal many instances in potential RA-A areas where home heights above 35' existed or would caused an issue with nonconformity.

As a general summary of Council's discussion, Chair Greenfield sought consensus from the Council that the height reductions should be reversed and restored back to their original metrics. To illustrate a potential scenario, Mr. Wilson described a possible house elevated a few feet above the ground with a 12' first story, 10' second story, and 10' third story, and pointed out that there is no room for a pitched roof. In the interest of time, Chair Greenfield requested that the discussion shift over to the next topic.

Theme: Institutional (INS) Zoning

Mr. Biberstein explained there was some confusion around size/acreage requirements for the INS district. He informed Council that the 1-acre size threshold would not become a formal requirement, but was instead intended to be used as a general "rule of thumb" for mapping. He added that smaller institutional uses would adopt surrounding zoning district, and larger institutions would receive the INS zoning district. With this in mind, he suggested re-examining instances where the INS district was applied to groupings of small lots-- the rationale being that these lots should adopt the surrounding zoning district to promote compatibility with their environs.

Regarding concerns about residential use permission in INS districts, Mr. Biberstein asked Council to elaborate. Initially worried that church property owners would have to rezone their INS property in order to build residential housing, Mr. Mai was put at ease with the new approach that Mr. Biberstein explained. He asked if a church property would remain zoned as INS if it had both a church and houses on it. He also asked if a church property would need to be rezoned if the church was no longer present.

Mr. Hart asked about the standards that would govern residential uses on institutional property in an INS district. He asked if there would be no restrictions at all, or if the development must be compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods. Mr. Colin Scarff, of Code Studio, stated the intent was for the residential uses to match the character and intensity of the surrounding development. Regarding use allowances, Mr. Biberstein spoke of accessory residential living (for example, a church's manse, a university's dormitory, or a non-profit organization's housing supply) being more traditionally permitted in the INS. However, if the institutional use vacated and residential became the sole use, then he suggested a rezoning would be appropriate.

Ms. Mullen disagreed that the new housing must follow the same pattern as the surrounding neighborhood. She reasoned that institutional properties are typically on larger parcels, and that the proposed INS areas have existing residential building styles that vary widely across the city. She informed the Council that institutional properties submit master plans to the city today, which provides the institutions with greater flexibility. She opposed imposing an overlay or additional standards, in favor of letting the institutional entity's master plan dictate development. She supported higher density allowances in the institutional areas. Mr. Wilson agreed with Ms. Mullen's statements.

Rev. Dr. Credle also agreed with Ms. Mullen, noting churches' recent trends of creating housing, schools, daycares, and gyms. He noted the benefits that more flexibility would provide, especially not needing to undergo a zoning change. Councilperson Robertson also wanted to see the zoning code allow for flexibility in allowing churches to perform all of these activities, especially since many churches are on busy corridors. She supported increased density, but noted that some churches in the interior of neighborhoods might need special examination given their sensitive location within residential areas.

One of the things that most concerned Councilperson Robertson was that most of the density increases happening in residential neighborhoods were overly-represented in communities that were being massively gentrified (namely in the East End and Southside). She felt there should be consistency citywide in how upzonings were being applied. She emphasized that upzonings in these predominately Black neighborhoods and historically disenfranchised communities would yield developments selling \$400,000 homes, which would drastically raise existing residents' assessment values to unaffordable levels. She noted such increases in value currently displace residents in these neighborhoods at a rate of 15-25%, as evidenced in a recent HOME of VA study. Feeling that there were large disparities amongst neighborhoods across the city in the draft maps, she urged that zoning decisions be re-examined from this lens. Mr. Biberstein recognized the importance of these displacement pressures, expressed his intent to prevent them, and asked if there were specific areas/neighborhoods that required more sensitive

consideration. Ms. Pechin echoed Councilperson Robertson's concerns on tax assessments, citing how increases would make it harder on residents with limited incomes and those who wished to age in place. Councilperson Robertson agreed, and emphasized that the impacts would stretch beyond low-income residents. She expressed that 80% of City of Richmond employees cannot afford to live in the city for which they work. Concerned about the increased cost of living in historically-marginalized neighborhoods, she questioned why RX-4 was deemed acceptable in places like Highland Park but not in West End neighborhoods where there is even fraught and contention over three-story development. With that said, she felt the draft map was not inclusive enough and did not reflect the Richmond 300 master plan.

Theme: Increases/Decreases in Density

Chair Greenfield recognized that the present discussion had pivoted to the theme surrounding Increases/Decreases in Density and directed Council to jump to that portion of the presentation. She invited Council to continue the discussion on this theme. Mr. Wilson agreed with Councilperson Robertson's statements and suggested that a more uniform application of zoning districts be instituted on the draft map. Mr. Mai also echoed Councilperson Robertson's statements and stressed the importance of equity. He mentioned the City's "One Richmond: An Equitable Affordable Housing Plan," which recommends amending the zoning ordinance to allow up to three-family homes in all residential districts. He stressed that this zoning rewrite process was the city's opportunity to realize this recommendation, noted that lots of other cities were boldly increasing density, and that Richmond should do the same.

Dr. Pitt stated that the current housing challenge stemmed from a supply-and-demand problem, specifically that there is not enough housing supply in the regions where housing demand is high. Therefore, he stated, we need more units across the region to alleviate regional housing costs, which usually translates into very expensive units wherever they get built. However, in comparing the housing costs of pre-existing homes, new denser developments built under SUP/new zoning reform standards, and new development built to old/outdated base zoning standards, he stressed that new denser SUP developments will certainly be more expensive than the pre-existing homes but less expensive than products built under the current base zoning code. Mr. Wilson corroborated this, and stated that developers were willing to go through the zoning process to realize economy of scale benefits. Mr. White added that new supply puts downward pressure on prices for surrounding housing units.

Regarding areas of the city that may need more special mapping attention, Chair Elizabeth mentioned the western portions of the city specifically, noting Council's awareness that these areas were not shown with higher densities on the map. Councilwoman Robertson reiterated her support for density along the corridors and opposition to increasing density in the residential neighborhood cores. She felt there was a need for more density in the western areas of the city. She felt the draft map showed a willingness to increase density in certain neighborhoods, felt the map was not equitable, and felt that it perpetuated the principles of the city's current zoning map. To conclude, she said residential neighborhoods should not have to bear the burden when the corridors are able to absorb a great deal of density.

Dr. Pitt asked Councilperson Robertson to clarify if she perceived the RA-A district to be an increase in density for Northside and End East residential neighborhoods. Councilperson Robertson felt it was. Dr. Pitt then asked the consultants if the zoning standards of RA-A were drafted to exceed the current density of those neighborhoods or if the standards were reflective of their current densities. Mr. Biberstein explained the general intention was to create districts standards that bring nonconforming features into conformity, not to encourage numerous parcel splits into small lots (although this may occur). Mr. Hart shared Councilperson Robertson's concern, highlighting the potentially negative impact that could result if investors begin purchasing lots in these neighborhoods and splitting them up for denser development. He caveated that by stating more RD-C zoning throughout the city would do little to lessen that impact, noting developers would not be inclined to build since the profit potential would not be worthwhile. He provided Charlottesville as an example where affordable housing and duplexes have not been built following their zoning code rewrite. In Minneapolis, he mentioned, a 12% increase in residential unit count was due to larger apartment construction (not duplexes). He felt the RD-C district should be tweaked to require 50' lot minimum requirements, so as not to encourage subdividing lots into even smaller lots.

Mr. Wilson stated his neighborhood Highland Park was maliciously zoned R-5 to restrict landowners from developing their properties in a way that matched the existing pattern of the neighborhood. He thought the RD-C district was a step in the right direction towards creating a better zoning district, and wanted to see the district go further in its density allowance. He also echoed the idea to upzone additional major streets in order to preserve the interiors of residential neighborhoods, providing Cherokee Road as a possible example if nearby residents are agreeable to it. He also recommended that some East End neighborhoods (for example, Oakwood and Chimborazo) be changed from RD-C to RA-A in order to better align with the Neighborhood Mixed Use designation under Richmond 300 and prevent existing attached homes from becoming nonconforming. Mr. Johannas and Councilperson Robertson spoke of multi-generational housing. Mr. White recommended a study that examines, neighborhood by neighborhood, how much of the existing pattern will be brought back into conformity under the new code. Mr. Biberstein restated the goal of the Code Refresh is to reduce the number of nonconformities. He considered a need to revisit how much zoning district mixing within a neighborhood would be necessary (for example, if a neighborhood includes areas of 50' wide lots and areas with 30' wide lots, should there be one zoning district or a mix of two?).

Theme: Upzoning Along Major Corridors

Mr. Biberstein explained that only major streets designated as Enhanced Transit Routes were upzoned for the draft map, and informed Council that their comments recommended a broader upzoning approach. Mr. Biberstein said he would look at specific corridors and additional major streets not along enhanced transit routes and see if gentle increases in density would be appropriate there (instead of within neighborhood interiors).

Theme: Transitions and Buffers

Mr. Biberstein stated a number of Council comments revolved around substantial differences in height between abutting zoning districts. He reminded Council that transition standards were being developed for the next module of the draft code. He explained that, under those transition standards, a district may require buildings to be set back from the property line and stepped back at the upper floors to manage building bulk. He also mentioned the creation of use transitions for the rare instances where industrial and residential districts abut each other, and noted that the required transitions might include setbacks or landscaping buffering.

Theme: Preservation of Views

Mr. Biberstein explained that “preservation of views” did not mean preserving specific viewsheds (like “The View That Named Richmond”, hilltop views, and other prominent features), but rather meant preserving views of the skyline, sky, and river to prevent the sense of feeling boxed in. He introduced the idea of imposing a maximum building length above the 4th story to break up larger buildings into separate spans and prevent one very long slab building. Mr. Wilson asked for the maximum length requirement being considered. Although the number was still under consideration, Mr. Scarff replied that it might be around 250 feet. He elaborated that this would be different from the maximum building width requirement which similarly regulates the entire building’s span—the major difference being that entire building width would allow for differences in façade articulation and inclusions of recessed courtyards that allow a building to continue spanning, whereas the newly suggested upper story building length limit would force an end to the building and impose an open gap for views beyond the building. Mr. Johannas felt the 250’ building length should be shortened, but was supportive of a mechanism to preserve views. He mentioned that Vancouver had sun-shading considerations built into their development codes.

Vice Chair Lloyd recalled a previous project he was involved in along the riverfront where the current zoning ordinance has a similar requirement to this. The requirement caused the project to go through the SUP process; otherwise, the developers would not achieve the level of density needed to make the project economically feasible. He also stated the best views for that project were typically observed down the axes of public rights-of-way, so imposing building gaps mid-block would not accomplish much in terms of preserving sightlines of the river. He opposed a one-size-fits-all standard for viewshed preservation within the base requirements, feeling it would limit developers so much that they would seek relief through the SUP process. He added that he could be supportive of viewshed protections for a specific viewshed,

with specific heights determined to ensure the viewshed is not encroached upon. Mr. White added that those specific/special viewsheds must be defined/identified/named ahead of time.

Mr. Hart felt this was an important protection to be included in the draft code, not only in preserving views, but also in forcing visual interest and architectural variety as well. Similarly, Mr. Johannas stressed the importance of architecturally interesting rooflines. Ms. Pitts mentioned this would be a topic of discussion at the High Quality Places Working Group meeting. Mr. Wilson reiterated that he wanted to have a clear and firm understanding of what the metrics would be for this standard. Ms. Mullen mentioned it is not possible for a one-size-fits-all metric to work, since all of the parcels along the river are unique in shape.

Ms. Biberstein expounded upon the issue, wanting Council to come away with a clearer understanding of what the draft code was to regulate. If the desire was to regulate specific views to a specific place, then applying different zoning districts or an overlay could achieve that. However, if the goal was more generic and sought to prevent a sense of feeling boxed in, then the newly-suggested building length limitation could be a solution to create a feeling of openness. Mr. White felt the latter goal of preserving openness was the important one (rather than specific viewsheds), and Chair Elizabeth agreed.

Theme: Infill Zoning

Mr. Biberstein mentioned Councilmember concerns about balancing the development of vacant lots and preserving sights. He also explained difficulties with reconciling differences between master plan considerations and the historic fabric of certain neighborhoods (for example, in the East End), resulting in a mixture of zoning districts in a small area on the draft map. He invited Councilmembers to elaborate on their map comments. Mr. White explained that Shockoe Bottom was designed as Destination Mixed Use and named as a Priority Growth Node, and he questioned how Shockoe Bottom could realize this vision with so much of it being mapped as MX-3. He supported more intense zoning districts to allow for greater height to be added to Shockoe Bottom. Mr. Johannas requested that development standards be drafted to respond to historic buildings and character needs in Module 2. He mentioned scale and setback requirements as possible suggestions to address infill concerns. Ms. Mullen echoed Mr. White's statement, adding that the city has Old and Historic Districts as its mechanism for regulating historic areas already. She opposed the mapping approach of looking at an existing building and matching the zoning district to that building unless it is done to bring a nonconforming structure into conformity. She felt the base zoning districts should not take historic assets into consideration, and that additional City Old and Historic Districts should be properly designated in historic areas (through creation or expansion) if the intent is to regulate development in those sensitive areas. Mr. Johannas felt this was reasonable. Vice Chair Lloyd stressed that since Richmond cannot expand its municipal boundaries, infill development must have the least amount of regulation (i.e. historic, environmental, and other constraints) in order to effectively add density at scale.

Theme: Mixed Uses in Residential Districts

Mr. Biberstein reminded Council that the draft use provisions allowed small commercial uses in Residential Attached (RA) districts and required conditional use approval in Residential Detached (RD) districts. He noted there were Council comments which suggested that more uses be allowed, and he asked Council if the allowances as proposed were sufficient or not. Mr. Johannas felt some commercial uses (nursery, garden space, food stands) would be appropriate in all neighborhoods, and also advocated for some additional by-right uses in RD districts as appropriate (even as low density as RD-A). Ms. Mullen felt 1,500 square feet was too small, and noted small spaces tended to remain vacant for longer. She added that the Transportation Working Group emphasized walkable neighborhoods, reflecting a desire for more commercial uses within neighborhoods. Rev. Dr. Credle expressed his concerns with Industrial Light (IL) and Industrial Mixed Use (IX) districts. He pointed out that the IX districts allowed residential and light industrial uses to mix, even though the IL district deemed them incompatible. He reiterated his concerns about residents living near businesses that use hazardous and/or chemical materials. He asked that a better definition of "light industrial uses" be provided, detailing those that would be allowed and prohibited in the IX districts. Guided by the concept of Industrial Mixed Use as detailed in the future land use descriptions within Richmond 300, Mr. Biberstein explained that the intention is to only allow "extra-light" industrial uses alongside residential and commercial uses in the IX districts, and offered to keep tinkering with the proposed slate of compatible uses.

Theme: Increases and Decreases in Density

Much of the discussion around this theme was had earlier in the meeting. Mr. Biberstein noted the ongoing disagreement over duplexes. He explained the proposed code would continue to include them as a permitted use in residential districts for the time being and planned to revisit the topic again in the future. Chair Greenfield expressed her desire to have it remain and allow the public to provide feedback on the duplex question at the open houses and other public engagement periods.

Theme: Auto-oriented uses

Mr. Biberstein overviewed Council's uncertainty regarding the utility of the CG zone, especially given its limited appearance on the draft map, and whether auto-oriented uses should be allowed outside of the CG district. He explained more thought will be given to this topic. He explained that the current approach was to apply the CG district in the outer corridors of the city away from nodes and BRT stops, and to allow the less intense auto-oriented uses in the MX districts. He provided the gas station use as an example, and explained the thought on limiting the number of pumps within certain MX districts.

Theme: General Concerns about Misalignment of Zoning and Plan (Not Otherwise Covered)

Mr. Biberstein explained that there were concerns from some people who felt the draft code and maps were not reflective of the Richmond 300 Master Plan. He explained that, ultimately, the development of the draft code and map was being directed by the plan. Given the general nature of the plan, he explained that it provided some flexibility and room for interpretation. He opened the floor to Council if there were any other topics or comments they wished to discuss or add to the conversation.

Dr. Pitt shared his thoughts on the appropriate zoning for The Fan neighborhood. Whereas the draft map showed the core of The Fan mapped mostly as RA-A, he noted that some people believed it should be mapped as RA-B. He disagreed, believing that RA-A was appropriate and that there was a "good smattering" of RA-B within the core of the neighborhood to provide varying density where needed. He mentioned he would like to see a few additional intersections with higher density, and those areas were flagged by his online comments on the draft map.

Mr. Wilson clarified an earlier comment he made in the meeting regarding future land use designations in the Richmond 300 master plan and the appropriate zoning that should be applied within them. He felt that neighborhoods designated as mixed-use (i.e. Neighborhood Mixed Use and above) should be mapped with the RA-A zoning district and above. He specifically mentioned Chimborazo and outer part of Church Hill (mapped as RD-C) as being a misalignment from the Neighborhood Mixed Use designation. He suggested that the consultants revisit how the zoning districts are assigned, both in relation to neighborhoods and to the future land use designations.

Vice Chair Lloyd wanted the Council to consider properties currently subject to Community Unit Plans. He was concerned that upzoning those properties' current base zoning district might legally impact their ability to develop further in the future. He wanted the consultants and Council to keep this in mind during the drafting of Administrative Provisions.

ADJOURNMENT

Before closing the meeting, Chair Greenfield asked Councilmembers to review the working group notes prior to the next Advisory Council meeting. She also invited Councilmembers to consider topics they wished to discuss at the next meeting and forward those to staff.

Chair Greenfield announced the next meeting is scheduled for July 9, 2025, at 4 P.M. in the 5th Floor Conference Room at City Hall (900 E. Broad St, Richmond, VA 23219). She also overviewed dates and locations for the upcoming Code Refresh Panel Discussion and Open House engagement events.

Chair Greenfield adjourned the meeting at 6:31 P.M.