

Richmond 300: Code Refresh

Advisory Council Meeting Notes

Date: September 10, 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: Elizabeth Greenfield, Preston Lloyd, Philip Hart, Kendra Norrell, Maritza Pechin, Brian White, Charles Menges, Wayne Credle, Bennie Gates, Ellen Robertson, Charlie Wilson, Jennifer Mullen, Damian Pitt

Members Absent: David Johannas, Eric Mai, Casey Overton

CALL TO ORDER

Roll Call

Chair Greenfield called the meeting to order at 4:05 P.M. Chair Greenfield called the roll.

Chair's Comments

Chair Greenfield welcomed and 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 August Meeting Notes

Mr. Lloyd motioned to approve the August meeting notes, and the motion was seconded by Mr. White. The Council voted to approve the minutes.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Greenfield opened the floor to public comment.

Rachel Hefner, a lead organizer of the New Virginia Majority and a part of the Richmond Housing Justice Collective, shared concerns with displacement when new housing is created from the rezoning. She wants to explore anti-displacement overlay opportunities with the Code Refresh. Rachel explained the impacts of involuntary displacement on communities. She believes the city has an obligation to make sure the new zoning is just and doesn't further displacement.

Meg Lawrence, a resident of Ginter Park, talked about the language in Richmond 300 regarding Great Streets. In particular, she described Arthur Ashe Blvd south of Broad Street that is primarily a residential street. She expressed concerns that the proposed rezoning along Chamberlayne Avenue could make it similar to Arthur Ashe Blvd north of Broad Street (primarily commercial). Meg described the residential feel to Chamberlayne Avenue and wants Arthur Ashe Blvd to be replicated along this corridor.

Catherine Harold, resident of the 4th District, wanted to focus on two large parcels behind the Publix and Target at the Shops at Stratford Hills off Forest Hill Avenue. These two parcels are basically landlocked and bisected by environmentally sensitive areas. The property is currently zoned R-2 and Catherine doesn't believe the proposed zoning of RA-A makes sense. She wants to keep something similar to the existing R-2 zoning.

Lauren Bowes, a member of the Church Hill Crime Prevention Club and other committees on the Church Hill Association, discussed the proposed MX-3 zoning for the Police Department First Precinct building at 25th Street and Q Street. She shared concerns with previous discrimination/crime in the neighborhood and the potential for the police precinct to leave. Lauren believes there is not enough single-family homes near the intersection to help reduce crime. She wants the ZAC to reconsider some of the aggressive commercial zoning in the area. Lauren shared infrastructure concerns in the city with the increases in population.

Copeland Casati, a resident of West Grace Street, talked about sustainability. She believes tall density is energy inefficient, anti-solar, and squelches sustainability and resiliency goals. Copeland further explained some impacts of taller buildings on surrounding properties. She shared concerns with residents not being able to use solar energy with tall buildings nearby. Copeland talked about the benefits of having residential yards in the city. She provided information regarding bus ridership and how it is current residents and those in affordable housing units that ride the bus the most (not residents of luxury apartments).

Jonathan shared concerns with public use and public bathrooms. He stated the growth for the next 50 years doesn't look into the use of public spaces. He said there would be a rise in homelessness, and they will need public bathrooms. He wants this to be included in the new zoning ordinance.

Holly Chasan-Young, a resident of the 3rd District, supports housing growth in Richmond but believes the Code Refresh feels incomplete and wants to make it more human-centered. She believes the infrastructure in the city is already at its breaking point based on the water issue earlier this year. She believes the upgrades to infrastructure should come before the Code Refresh. Holly shared concerns with no parking minimums and how that will lead to cars blocking bike lines and unsafe streets for pedestrians. Holly described the issues with blight and certain uses (vape shops and massage parlors) near her neighborhood. She urged the ZAC to ensure that the Code Refresh ties density to increases directly to infrastructure upgrades, provides functional requirements for parking and loading, and plans with love and intentionality for business corridors that serve residents with vitality and not blight.

Jacob Sherrod, a writer of the city's water crisis, shared concerns with the actual pipes. He stated the increases in population and taxpayers can help pay for the upgrades needed for the pipes. Jacob said the water plant didn't fail because of capacity issues, but because the pipes are old. He believes the Code Refresh is going in the right direction and wants it to go further in allowing density.

Brock Hall, a resident of Manchester, wanted to talk about use restrictions. He believes there is a disconnect between what people think use restrictions do and what actually happens. Brock gave an example of shared parking. He said the only way to have more parking is to bundle it with another use on the property. Brock provided costs associated with different types of parking spaces.

Tyler Misencik, a resident of the 2nd District, discussed the recent property assessments in the city and how it impacts people who don't own their own homes. He provided statistics regarding the increases in home values and property assessments in the city within the past five years. Tyler said that skyrocketing prices of existing homes is caused by scarcity (not developers). He wants to expand opportunities for first-time homebuyers in the city.

Kevin Cianfarini, resident of Fulton neighborhood, wants to see more housing density offered in the 1st & 4th City Council districts. He said that no neighborhood should be exempt from growth. He believes allowing more housing density in the 1st & 4th council districts will help alleviate displacement elsewhere.

Rachael, a resident of the 4th District, shared concerns with allowing data centers in the city and the excessive use of water and electricity for these centers. She also believes we don't have the infrastructure ready for high density in the city.

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

COUNCIL RECAP AND MEETING INTRODUCTION

Marianne Pitts provided a brief review of the September ZAC meeting where Code Studio listed potential changes to Module 1 based on public feedback. She indicated that the ZAC was introduced to the Draft Development Standards (Module 2) at the last meeting and will be introduced to the Administrative Provisions (Module 3) at the meeting today. She reminded the ZAC that the comment period for the draft zoning map has been extended to September 28th. Marianne indicated that PDR staff have been attending many community meetings to get the information out to the public so people have the opportunity to comment. Marianne will provide the ZAC members with some emails staff have been receiving regarding the Code Refresh. Chair Greenfield indicated that the Director of Housing and Community Development will come speak to the ZAC at the October meeting.

Chair Greenfield invited Rene Biberstein (of Code Studio) to present the consultant presentation, which began with an overview of the presentation and discussion for the meeting.

- Update On Interactive Map Comments
- Discussion of the Draft Development Standards
- Discussion on the Goals for the Administrative Provisions

UPDATE ON INTERACTIVE MAP COMMENTS

Rene reminded the ZAC and audience that there will be Code Refresh Virtual Office Hours over the next two weeks:

- General Session: Monday, September 15, 6-7 PM
- Bilingual (Spanish/English) Session: Wednesday, September 17, 6-7 PM
- 6th & 9th District Session: Monday, September 22, 6-7 PM
- Renter Session: Wednesday, September 24, 6-7 PM

Rene indicated they there have been 1,084 comments & 943 replies, including comments uploaded from open house post-its. There are 306 unique commenters so that means most people are leaving multiple comments. The top five neighborhoods by number of comments: The Fan (260), Shockoe Bottom (106), Bellevue (104), The Museum District (95), Ginter Park (89). There are 38 neighborhoods with no comments, predominantly concentrated in the Broad Rock and Midlothian areas so Rene stated that we would like to receive more feedback from these neighborhoods.

Rene then provided a summary of the comments received so far. The top five themes of comments:

1. Either increase or decrease intensity in specific areas based on neighborhood context.
2. Promote walkability along nodes and corridors with mixed-use development.
3. Strengthen transit corridors (existing and planned) by coordinating new zoning.
4. Expand and protect tree canopy through preservation and planting.
5. Ensure building height transitions fit adjacent neighborhood characteristics and/or maintain sunlight.

Rene reminded the audience that the comment period for the draft districts, uses and maps has been extended to September 28th at midnight. He encouraged everyone in the audience to make comments on the map if you haven't already. In addition, he encouraged people to reach out to others who may be interested. Rene reiterated that they would particularly like to hear from more people in the underrepresented southern neighborhoods.

Chair Greenfield asked the ZAC members if there were any questions or comments regarding the over Rene presented. Hearing no questions, Chair Greenfield proceeded with the next agenda item.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION OF THE DRAFT DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Colin Scarff gave an overview of the draft Development Standards, which is Part 1 of Module 2 of the Code Refresh. He said today is an opportunity to discuss these standards.

The draft standards that have been shared to date:

1. Pedestrian Access
2. Bicycle Parking
3. Vehicle Access
4. Parking Lots
5. Vehicle Use Areas
6. Transitions and Screening

The draft standards that are still to come:

1. Fences and Walls
2. General Planting / Landscaping
3. Signs
4. Tree Canopy
5. Affordability Bonusing (still needing legal input)

Colin then asked the ZAC members if there are any general comments or questions about the draft development standards.

Philip Hart asked for a quick definition of site modification. He also wondered why site modification don't require the bicycle parking and transit access requirements. Colin indicated that any changes less than 15,000 square feet of site area would be considered a site modification. Anything more than that would be considered new construction. Colin indicated that this was just a threshold and can be revised. He also stated that bicycle parking is more of a use-based requirement, which is more associated with the building.

Brian White asked if these development standards apply to single-family dwellings. Colin indicated that a few of these standards could apply to single-family dwellings (i.e., driveway widths) but for the most part site development standards don't apply to them.

Maritza Pechin pointed out a discrepancy in the draft standards regarding language for when the standards apply. She also had some questions for the transition, transition screens, frontage screens, and site element screens for a change of use. She thought it could be difficult to have these requirements for a change of use for a small lot that doesn't have the space. Maritza will scan the rest of her comments and provide them to staff.

Damian Pitt asked questions regarding bicycle parking but it was noted that this would be discussed later in the presentation.

Preston Lloyd brought up the recent Site Plan process that PDR has implemented that is supposed to be a more straightforward process. He wants to make sure that the new applicability requirements for the development standards don't inadvertently draw out the scope of that process. Chair Greenfield recommended Code Studio look at the Site Plan Checklist that was created.

Pedestrian Access

Discussion Questions:

- Do the proposed access types make sense?
- Are the correct access types attributed to the right districts in the table?

Preston Lloyd asked if there is a waiver process for scenarios where these proposed access types would not be feasible due to topography or other unique conditions. He also shared concerns with the annexed parts of the city in southside where there are no public sidewalks. Preston stated that this waiver wouldn't be a good variance case due to the standards set in the Code of Virginia proving a hardship. He recommends allowing for the waiver during the site plan process.

Charlie Wilson stated that the intentions for these requirements are good, but the implementation could be difficult. He shared concerns with six-foot minimum access width at the single-family and two-family infill level. He thinks six feet is too wide and maybe three feet would be better. Maritza Pechin questioned the difference between internal connectivity vs. external connectivity. Colin Scarff said that external connectivity is making sure that you connect to pedestrian connections that exists or are proposed as a part of the development. Maritza also recommended that we don't regulate the minimum width for the pedestrian walkway. She stated that building code should regulate the width regarding ADA compliance.

Jennifer Mullen followed up on the waiver process previously mentioned for pedestrian access. She referenced infill development on tracts of land that don't have sidewalks fronting them. She recommended having pedestrian access on one side of the driveway (not both).

Charles Menges asked if these pedestrian access requirements would apply to single-family dwellings. It was noted that they would apply to new construction single-family dwellings. More concerns were raised about the access requirements when there are no public sidewalks. Colin Scarff stated that they could look at exemptions for single-family dwellings or duplexes if there are no sidewalks. Jennifer Mullen believes it depends on the development type and how the internal road is coming in. Colin Scarff indicated that a driveway with a pedestrian access to the front door could be used. Chair Greenfield stated that driveways are not permitted in front yards in certain districts where there is alley access for the property. Colin Scarff said that they will look into reducing or eliminating the minimum access width. Charlie Wilson recommended that Public Works should review this as a part of their process. Preston Lloyd reiterated concerns about the waiver process only being through City Council approval. Jennifer Mullen asked if the connectivity ties into the greenways, bicycles, and trails plan. More concerns were shared about requiring pedestrian access for single-family dwellings.

Bike Parking

Discussion Question:

- What you think about this table - does it require too much, not enough? Is it wrong for certain uses?

Colin Scarff indicated that the bicycle parking requirements have expanded beyond the residential uses and are proposed to apply to a variety of uses. Colin shared a concern about requiring too many spaces for one use and mentioned the idea of putting a cap on the number of spaces so that a large hotel wouldn't require 200 spaces. He indicated that short-term spaces could be used for visitors of a building and long-term spaces are meant for employees or residents. Damian Pitt noted that certain parts of the city are dense and bicycle-friendly where other parts are not. Damian thinks we need to delineate the land uses and bicycle parking requirements based on different parts of the city. He stated that some of the bicycle requirements may be too low in the denser parts of the city. Wayne Credle suggested that the bicycle requirements for medical uses should be increased and wanted clarification on how these calculations for spaces were determined. Colin Scarff indicated that these numbers were borrowed from another locality. There was a discussion about the difference between short-term and long-term spaces and it was confirmed that these bicycle requirements don't apply to single-family dwellings.

Charlie Wilson shared a concern about how long-term bicycle parking spaces produce weird rooms in certain buildings. He said they often feel like bicycle graveyards and wanted to see if there was a way to soften them and maybe only just require them to be covered. Preston Lloyd discussed his concerns with the one size fits all approach to bicycle parking. He suggested applying requirements based on location near a bike lane or creating an overlay where bicycle utilization is best suited. He suggested another option would be to let the market dictate the number of spaces and provide incentives. Preston indicated

that these bicycle parking spaces do require space that could be used for more housing. Maritza Pechin shared concerns with requiring a minimum of two short-term and long-term spaces for certain commercial uses regardless of size and the description of the bicycle facilities. Maritza said that these requirements are more than what is currently required and recommended putting a cap on certain uses as Colin previously suggested. She indicated that the long-term spaces being on the ground floor could be a burden on other areas required on the ground floor.

Colin Scarff suggested that these bicycle parking space requirements are different than parking space ratios. If a mistake is made with parking ratios, it will be much more impactful on wasted space than the bicycle spaces. Charles Menges asked about the different types of bicycles and other modes of transportation (scooters, motorized bicycles, and others in the future). Charles mentioned that bicycle lanes in New York City were designed for bicycles, but they are now being used by these other modes of transportation. He shares similar concerns with these bicycle parking requirements and the potential for other uses in the future. Philip Hart shared concerns with these bicycle requirements for renovations or change of uses for areas with older commercial development (Carytown) that would be an impediment to businesses. Jennifer Mullen suggested alternatives to bicycle parking requirements if there are already spaces in the right-of-way. Ellen Robertson stated that the bicycle parking should be in uniform with demands for parking of cars. She wants to make sure the requirements align with the existing bike infrastructure.

Damian Pitt suggested that the transitions and screening standards are important, but he didn't believe the group could discuss them in the allotted time so it was recommended that staff set aside time at the next ZAC meeting.

Preston Lloyd asked Kevin Vonck (PDR Director) about the value between having these standards clearly defined in the zoning code instead of letting them be addressed in the site plan process. Kevin Vonck indicated that staff will examine the site plan process in about six months to see where there are sticking points. Kevin Vonck said that it is important that these standards are available to public whether they are in the code or other city policy. Kevin said that standards that are codified should be City Council priorities.

Vehicle Access

Discussion Questions:

- Should there be more granularity to the proposed driveway spacing standards?
- What do you think of the proposed driveway width standards?

Colin Scarff stated that similar to pedestrian access, they want to make sure that vehicles have the proper access to sites. He said that we don't want a lot of driveways along a street. Colin gave an overview of the spacing requirements for vehicle access. There was a clarification on the requirements for driveways for single-family dwellings. Chair Greenfield asked if these driveway design standards allow all properties to have driveways. Colin said that a driveway in the front yard would not be permitted if there is alley access (similar to the existing requirements).

Jennifer Mullen asked about the minimum spacing requirements of 50 feet for driveways on abutting lots. It was indicated that a Special Use Permit would be required in order to waive that. Charlie Wilson then mentioned that a provision in the draft standards allows the City Engineer to waive certain requirements. Jennifer Mullen suggested that this spacing requirement not be in the zoning ordinance. Brian White shared concerns with the widths of driveways serving up to five parking spaces. He stated that families with three cars may not be able to fit on these driveways so they would have to park on the street. Maritza Pechin said it is good to reduce the conflict between pedestrians and cars exiting parcels. She said there are places where vehicles are exiting more than others and there may be a need for a driveway to empty a garbage container that could be close to a driveway needed for cars going to a parking lot. Ellen Robertson said some vehicle standards could be put in the zoning code, but she believes it should mostly be up to the developer. There was a discussion about using Public Works guidelines for new driveways through Vision Zero.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION ON THE GOALS FOR THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS

Rene Biberstein made a note in the Transitions and Screening chart that there will be transition standards applied to the RA- districts.

Rene provided an overview of the administrative provisions and explained that they establish:

- The authority under which the zoning code is established and the bodies that oversee it.
- The way that development applications are reviewed and approved.
- The process for making amendments to the zoning code's text or map (i.e. rezonings)
- Rules for granting exceptions (variances and special use permits (SUPs), as well as minor discretionary modifications that can be granted by staff).
- How existing non-conformities are dealt with.
- How the zoning code is enforced and the penalties for violating it.

Rene then asked the ZAC the following questions regarding the goals for the administrative provisions:

- For those who have dealt with the zoning code: Are there administrative processes that you think could
- be made more effective or efficient?
- For everyone: Generally, what outcomes would you like to see for the code's administrative processes?
- It is hoped that the number of SUPs will be drastically reduced as a result of the updated standards. Outside of this, should the City attempt to formally limit the scope of SUPs?
- Do you have any other suggestions?

Brian White believes that being able to build things by-right would be an enormous improvement. He also asked they be conscious of the balance between the cost of housing in the city and the number and scope of responsibilities that we are adding to property owners with the proposed provisions. Charlie Wilson would like to see more opportunities for special exceptions that can go to the Board of Zoning Appeals instead of a Special Use Permit. Charlie also believes the administrative variance process is important for minor relief.

Preston Lloyd referenced the impacts of other zoning ordinances that have been overly prescriptive with the administrative process. Preston believes the more details about the process that we put in the code, the less flexible PDR can be about expediting the process when appropriate. He referenced other localities using incentive zoning for affordable housing. Preston explained that changes to the Special Use Permit process would require amendments to the City Charter. Preston also discussed the issues with the new Charlottesville zoning ordinance preventing adaptive reuse projects when there are nonconformities. Charlie Wilson asked if the administrative provisions would include any affordable dwelling unit ordinances. Rene Biberstein said that these could potentially be under development standards, but they are waiting to hear back from the city attorney's office. Rene also said they could be incorporated into the different zoning districts. Preston Lloyd asked if there will be a Planned Unit Development (PUD) process in the new code similar to the existing Community Unit Plan (CUP). Colin Scarff said that is to be determined. Preston shared concerns about the nonconformities of the existing Community Unit Plans if they are not carried over into the new code.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Greenfield announced the next meeting is scheduled on October 8, 2025, at 4 P.M. in the 5th Floor Conference Room at City Hall (900 E. Broad St, Richmond, VA 23219). She reiterated that the draft zoning districts, uses, and map are available online for public comment until September 28th.

Chair Greenfield adjourned the meeting at 6:20 P.M.