

# Richmond 300: Code Refresh Advisory Council Meeting Notes

Date: October 8, 2025, 4 P.M.  
Location: 900 E Broad Street  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room  
[Code Refresh Zoning Advisory Council | Meeting-Join | Microsoft Teams](#)



DEPARTMENT OF  
**PLANNING AND  
DEVELOPMENT  
REVIEW**

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## Attendance

**Members Present:** Mr. Preston Lloyd (Vice Chair), Ms. Elizabeth Greenfield, Mr. Benny Gates, Mr. Phillip Hart, Mr. Charles Menges, Ms. Jennifer Mullen, Ms. Casey Overton, Mr. Damian Pitt, Mr. Charlie Wilson, Councilwoman Ellen Robertson (6<sup>th</sup>)  
Virtual Participants: Dr. Wayne Cradle, Ms. Maritza Pechin (joined in-person at 5:26PM), Ms. Kendra Norrell

**Absent:** Mr. Phillip Hart, Mr. David Johannes, Mr. Eric Mai, Mr. White

**Staff Present:** Sr. Dep. Dir. Marianne Pitts, Dir. Kevin Vonck, and Mr. Brian Mercer (Planning and Development Review Department); Mr. Colin Scarf and Mr. Rene Biberstein (Code Studio Consulting Team Representatives);

**Guests:** Mr. Merrick Malone (Director, Housing & Community Development), Mr. Guy Roach and Mr. Joe Dillard (GRTC)

## CALL TO ORDER

### Roll Call

Vice Chair Preston Lloyd called the meeting to order at 4:05 PM. He announced that he would serve as Acting Chair until Chair Greenfield arrived. A roll call was conducted, confirming a quorum was present.

### Virtual Participation Requests

Virtual participation requests were received from Dr. Credle, Ms. Pechin, and Ms. Norrell. Each member stated their reason for joining virtually—home renovations, HVAC repairs, and a work trip respectively. Motions to approve each request were made, seconded, and unanimously approved by the Council.

## **Approval of Minutes**

The September 2025 meeting minutes were reviewed. A motion to approve the minutes was made and seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Members of the public were invited to comment on items not on the day's agenda.

- Thomas Courtney (1st District) raised concerns about public access to the zoning map tool, noting difficulties using it on mobile devices and limited access among Southside residents. He also expressed concern regarding potential conflicts of interest among particular professionals serving on the Council.
- Maria Duster (Community Climate Collaborative, C3) emphasized the importance of climate action, transit-oriented development, and inclusionary housing in the zoning refresh. She encouraged the City to support mixed-use and multi-modal neighborhoods and to allow duplexes, ADUs, and missing-middle housing citywide.
- Thomas Fitzpatrick (1st District, Housing Opportunities Made Equal) highlighted Richmond's housing affordability crisis and the historic exclusionary nature of zoning. He urged broader public engagement, especially for renters and those with limited internet access as he also found commenting online difficult.
- Meg Lawrence (3rd District) encouraged the Council to avoid one-size-fits-all zoning standards (use permissions, types of zonings, transit routes, sidewalks) and to consider neighborhood context in future drafts. She also urged staff to consult with communities before releasing the next draft of the zoning code.

*No additional public comments were received in person or online. The public comment period was closed.*

## **RECAP AND MEETING INTRODUCTION**

Planning staff member, Senior Deputy Director, Marianne Pitts provided a recap of the previous meeting and outlined the agenda. She stated if there were any additional comments to email them or comments could be added to the document itself. Ms. Pitts then introduces the guests who will be presenting during the first half of the meeting and explains that Code Studio will present during the second half with emphasis on transition, signage, and landscaping standards. She noted that comments on the draft development standards and map had closed on September 28th. Over 350 email comments had been received and were being compiled for Council review. She also shared that Planning Commission had passed a resolution expanding the Advisory Council to up to 21 members to improve district representation. Ms. Pitts explained that Chair, Elizabeth Greenfield, will appoint the new members in along with City Councilmembers to remedy the lack of representation in certain districts (mainly representatives from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> districts). She stated applicants will be pulled from the original applicant pool and that several people are no longer serving on the ZAC.

## **GUEST PRESENTATIONS**

### **Office of Housing & Community Development (COR) Presentation and Council Discussion**

Mr. Malone from the City of Richmond's Office of Housing and Community Development provided a presentation on affordable housing, displacement risks, and the City's efforts to address affordability challenges. He noted that young residents often leave Richmond for college and are unable to return due to rising housing costs.

Chair Greenfield inquired whether legislation exists to prevent displacement. Mr. Malone referenced the Healthy Homes Program, which assists residents in aging in place and completing home repairs, as well as the City's eviction diversion initiatives. He acknowledged that while minimizing displacement is a goal, it is unrealistic to suggest it can be fully eliminated.

Mr. Gates raised concerns about the elderly population, noting that individuals relocating from other states often face affordability challenges due to income disparities. He remarked that the Healthy Homes Program has a long waitlist and limited funding.

Mr. Malone explained that less than \$10 million had been allocated over nine years due to the absence of a dedicated funding source. He stated that \$2 million in new preservation funding had recently been added and emphasized the need to leverage partnerships and align zoning reforms with housing strategies to keep pace with market changes.

Mr. Menges referenced studies on upzoning in Minnesota and Oregon, noting mixed results. Mr. Merrick agreed that while upzoning is a useful tool, it must be applied in coordination with other housing strategies.

Mr. Lloyd asked which housing tools have proven most successful. Mr. Malone identified the Affordable Housing Performance Grant as particularly effective, providing rebates and tax incentives to developers. He noted that forthcoming RFPs for surplus City properties will further expand affordable housing opportunities.

Mr. Gates expressed that post-pandemic policies appear to have disproportionately affected older residents. Mr. Malone responded that the City is committed to wraparound services and intentional housing strategies, though progress has been gradual.

Mr. Wilson questioned whether increasing housing supply lowers overall housing prices, citing Austin, TX as an example. Mr. Pitt noted that while Austin's prices declined, the city did not necessarily produce more units for lower- or middle-income residents.

Dr. Pitt observed that new construction in lower-income neighborhoods often remains unaffordable for existing residents. Mr. Malone agreed, stating that the City must intentionally subsidize housing types and strategically target infill development to achieve balanced outcomes.

Dr. Credle asked what additional tools beyond the Performance Grant are being used. Mr. Malone referenced the Affordable Housing Trust Fund and the City's interest in promoting diverse building types such as manufactured homes and smaller formats. He emphasized the need for streamlined development processes.

*At 4:58 P.M., Councilwoman Ellen Robertson joined virtually, citing illness. A motion by Mr. Lloyd, seconded by Ms. Overton, approved her virtual participation unanimously.*

## **GRTC Presentation and Council Discussion**

Guy Roach and Joe Dillard from GRTC presented an update on the North–South Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project. They described the ongoing NEPA review process, third-round public engagement, and the concurrent Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) study. The study aims to anticipate and guide development pressures along the BRT corridor.

Key station areas include Brook Road, Brookland Park, Southside Plaza among others. GRTC is also exploring options for a new downtown transfer station to serve as a permanent mixed-use development hub. The team released a related report in May 2024.

Mr. Lloyd asked about funding and the role of density in supporting ridership. Mr. Roach reported farebox revenues between \$5.6 and \$8 million, supported by state and regional partnerships, and noted that higher-density development enhances long-term system sustainability.

Dr. Pitt asked about the choice to use the Manchester Bridge instead of the Mayo Bridge. Mr. Dillard from GRTC confirmed that the Mayo Bridge was excluded to avoid conflict with VDOT’s replacement project. The agency continues coordinating with CBTA funds and other regional partners.

Mr. Menges inquired about bus utilization rates. GRTC staff noted that ridership has remained strong since fare-free service began, with growth expected once TOD policies are adopted.

Ms. Pechin asked about the scope and intent of the TOD study, clarifying its purpose to guide development rather than regulate zoning. Her prior involvement in securing the federal grant for the study was noted. Members thanked GRTC staff for the presentation.

## **Code Studio Presentation and Council Discussion**

Mr. Biberstein of Code Studio presented a summary of public feedback from the zoning map and draft ordinance comment portal and stated the second round of review will expand opportunities for public input.

### **Public Feedback Key Summary Points:**

- 2,105 total comments on the map
- 686 replies to those comments
- 620 unique commenters identified
- Top 5 neighborhoods with comments included the Fan, Nature Park, Museum District, Oregon Hill, and Northern Barton Heights
- 25 neighborhoods lacked comments on the map
- 427 comments in draft documents

### **Top themes from the comments included:**

- Prioritizing affordable housing options
- Concerns about construction capacity with increased density
- Promoting mixed-use developments
- Reevaluating zoning on mixed corridors

Mr. Wilson asked whether the ZAC Council would review the second draft before public release. Staff responded that due to the schedule, the Council will review updates concurrently with the public.

Mr. Menges expressed concern that some public comments were sent to the Planning Commission instead of PDR. Ms. Pitts clarified that all comments sent to Richmond 300 staff, commissioners, and consultants are being consolidated for inclusion.

Dr. Credle asked about outreach efforts to neighborhoods with lower participation. Ms. Pitts described recent pop-up events and stated that email submissions have helped fill gaps in underrepresented districts. Members requested a summary of which neighborhoods have yet to submit input.

Discussion turned to transition standards between districts of differing intensities. Mr. Biberstein explained that areas with higher intensity zoning adjacent to residential uses will require greater setbacks or landscape screening. Mr. Wilson noted that such standards may not apply in RD zones where no increase in intensity occurs.

Ms. Pechin referenced Type A diagrams and explained how lot depth and building height interact to maintain appropriate scale. Mr. Wilson suggested that Type C transitions will be especially important for context-sensitive development.

Dr. Pitt raised questions about solar access, asking whether additional setbacks could be required to prevent shadowing. Mr. Biberstein explained that orientation-based standards can be difficult to apply uniformly but acknowledged their value. Mr. Wilson added that MX-13 districts should be a focus area due to their proximity to residential zones.

Ms. Mullen commented that transition screen types need clearer labeling to indicate intensity levels. Ms. Pechin noted potential conflicts with existing utilities and encouraged flexibility in applying screening standards. Director Vonck emphasized that the updated ordinance introduces more robust and versatile screening options than the current code.

Council members agreed that transition standards must balance neighborhood privacy concerns with new density allowances. Ms. Pechin suggested that future visual examples could use existing developments such as W. Grace Street TOD to illustrate the intent of design standards.

## **Council Discussion**

### **1. Transition Standards**

- Differences between Type A (Minimal restrictions, 15-foot setback, screening), Type B (Moderate restrictions), & Type C (Most complex, with multiple step backs for tall buildings)
- Building side length relative to lot dimensions
- Considered adding transition standards for MX districts for consistency
- Acknowledged challenged with step backs due to building code and cost implications. Specific considerations regarding step backs included becoming more pronounced over 5 stories, buildings must step back when adjacent to lower-intensity residential zones, and maintaining that the main goal is to preserve views, light, and privacy for existing neighborhoods.

- Revisit mapping to ensure maximum heights are realistically achievable

## **2. Comment Analysis Concerns**

- Frustration was expressed that the summary didn't highlight opposition to duplexes in single-family neighborhoods
- Discussed challenges of verifying commenter identities and residences (neighborhoods)
- Recognized the need for better community engagement, especially in underrepresented neighborhoods

## **3. Public Comment Process**

- Confirmed multiple comment periods will be available
- Planned to revise draft before Thanksgiving
- Comment period will likely extend into January

## **4. Zoning and Housing Considerations**

- Continued focus on balancing development with neighborhood character
- Explored how zoning might support affordable housing
- Discussed potential impacts of new development on existing neighborhoods

## **Adjournment**

Chair Greenfield announced that the next meeting of the Advisory Council will be held on November 12, 2025, at 4:00 P.M. at City Hall, 900 E Broad Street, 5th Floor Conference Room. The meeting adjourned at 6:36 P.M.

*Past meeting minutes and further information on Code Refresh can be found here:*

<https://rva.gov/planning-development-review/code-refresh>