

Richmond 300: Code Refresh Advisory Council Meeting Notes

Date: January 14, 2026, 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, Riley Champine, Casey Overton, Maritza Pechin, Brian White, Charlie Wilson, Wayne Credle, Bennie Gates, Eric Mai, Damian Pitt, Jennifer Mullen, Melissa Savenko, Ellen Robertson, Andrew Bunn, Tiffany Gunn

Members Absent: Charles Menges, Latasha Wyche, Kendra Norrell

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. Chair Greenfield said the December 2025 Meetings Notes are not ready so there were no meeting notes to approve at the January meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Greenfield opened the floor to public comment.

Richard Hankins, Executive Director for the Partnership for Smarter Growth, appreciates the work so far on Code Refresh but encourages the ZAC to allow for more types of housing in a more equitable way in all council districts. Richard shared concerns with the requirement to only permit commercial uses in the same building as a dwelling use in the RM (residential) districts. He felt this requirement limited the potential for commercial uses and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Annika Schunn, a housing policy advocate at Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME), shared that we must build more housing in expensive areas if we want to avoid displacement. She stated that the data is very clear that building market rate housing slows rent growth for older and more affordable buildings.

Sally Valentine, a resident of Grove Avenue, believes that the Fan is already dense enough and parking is very tight. She also shared concerns with pedestrian safety in the neighborhood and the issues with increasing density.

Copeland Casati shared concerns with the square footage requirements permitted for ADUs. She believes additional dwelling units on lots should be of smaller scale. Copeland stated that dwelling units have been converted to illegal Airbnbs and shared concerns with enforcement.

Barry O'Keefe, a member of Homes for All Our Neighbors Coalition, stated that the city has declared a climate emergency and housing crisis and should allow dense, mixed-use walkable neighborhoods. He encouraged the ZAC to be in dialogue with the Homes for All Our Neighbors Coalition.

William Wilson, a resident of Jackson Ward and member of the Homes for All Our Neighbors Coalition, shared concerns with the transition standards in Draft 2. In particular, he doesn't believe there should be two step back requirements for Transition C. William thinks there should be an alley credit for the step back requirement.

Kevin Cianfarini, co-lead with Climate Changemakers RVA, shared concerns with the gravity of the climate crisis and believes zoning can be a tool in the climate fight. He also believes there is too much RD-A zoning proposed in Draft 2 (15% of the city). Kevin wants to allow more types of housing in the exclusive neighborhoods in the city.

Dave Neary, the CEO of Richmond Habitat, supports the Code Refresh as a practical housing solution. He believes the zoning code should reflect the city we want to become and not the city of the past. He believes Code Refresh doesn't lower standards; it modernizes them. Dave said that Code Refresh isn't the entire solution to the housing problem, but it is a foundational structure.

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 last ZAC meeting where they were introduced the Draft 2 of the Code Refresh. The consultants gave a brief overview of the major changes in Draft 2 at the December meeting. Marianne stated that we would continue this discussion at this meeting and review some map changes. The draft administration regulations will be reviewed at the January meeting as well. Marianne provided a quick update on the recent working groups for Code Refresh.

COUNCIL OPEN DISCUSSION

The Advisory Council Chair led an open discussion with the Advisory Council regarding the Code Refresh project.

COUNCIL CONTINUED DISCUSSION ON MAJOR CHANGES IN DRAFT 2

Rene Biberstein (of Code Studio) gave a presentation on the mapping changes for Draft 2. He started with various changes to the Residential Detached districts (RD-A, RD-B, and RD-C) from Draft 1 to Draft 2. He indicated that some previously zoned RA-A (now RA) properties were changed to RD-C. Rene then provided an overview of the changes to all the other Residential Districts (RC, RA, RM-A, RM-B, and RM-C). He provided an update on the changes in nomenclature for some of these other Residential Districts.

Rene then shared the changes to the Mixed-Use (MX) districts. He indicated the changes in story heights from Draft 1 and the intention to give churches and other places of worship MX-3 zoning. Rene shared that some zoning districts changed along major corridors because the proposed zoning would not be achieved due to transition standards. Rene then shared changes to all the remaining districts (CG, IX, IL, IH, INS, CEM) from Draft 1 to Draft 2. There was a brief discussion about the combination of previous IX-6 and IX-8 districts to one district IX (permitting 7 stories). A question was asked about the changes from the previous RX districts to the new RM districts and the proposed RM zoning along Chamberlayne Avenue.

Another question was asked about the commercial requirements in certain districts. There was a concern about having commercial requirements on the ground floor, but these spaces sit vacant and they could be used for housing. Rene and City staff indicated that none of the districts require ground floor commercial. It was discussed that there could be a retail overlay district or street-oriented commercial frontages (similar to the existing map) created in the future, but there are none proposed for Code Refresh at this time. There was a discussion about the active depth requirements and potential issues with certain uses for a building (equipment room, stairwell exit, gas meter, etc.) not being allowed along the street frontage.

A question was asked about the benefits of places of worship having MX zoning and if there was a particular measure or rule that was used for “place of worship”. Kevin Vonck (PDR Director) explained the reasoning for the proposed MX-3 zoning for places of worship and how it can allow them to evolve and serve accessory commercial uses along with new housing. Another question was asked about public uses on church properties and what would happen to those if the church dissolved its congregation. There was a discussion about regulatory takings for these public uses and it should be up to the property owners.

There was a discussion about the need for 35,000 new housing units, according to the studies in Richmond 300. A comment was made that the changes from Draft 1 to Draft 2 seem to potentially decrease the permitted development and if this helps address the housing crisis. Kevin Vonck addressed the concerns and stated that the preservation bonus in Draft 2 was a result of residents’ concerns with displacement. He also shared that City staff is working on an economic analysis to show the impacts of the preservation bonus. Kevin shared that some neighborhoods were not properly zoned in the 1970s (and current zoning) so the changes in Draft 2 could appear to be a downzoning, but the intention was to match the zoning with the built form. It was stated that Draft 2 of the Code Refresh allows for more development than the existing zoning.

Rene Biberstein provided a list of changes in Draft 2 that were discussed at the December 2025 ZAC Meeting. Rene asked if there were any follow-up questions regarding these changes. A question was asked about the change on corner lots only being able to subdivide along the primary street frontage. Rene explained that staff heard pushback from community members about allowing splits along the side streets and it would be more than incremental change in residential neighborhoods. He also indicated that this could potentially be allowed under the proposed subplot regulations.

There was a brief discussion about the proposed breaks in building heights in the zoning districts and if different heights are more feasible than others. City staff indicated that using the building codes helped determine these proposed building heights. A question was raised about the changes to setbacks in the RA and RM districts. It was explained that setbacks of three feet are required for detached dwellings in these districts or end units of attached dwellings and zero foot setbacks are permitted for attached dwellings along the common lot line. A concern was raised about not having any minimum height requirements in dense districts and a potential issue with the proposed contextual height requirements.

PRESENTATION ON DRAFT ADMINISTRATION REGULATIONS

Rene Biberstein presented an overview of the draft administration regulations. He explained some new elements of the administration section and provided a status of the draft regulations. In particular, the draft regulations have a new summary table that shows the review and approval authority for different application types and other approval processes. This table is designed to make it easier for the public to understand the different processes in the city and who approves them. Rene then explained the potential changes for special exceptions that could be granted through the Board of Zoning Appeals. The special exceptions would have to meet general provisions and intent statements specified in the zoning ordinance. These exceptions are meant to grant relief from certain design and feature requirements. This would help decrease the need for Special Use Permits for relatively minor adjustments to the requirements.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Greenfield announced the next meeting is scheduled on February 11, 2026, at 4 P.M. in the 5th Floor Conference Room at City Hall (900 E. Broad St, Richmond, VA 23219). She indicated that the ZAC will take a deeper dive into the administration regulations at the February meeting along with more review of Article 3 – Use Provisions and Article 4 – Development Standards. The Chair informed the public that any comments about the Code Refresh can be submitted to City staff at richmond300@rva.gov

Chair Greenfield adjourned the meeting at 6:30 P.M.