

Richmond 300: Code Refresh Advisory Council Meeting Notes

Date: February 11, 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**

Attendance:

Members Present:

Elizabeth Greenfield, Andrew Bunn, Riley Champine, Tiffany Gunn, Preston Lloyd, Charlie Menges, Jennifer Mullen, Damian Pitt, Melissa Savenko, Charlie Wilson, Bennie Gates (Virtually)

Members Absent:

Wayne Credle, Phillip Hart, Eric Mai, Kendra Norrell, Casey Overton, Maritza Pechin, Ellen Robertson, Brian White, Latasha Wyche

Staff Present:

Sr. Dep. Dir. Marianne Pitts (Department of Planning and Development Review), René Biberstein and Colin Scarff (Code Studio, consulting team representatives)

CALL TO ORDER

Roll Call

Chair Greenfield called the meeting to order at 4:04 P.M. and then called the roll. A quorum was present.

A virtual participation request was received from Mr. Gates. The member stated his reason for need to join virtually, a family emergency. A motion to approve the request was made, seconded, and approved by the council.

Chair's Comments

Chair Greenfield 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. Chair Greenfield also noted that topics of discussions may be emotional to talk about and reminded commenters to be mindful, respectful, and cordial when voicing opinions.

Approval of December 2025 Meeting Notes

Andrew Bunn motioned to approve the December 2025 meeting notes, seconded by Charlie Wilson. After Council vote, the December 2025 meeting notes were approved, unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

Finn Pollard, on behalf of the Partnership for Smarter Growth (PSG), informed members that the organization has joined the Homes for All Our Neighbors coalition. Pollard stated that they believe it is important that the City and the Zoning Ordinance allow for equitable growth throughout Richmond, particularly in areas and neighborhoods that had been restricted from that growth in the past. They continued to ask that the Council support mixed-uses throughout the City to allow for a more walkable,

affordable Richmond.

Copeland Casati, resident of West Grace Street, stated that our existing communities' affordable housing, sustainability, and resilience matter more than developer profits. Casati shared an example of affordable housing with existing solar opportunities in the Peter Paul neighborhood. They argue that the increased density allowed with Code Refresh would prevent similar uses. They also argue that the argument that density brings affordable housing, is false. Casati stated alternative methods required such as a change to the labor market structure and significant public investment in the housing sector.

Tommy Waterworth, local real estate agent, stated that the citizens are losing out on opportunities now due to affordability and even with grant programs and things of that nature, being able to provide smaller housing across the City will be a great opportunity for people to buy property they can afford. Waterworth then brought up lot coverage and height regulations, stating that there is a concern among developers that they won't be able to monetize with these restrictions.

Meg Lawrence, resident of Ginter Park, on religious buildings being zoned MX-3, stated that while churches being previously zoned Institutional, the current MX-3 zoning is 'not it'. Lawrence argued that this is a one-size-fits-all solution for such a broad variety of properties, sizes, and locations. They state that in Ginter Park Residence Association alone contains around 10 churches in it, with each having unique qualities. They acknowledge the purpose of this change is to move away from special use permits for uses accessory to the existing use, but stated that the special use permit is sometimes needed. Lawrence stated that part of the problem would be commercial uses being allowed in places were there were none previously. They stated that the protection of the conditional use permit is valuable and questioned whether the existing conditional use permit regulations would apply or if they would be amended in subsequent drafts. They argued that if no change is to be had, that the existing definition is vague and encouraged the Council to change before adoption.

Patti Merrill, president of the West Hampton Citizens Association, on occupancy limitations of dwelling units, stated that the existing zoning ordinance does this, in part, through the definition of family, which applies to a group of persons living together in a single-housekeeping unit and an occupancy limit of three for unrelated individuals. Merrill stated that Code Refresh had eliminated the definition of family, and, in doing so, eliminated both the requirement that the group of people be living together as a single housekeeping unit and any limitation on the number of unrelated people living together. They stated the current draft addresses this under the definition of household living, which is defined as residential occupancy of a dwelling unit by a household. They stated that, in the current draft, a household is considered one or more persons living together in a dwelling unit with common access to and common use of all living, kitchen, and eating areas within the dwelling unit, and tenancy is arranged for greater than 30 days. They stated the limitation for occupancy for those unrelated is found in the definition of group living, which starts at 9 unrelated people and therefore, they argue, that one can deduce that the limit for household living is eight unrelated individuals. They stated, in addition to the effects of increased density generated by an increase in number of dwelling units, additional density will be allowed as a result of increased density within each dwelling unit. Merrill stated that informal research of other Virginia jurisdictions saw a standard of 3 to 4 unrelated individuals, they also stated they would like Richmond to reintroduce the concept of living together as a housing unit to reduce the potential for dwelling units being converted into rentals.

Seeing no other members of the public wishing to speak, Chair Greenfield closed the public comment period and thanked everyone for their comments.

COUNCIL RECAP AND MEETING INTRODUCTION

Ms. Marianne Pitts provided a recap of the previous meeting held in December. They stated that there had been requests for information about the direction that the advisors are taking Code Refresh and shared the intention of having that kind of discussion every other meeting, as time is needed to review relevant materials. They also held discussion of differences between draft 1 and draft 2, which would be continued today. Pitts gave an outline of what would be discussed, including the administrative regulations, particularly on what types of special exceptions there are. They also provided an account of the feedback received from the various working groups. These include general questions like are we

achieving the goal of allowing incremental growth in established neighborhoods and allowing for considerable growth along our corridors, and more pointed questions like those regarding the number of unrelated individuals in the dwelling unit. Pitts stated that a summary of comments received will be provided prior to the next meeting. They also stated that the comment period has been extended March 1st.

CONSULTANT PRESENTATION

Revisit of District Standards & Rules of Interpretation & Draft Admin Section Discussion

Colin Scarff, consultant with Code Studio, began the presentation, which would discuss district standards, rules of interpretation, and draft administrative regulations, with development standards being saved for a later meeting.

Scarff began by sharing the district standards' summary tables, explaining in the final draft each standard will contain links to the ordinance section where the standard is defined and how the standard is calculated. They list the standards present, those being amenity space, build-to requirements, parking location, streetscape, building width, active depth, as well as some of the ground story, transparency, and entrance spacing requirements. Scarff then explains the differences in two sets of districts, lower intensity residential and higher intensity districts, stating that some of the standards differ in the latter replaced with specific metrics.

Scarff then presents the next section, outdoor amenity space, with the purpose of the section being to help provide on-site shared recreation and open space, through common outdoor amenity space, as well as encouraging pedestrian oriented and publicly accessible gathering spaces, through pedestrian accessible amenity space. Preston Lloyd stated that when Virginia Housing evaluates affordable projects, they'll often not approve of balconies or other similar kinds of outdoor amenities. Lloyd stated that they would hate to include requirements that create compliance problems with the primary housing financing and encouraged staff to vet whether any of these requirements are in fact going to create that disincentive. Charlie Wilson stated that they understand the utility is magnified if it is a quasi-public experience for the users but questioned how it would be interpreted such as needing a legal rider or permanent access easement.

Scarff transitioned to the build-to requirements, outlining minimum and maximum setbacks. The purpose of these are to create pedestrian-friendly environments and reduce the emphasis of cars along the street edge. They provided an example of prohibiting parking between the building and the street. Additionally included is a clear pedestrian zone between the building and the street, stating that if a sidewalk is 5 feet and the pedestrian zone is 10 feet, then your building would need to be moved back to accommodate the zone. Preston Lloyd argued that the zone may be considered regulatory taking and may face legal challenges under Virginia law.

Scarff then moved to the active depth requirement, with a focus on creating active spaces just above the street to improve walkability and make them safe, engaging, and attractive, with a range of 9 to 20 or 30 feet. The active depth serves as a percentage of the build-to requirement with 60%, down to 20% for inactive uses. Jennifer Mullen asked how the 20% was decided upon, to which Scarff replied with it having no scientific basis, but that it is a number that has been used previously. Melissa Savenko asked if this would prohibit having a home with a driveway beside it, which Scarff replied no, they would still be able to have a driveway. Savenko then asked if a ground floor garage would be allowed. Scarff replied only if the garage is rear accessed, but not street facing. Charlie Wilson asked if it would be possible to limit it to multi-family of a certain size. Savenko added that infill development is often going to be on garage parcels between alleys. Scarff replied that the purpose of this is to prevent a garage door streetscape. Elizabeth Greenfield stated that even though this won't necessarily affect lower-density districts, we still need to be mindful of how it could affect townhomes and infill, as that is a common type of development.

Scarff then covered the building width requirement, stating it will regulate horizontal massing, minimum ground story height, and minimum and maximum finished floor elevation. Preston Lloyd asked if an existing commercial building being converted into residential would need to follow this standard.

Scarff then explained the transparency requirements, noting that this would only apply to street-facing building facades. Lloyd brought up potential issues with conversions of former industrial into residential that have strict regulations when using historic tax credit that prohibit new penetrations through existing walls. Scarff stated the limits between windows and doors and blank walls, with alternative treatments including a living wall, public art, pedestrian access piece, and trees. Riley Champine stated their confusion of large trees being an option, stating that this seems to conflict with the idea of building up to the street. Scarff replied that there may be issues with small trees as they may grow into the pedestrian right-of-way. Andrew Bunn gave an example of large trees on Broad Street. Lloyd stated that the required setbacks combined with existing utilities may force developers to pay to underground utilities.

Scarff presented the requirements of entrances at certain intervals to create some kind of cadence along the street to replicate traditional character that exists in Richmond. Damien Pitt voiced some concerns regarding setbacks, stating that a lot of housing is non-conforming with respect to current setbacks as well as historic development patterns.

René Biberstein then presented information regarding exceptions granted by the Board of Zoning Appeals, a flexibility in the zoning code like variances, but not based on hardship. The code would allow administrative exceptions of up to 10% with the Board of Zoning Appeals being able to grant flexibility of up to 25%. Topics would include width and area, lot coverage, setback requirements, fences and walls, enlargement and re-establishment of non-conforming uses, and building height. Wilson, speaking about the current exceptions, stated that the list slowly grew over time and this created friction as it was done on a case-by-case basis. However, they went on, explaining that this has worked to safeguard from blind spots in the zoning code, stating that maybe starting with only variances as they would need to pass a hardship test. Biberstein stated they hope this will reduce the number of special use permits. Wilson stated the requirements of special use permits, such as the timeline and notification procedures. Charlie Menges stated that they were uncomfortable with the idea of giving the zoning administrator that much power, highlighting that the Board of Zoning Appeals is a citizen-based organization.

Following the discussion, the consultants concluded their presentation and asked if the members had any further questions or requests. Greenfield stated that the development standards would take place next meeting and would most likely take the entire meeting. Gunn asked the consultants for clarification on how neighborhood covenants would interact with the zoning ordinance to which Scarff stated that any additional restrictions in the covenant would need to be followed by the property owner, with Menges stating that those are matters of private contract between property owners.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Greenfield adjourned the meeting at 5:54 P.M.