

# Richmond 300: Code Refresh Advisory Council Meeting Notes

Date: March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2026, 4 P.M.  
Location: City Hall, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room  
900 E. Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23219  
Microsoft Teams (<https://bit.ly/CodeRefreshAC>)



## DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

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### Attendance:

#### Members Present:

Elizabeth Greenfield, Charlie Wilson, Charles Mengles, Brian White, Melissa Savenko, Eric Mai, Riley Champine, Jennifer Mullen, Casey Overton, Maritza Pechin, Andrew Bunn, Ellen Robertson, Wayne Credle (Virtual), Damian Pitt (Virtual), Latasha White (Virtual)

Members Absent: Bennie Gates, Tiffany Gunn, Preston Lloyd, Riley Champine, Phillip Hart, Kendra Norrell, David Johannas

**Staff Present:** Sr. Dep. Dir. Marianne Pitts (Department of Planning and Development Review), René Biberstein and Colin Scarff (Code Studio, consulting team representatives), Kyle Talente (RKG Associates)

### CALL TO ORDER

#### Roll Call

Chair Greenfield called the meeting to order at 4:05 P.M. and then called the roll. A quorum was present.

Virtual participation requests were received from Members Credle, Pitt, and White. Each member stated their reason for need to join virtually. A motion to approve the requests were 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 reminded members to speak loudly so those attending virtually are able to hear them and to also announce their name so those listening will know who's speaking.

#### Approval of December 2025 Meeting Notes

Charles Menges motioned to approve the January 2026 meeting notes, seconded by Melissa Savenko. After Council vote, the December 2026 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.

Stephen Versen, Zoning Chair of the Museum District Association, on the changes from draft 1 and 2 stated that the changes are largely positive. They suggested some tweaks to the commercial use

provisions in the RM district, noting that existing commercial in the neighborhood is typically located on corner lots or side streets and requested additional sensitivities paid to how these more intense uses impact the block face, particularly when located centrally and on main streets. Versen also voiced opposition to the blanket zoning of religious structures as MX-3, stating that the SUP process, while it may be burdensome, has yielded high quality developments.

Meg Lawrence, resident of Woodland Park, on City-owned real estate, recalled of a parcel near the intersection of Chamberlayne and Azalea being sold to Planned Parenthood for 10 dollars, voicing their disappointment on how the sale was inconsistent with the messaging of the City being landlocked and having to use every piece of property at its disposal. They cite a recent article stating that Planned Parenthood has since given up on the project, leaving it to return to the city's possession, stating that the site is a good example of where the MX-3 district should go. They also echoed previous sentiment surrounding MX-3, stating that the properties affected are not one-size-fits-all and affirmed that the SUP process is preferred.

Robin Levey, resident of Byrd Park, on housing density, voiced their support for increased density along transit corridors as presented in the City's master plan, Richmond 300. In contrast, they voiced their opposition to single-family homes being turned into 2+1s. Using their parcel as an example, their backyard is currently partially blocked off by their neighbor's garage. They stated that if the other neighbor were to build an additional structure, then they would be even further impacted. They again referenced Richmond 300, quoting "We need to build the homes gently, adding to the landscape of housing options here, while retaining existing neighborhood character through sensitive design standards and community engagement."

Betsy Gardner, President of the Stonewall Court Civic Association, on Code Refresh generally, stated that they oppose the current shotgun approach and urged members to consider restarting the process. They argued the reason that neighborhoods like Northside, West End, Museum District, etc. are valuable is due to their uniqueness and warned against policy that would make these neighborhoods more similar to those in Northern Virginia. Among these unique qualities are things like architecture, lot sizes, trees, and a variety of uses. Gardner argued that policies like ADU allowances would harm some of these qualities. They questioned if the ADUs the City has currently have been used as rentals or if they are being used as short-term rentals. They brought up RVA Green 2050, noting topics such as urban heat islands, greenspace, and urban forest planning arguing that Code Refresh, as drafted, is acting as an antithesis to these goals by decreasing ground coverage and trees through development. They noted that these effects would lead to increase strain on infrastructure, particularly stormwater. Gardner encouraged discussion with adjacent localities to ease the housing crisis. They also argued that the increase in development potential of parcels will increase land costs. Gardner emphasized the need to develop incrementally by focusing on underdeveloped neighborhoods and infrastructure improvements.

Kathy Hanberg, resident of West Grace Street, stated they agree with previous speakers and noted that in speaker with neighborhood associations, they are generally aligned with Code Refresh. On the topic of the Fan, they questioned why West Grace is zoned mixed-used compared to the residential zoning present in the rest of the district. They also stated that a number of churches, which would be zoned mixed-use, had been sold and made into condos rather than into homes for first time buyers. Hanberg voiced their support for the SUP requirement but noted that the process should be improved. They noted that Charlottesville had effectively banned short-term rentals in the locality, also noting rising rents. Hanberg also emphasized prioritizing infrastructure improvements before allowing increased development.

Christian Schick, on behalf of Flora Washington, state their disappointment that the conversation around Code Refresh has been dominated by property owners even though Richmond is a majority renter locality. They state that they support Code Refresh while acknowledging that the process hasn't been perfectly transparent or accessible. They state that we are in a housing, economic, and affordable crises and that Code Refresh is able to lay the groundwork to address these problems. They argue that density, while not a silver bullet, filling in parking lots with housing certainly doesn't hurt. Washington states that evidence of zoning reform in other localities backs this claim, with rents stabilizing when new housing is built, even if those units aren't immediately affordable. They criticize certain Code Refresh opposition, namely the phrase "like people want to live with like people", which they compare to the historic redlining

of Richmond.

Bruce Tyler, longtime resident of Richmond, stated that 95% of it is right and commends the Council for the work they have done as 50 years without an update is long overdue. However, Tyler identifies 2 issues, being MX-3 zoning for religious institutions and the framing of single-family residential housing vs affordable housing. On the latter issue, they state that everyone is in favor of affordable housing and not many people want to eliminate single-family housing. Tyler recalls a study made during the Stoney administration that stated that 30,000 units are needed, with 33% of the City being single-family. They state that if half of the existing single-family homes added an ADU, it would result in 10,000 units.

Judy Carpenter, President of the Westhampton Civic Association, on the tree canopy, stated that trees are our best hedge against global warming. They stated that the 1<sup>st</sup> district is already struggling with utilities, police, fire, and infrastructure and adding increased density will only serve to exacerbate these issues. Carpenter argues that increased density will destroy the character of the neighborhood, agreeing with previous sentiment that a blanket approach is not appropriate.

Anikka Schone, with the Housing Opportunities Made Equal, on the topic of housing choice, states that the majority of Richmond residents are effectively locked out of living in half of the City. Using themselves as an example, they state that even in a household that is dual-income with no kids, it was still difficult to find affordable housing. They went on to state that if they wanted something that wasn't single-family, that their options would be even smaller. They present alternative reasons for wanting housing other than single-family such as life circumstances, elderly, people looking to downsize, and individuals. They state that housing choice is just as important as affordability, if not more so, as it is the one thing we can guarantee. Additionally, on distributing development and incremental change, they state that development under the current zoning regulations has been largely concentrated in specific areas of the City, namely historically Black and Brown neighborhoods. Schone states that the City has a moral imperative to distribute the growth pressures evenly amongst the City so that no one neighborhood is forced to bear the brunt of the growth that is coming, stating that we cannot control growth but we can change how it grows. One way to grow incrementally is to allow a little bit of change everywhere. They state that you won't see every house on a certain block be demolished and replaced as it doesn't make sense financially.

Gwen Cunningham, resident of Henry Place, voiced their support of the preservation bonus to prevent teardowns of existing housing from developers. They also support the contextual height standards, though pointing out that commercial buildings abutting residential districts would not have to conform to these requirements, which they fear that this would reduce viability of solar panels and gardens.

Jamie Sims, resident of the block located between Thompson Avenue, Grove Avenue, Nansemond Street, and Floyd Avenue, provided a short list of demographics present on the block and shared that proposed zoning does not fit what is there now. Sims voiced concern that by-right uses of 3-story apartment buildings and commercial will encourage displacement of long-term residents from landlords and developers. They argue that this conflicts with the stated goal of increasing affordable housing in the City. They state that each block in the City is different and ask that the City uses sensitivity when zoning.

Copeland Casati, resident, asked the Council, how did code refresh get so far from Richmond 300 and the Climate Action Plan, stating that resiliency trumps concrete. Recalling a food access forum that discussed Richmond's food resilience, stating that community gardens only have so many plots to lease and that yards are Richmond's largest food acreage. They argue that you can't prevent food instability when every lot is paved, which Code Refresh will encourage. That state that Solar energy is now affordable, but development will decrease viability. Casati states that studies show that increased density hasn't increased housing affordability, pointing out that despite increased development recently, rents continue to rise.

William Wilson, with Homes For All Our Neighbors through RVA YIMBY and member of the Historic Jackson Ward Association, on accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and maximum lot coverage rules, stated that goal between draft 1 and draft 2 decreasing the maximum lot coverage and shared examples of progressive alternatives seen in other localities. The first example provides an exemption to lot coverage restrictions for construction of an ADU. The second example, from Arlington County, is called a bonus lot allowance which allows exceptions to lot coverage restrictions for items such as a front porch, rear

detached garage, etc. Wilson stated that we are able to do this for ADUs or other site elements and argues that these additional regulations would react to site-specific conditions rather than fixed coverage percentages. They also provide an example from Portland that allows for lot coverage percentages to increase with the number of units provided on the site.

Errol Somay, stated that draft 1 of Code Refresh was such a shock to system of those involved and that resulted in divisions between YIMBYs and NIMBYs that bled into draft 2 engagement. They reflected on previous projects where City representatives were not transparent with the public and argued that more people knew about the casino referendum than the current Code Refresh.

Kenton Hambrick, retired lawyer and resident of the Caroline Neighborhood, voiced their support of the previous speaker's, Copeland Casati, point and argued that Code Refresh will not provide more affordable homes in the neighborhood and will promote gentrification and erode the diversity of races and income that has characterized the neighborhood. They argue that existing homes will be demolished by developers looking to maximize density and profit. They also argue that Code Refresh will deteriorate the quality of life of single-family neighborhoods on quiet, tree-lined streets. Hambrick stated that this will lead to an increase in cars and parking demand, noise levels, and shade trees. They argued that Code Refresh won't increase the number of affordable homes but will increase the number of short-term rentals. Hambrick argues that removing the definition of family will motivate houses to be converted to boarding houses with up to 8 unrelated individuals. They also argue that the preservation bonus will not be able to mitigate these facts, citing that an existing home would be considered preserved if 60% of the structure remains, arguing that a developer could gut an existing home and add a large addition without having to wait 5 years for the preservation regulations to elapse. Hambrick quotes a goal of Richmond 300 being to preserve existing neighborhoods and argues that Code Refresh being applied indiscriminately across neighborhoods like the Caroline will destroy them. They suggest alternative methods such as leaving the current zoning in neighborhoods like the Caroline as single-family only, try rezoning nodes first, restore the definition of family, restrict the creation of short-term rentals, and prohibit the removal of older trees without planning permission.

## **COUNCIL RECAP AND MEETING INTRODUCTION**

Marianne Pitts, Deputy Department Director of Planning & Development Review provided a recap of the previous meeting held in February. They went over discussion of the rules of interpretation as well as some of the administrative provisions. They stated that the current meeting will take a deep dive into the development standards. Pitts also shared that there will be an analysis of development scenarios from Kyle Talente of RKG Associates, one of the City's subconsultants.

## **CONSULTANT PRESENTATION**

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

Colin Scarff, consultant with Code Studio, began the presentation which would provide an overview of the draft development standards. Eric Mai asked if there are typically development standards for parking garages. Scarff stated that there aren't any in the draft currently, but they could consider adding some, however, the concerns may be address by non-specific standards such as the active depth and transparency requirements. Kevin Vonck, Director of Planning & Development Review, stated that they are able to create standards for as much or as little as we want in the code. They also stated that there's a balance between both someone developing and ease of enforcing from staff.

Charles Menges shared a concern regarding the minimum width of pedestrian walkways being 5 feet. Menges states that in a number of neighborhoods do not conform to these requirements and asked if these would be considered legally non-conforming. Scarff responded, stating that these standards would only be applicable to new construction. Andrew Bunn added that the 5 feet requirement is the ADA standard, meaning that the construction would be subject to these standards from the federal level, regardless of if in a zoning ordinance. They continued, stating that it would fall under the logical termini requirements with the logic that a network has to start with something that doesn't go anywhere and eventually everything will be connected. Menges thanked Gunn for the insight but voiced discomfort with

the idea of 1 or 2 homes with sidewalks and then nothing for the existing homes. Maritza Pechin added that this would be a particular problem in parts of Southside where there's no stormwater infrastructure. They also brought up worries about statutory taking, echoing similar discussion from the previous meeting.

Maritza Pechin shared an additional concern with draft bike parking requirements, stating that those changing from residential to commercial would potentially have to provide more bike parking within an existing structure. They argue that this, along with screening, may not be physically possible when your site is already defined. Eric Mai asked if there were any exceptions for infill development. Brian White suggested waivers for adaptive reuse where bicycle parking for a building with 200 units requiring 50 units would see the removal of a number of units. Scarff replied stating that there is a limit of 10 long-term bicycle parking spots. White stated that this still would make developments less profitable, but if it was that important, that's fine.

Brian White then went on to ask for clarification regarding the opacity requirements for screening and why it was relevant. Scarff replied stating that in order for screening to be effective, it can't be transparent. White then revisited the pedestrian zone stating that it's their understanding that the ADA requirement, that sidewalks be 5 feet instead of 3 feet, only applies to spans of more than 200 feet. Pechin added that as ADA regulations change and evolve, they believe the ordinance should not try to follow ADA regulations as they will be outdated if they are to change in the future. Scarff replied stating that they would suggest they don't put in 5 feet because ADA but put 5 feet as that's a good width of sidewalk, citing the ability for two people to pass each other comfortably.

Andrew Bunn, on bicycle parking, stated that you are able to count public spaces with 500 feet towards the requirement but those provided by the development are required to be within 100 feet for short-term and 200 feet for long-term, requesting that the public spaces follow the same distances for consistency. Jennifer Mullen stated that some administrative clarification could be beneficial regarding things like parking space size and the definition of 'well-distributed'. Maritza Pechin then suggested re-visiting or outright removing the bike parking requirements, arguing that it takes up too much room and exceeds demand. Mullen stated that the Director of Transportation brought up public bike corrals that are in the works.

Charlie Wilson, on the transit stop requirement in section 4.2, stated that they are unsure about this requirement as the topic may be a thing that comes up anyways during the site plan review of substantial size. Melissa Savenko, stated that the language reading 'access to the transit stop must be allowed in perpetuity', sounded excessive and strange. Scarff stated that if they think the standard doesn't make any sense they can look into removing it but noted that it would only affect a very small piece of land in the scheme of things. Wilson, as a point of clarification, added that his question was intended to speak to a scenario where if public works is asking someone to install that in the right of way and they did not want that comment to be construed as them suggesting an on-site easement for a transit stop is in the site plan process.

Melissa Savenko asked for clarification regarding a section reading 'every platted lot is allowed at least 1 driveway'. Scarff stated that this was included primarily for lots with alley access and to avoid development blocking off access to your property. Charlie Wilson stated that even if the zoning code allows, the Department of Public Works may not allow a curb cut. Maritza Pechin stated in some neighborhoods, it doesn't make sense for every house to be permitted a driveway. Andrew Bunn stated that the access would still need to follow DOT access management standards, which can limit the number of driveways or access points in general.

Elizabeth Greenfield stated that the Department of Transportation and Department of Public Works should be consulted for redundancies. Charlie Menges stated that the applicability of these standards are for new construction that would presumably include ADUs, asking if sidewalks would be required. Scarff replied that they would. Elizabeth Greenfield then noted some things referenced in the landscaping chart that determines if existing or new construction would be required to follow specific standards. Greenfield asked if they would need to meet tree canopy requirements when doing an addition, stating that they don't want to be told what I have to put on my properties and they feel this is more appropriate for commercial use or larger developments.

Melissa Savenko stated that if we are expanding the lot coverage that's permitted, the City would lose a lot of permeable surface and trees and that if not then where would the City make it up? Greenfield again asked if tree canopy requirements are tracked for additions. Kevin Vonck stated that there are currently no restrictions and that the only time it may be applicable for larger development sites for erosion control. Charlie Wilson stated that in context of other goals found in the document, the requirement makes sense, but things like requiring an ISA certified arborist must be provided should be simplified. Brian White expanded, pointing out that there are a number of the City's tree wells that are empty and argued that the zoning ordinance is establishing two standards, one for the public and one for private. Eric Mai agreed, arguing that the tree canopy should not be the responsibility of private property owners and stating that those in favor of trees should tell your council members to invest in the Urban Forestry Department. Charlie Wilson stated that they would like to hear more about the use of right-of-way for trees and if future zoning ordinance would have tree coverage requirements and if trees in the right-of-way would be able to fulfil those requirements.

Andrew Bunn stated that oftentimes the tree well in front of a property acts as that lot's tree coverage. Bunn also stated that there has been a concentrated effort of filling the tree wells previously discussed. They argued that tree coverage requirements are essential, especially in lower density districts, in order to address the major environmental issues in Richmond. They also added that these lower density districts typically have less public space, parks, and right-of-way in them where trees can get planted.

Melissa Savenko stated that they would have no objection to a less scientific or less rigorous of measuring whether the tree is appropriate. They highlight that Richmond 300 has a number of goals requiring balancing beyond just affordability, density, additional housing, and climate resilience. Savenko stated that allowing additional building will cost a lot of land and create more problems with water runoff and that it's important to balance those interests. Maritza Pechin stated that they had planted an oak tree that was shorter and has grown but they're still not meeting the required tree canopy coverage and asked how does the City delineate between difference types and size of trees. Pechin added that they are fond of the idea of using offsite tree banking and payment, however, they have questions on where does that go and how is that managed. Riley Champine noted a theme with the discussion of walkways, tree canopy, and bike parking, stating that some of these things are simple and obvious and doesn't need to be this complicated. Champine asked if there is a threshold to allow less strict standards for individual homeowners versus bigger developments.

Marianne Pitts provided insight stating that the Office of Sustainability has been collaborating on this and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss tree canopy standards in a future meeting. Elizabeth Greenfield asked whether or not we are evaluating these proposed standards against program policy that the City has already created, arguing that what is adopted shouldn't exceed the standards stated elsewhere. Brian White argued that there are 3 things that drive the cost of housing, with supply and demand being the big one and the zoning ordinance and building code being another. They argued that they are constantly evolving but seem to always be additive but never removing restrictions and worried that if one of the goals is to apply downward pressure on housing prices, that these regulations are sabotaging these efforts. White noted that the removal of parking minimum was an example of successful effort.

Ellen Robertson stated that Richmond 300 has goals that conflict at times and triangulate, with being able to build things quickly, cheaply, or high quality and only being able to choose 2. Robertson noted the importance of recreating the tree canopy throughout the City equitably. They stated that in terms of million dollar projects, they would could afford hiring an arborist and create an elaborate tree plan, but for mom-and-pop homeowners, settling for saying 'just put a tree' in is acceptable. They noted that people want high quality development but also want to complement what is already there.

Andrew Bunn asked for clarification if transition buffers are additive setbacks to yards, to which Scarff stated that they are contained within yard setbacks. Elizabeth Greenfield wrapped up conversation on the development standards, stating that additional comments may be submitted to staff.

## Richmond Development Scenario Analysis

Kyle Talente, RKG Associates, introduced the presentation stating that they were tasked to analyze the like rate of change based on a series of zoning options presented. This would be a financial feasibility study of what the value of houses in the RD-A, RD-B, and RD-C zones and what they would likely be under these different development scenarios. This would help understand the potential would be for investors or existing property owners to take advantage of ADUs and bonus units. They stated that not everywhere in Richmond is the same and they wanted to make sure that the feasibility analysis compared apples to apples, both what the current value of housing is in these areas as well as what the likely value of new housing development, either for sale or for rent, would be. Then, they would calculate what the value differential would be and whether or not an existing homeowner would want to take advantage of this policy or whether an investor would come in and make an offer to a property owner so they could take advantage of the policy.

Talente stated that they examined this 2 different ways. The first was side-by-side subdivision, explaining that each zoning district has a minimum width requirement and for a property to be able to subdivide, they would need to have at least double the width of that property. For example, RD-A would need to be 180 feet, RD-B at 100 feet, and RD-C at 50 feet as well as buildings themselves being situated in a suitable manner. Talente stated that of the lots in the aforementioned districts, 5% would be able to be subdivided.

Talente also examined front-to-back lots, with new construction added behind existing structures. They noted that 70% of lots would be able to build a unit behind the existing structures and meet the requirements there. Talente stated that owner-occupants have different priorities versus potential investors, noting that an owner-occupant lives in the existing structure and would either be adding an ADU or adding a new structure with an ADU, looking for the continued use of their property and to continue to maintain value.

They then introduced the feasibility ratio calculation, explaining that if, for example, if an existing house is worth \$300,000 and if they take advantage of this policy change, an investor would be willing to pay them \$450,000 or 50% more than the existing value of my home, then the ratio determines whether it would be likely or unlikely for the homeowner to accept that offer.

Revisiting side-by-side subdivisions, Talente finds that not only is it limited to the number of parcels actually capable of subdividing, but the loss of value of the property being cut in half doesn't justify the move in most of the City. Put simply, what an investor would be willing to pay for that newly-created empty lot is likely not worth the lost of value to the house by the lot becoming smaller, stating that only 0.6% of lots in RD-A, 0.6% in RD-B, and 5.1% in RD-C are able to subdivide and show financial viability. The annual rate of change, or the percent of parcels that actually take advantage of the opportunity, is much lower at 0.01%, 0.01%, and 0.17% , respectively.

Talente then analyzed how likely it is that lots will subdivide either side-by-side or front-to-back. They observe that significantly more parcels have sufficient area to accommodate a subdivision, compared to just 4% under side-by-side requirements. RD-A would see 5% of parcels qualifying for subdivision and showing financial feasibility. RD-B had 27% of parcels, and RD-C had 34%. The annual rate of change is 0.1%, 0.6%, and 1.1%, respectively.

They then explored how much more uptake there would be if 2+1 was allowed for teardowns. Talente found that it is more financially advantageous in almost all cases to preserve the existing unit and build the two new units as an additional structure that acquiring the property at full market value, incur the demolition cost, and then building a new structure to get to the 2 full size and ADU. As a caveat, this may differ for blighted and dilapidated properties. . Talente found that RD-A, RD-B, and RD-C saw parcels expected to convert under the 2+1 demolition scenario extremely unlikely, electing to measure in numbers of parcels at 1, 17, 4 parcels, respectively.

Talente then analyzed how many owners would take advantage of the preservation bonus (2 full units plus 1 ADU) as a rental model. Talente found that RD-A, RD-B, and RD-C saw parcels both qualifying and showing financial feasibility at rates of 2%, 13%, and 33%, respectively. Additionally, the expected annual rate of change would be 0.05%, 0.4%, and 1.2% of all parcels.

Following the presentation, Melissa Savenko requested that the map displaying subarea market characteristics be adjusted for clarity and to include the relevant zoning districts.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Greenfield adjourned the meeting at 6:36 P.M.