

First District Special Use Permits

Updated as of November 3rd, 2025. This document may not include ALL SUPs in the District.

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We continue to see numerous Special Use Permits in our district. Each of these projects, in order to receive an exemption from the standard zoning allowances, must meet a standard that it improves the neighborhood and helps us reach our goal of having a beautiful, livable, and more inclusive city.

Understandably, with our neighborhood already so good, it can be difficult to imagine how much any change would constitute an improvement. But if, through community discussions and careful considerations, a project can welcome a greater number of families and businesses to the neighborhood while retaining the neighborhood's historic charm and beauty, then it is a welcome addition.

I have the responsibility of casting a consequential vote on these and other projects in the city. I believe the city needs to find a balance between a few important principles that have tension between them.

Firstly, the city, and our neighborhood as a part of it, needs to welcome more families into it. I believe this is important because countless families are unable to find anywhere in the city where they can move. This is due to a housing shortage that is greatly impacting Richmond. We

are lucky that we have a spot already, and I don't think we should make it our goal to exclude others from joining us.

But secondly, we mustn't create a negative living environment for existing or new residents. We must do what we can to ensure that we have green spaces (public and private), that the homes we build will be pleasant to live in, and that the city retains its historic charm, which contributes to our quality of life.

Here are some updates on a few Permits currently under discussion with the city:

****Henry Place Townhomes - The “Historic Farmhouse on Grove”**

The applicant and the neighbors have agreed on the basics of a new design. Rather than two sideways rows of townhomes, the new design features a combination of duplexes and single family homes, consistent with feedback from neighbors. The new design will undergo review by city departments before coming back to Council and Planning Commission.

Next to the Malvern Manor apartment complex on Grove is a historic home with a large lot where Lafayette would have intersected Grove. This same lot backs up to the neighborhood of Henry Place, which consists of modestly sized one-story homes.

Center Creek Builders was proposing a large number of townhouses in this lot as part of what they describe as a mission of creating well-designed city homes at lower price points. Though the very first proposals involved developing the whole plot, the revised project proposal later included the preservation of that original historic home, based on overwhelming community preference.

The project went through numerous iterations before an initial hearing at Planning Commission. Despite the broad opposition from neighbors at the time, that application was approved by the Commission.

My Response:

However, I shared the concerns of the neighbors that the design was not compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. I insisted that they continue to discuss and revise the designs before bringing them to Council or else they would not have my support. I certainly hate prolonging the process, which adds to expenses and delays the availability of new housing, but a project of this size requires that enough time be spent to achieve the best results.

After some more conversations, the applicants have returned with a more significant revision to their layout. This layout is consistent with proposals from the residents that they said they would support. While it unfortunately will provide fewer homes than the earlier proposal, it is still an eleven-home plan. Most importantly, it creates these new homes in a manner that is architecturally harmonious with the surrounding context. The new plan includes more green space, and adds no new curb-cuts.

I am eager to build many more homes in the District, and I believe we will make more progress more quickly if we respect the context of the neighborhood. This may mean less ambitious projects but it will spark less opposition and result in an outcome we can all be proud of.

Berrington Court Townhomes (behind Grove Eye Care)

The application is for 17 townhomes in the area between Thompson and 195, between Floyd and Grove Avenues. The Museum District Association has been engaged in discussions to ensure the designs are compatible with the surrounding context. The plans I've seen include garage parking and a reasonable number of street trees. Given the isolated nature of this property, I am not expecting any concerns or opposition.

My Response: I am glad to hear about the addition of 17 new homes in the district. I am also glad to see the plans include improvements to the crosswalks around Floyd and Thompson, adding bumpouts to reduce the crossing distance.

****7th Street Church (Malvern & Grove)**

A proposal has been submitted to redevelop the property of the 7th Street Church at Malvern and Grove. The property is owned by the congregation, which is considering options for its future - including relocation of the congregation and the sale of the property to create more housing.

The process is being driven by the congregation, with a set of objectives that includes furthering the church's mission and ensuring that the property is used in a way that aligns with the community. As the pastor explained to me, the maintenance backlog of the existing building is immense, but they do hope to preserve aspects of the historic structure.

The proposal submitted is an elegant design, with a combination of townhomes fronting the streets, and a condo building along the alley. The proposal preserves mature street trees and preserves and repurposes a section of the original church building.

The neighbors expressed concerns about traffic and parking, and the neighboring Greek Church has also raised concerns about their private alleyway traffic, and close proximity between Greek Festival activities and potential new residents.

My Response:

There is still plenty of time to discuss the merits and concerns of this proposal and to request revisions based on community and administrative feedback.

I myself believe the community would benefit from preserving as much of the historic church structure as possible, but there is no law requiring that the structure be preserved, and there are realities of the cost and feasibility of repurposing old buildings. I met with Historic Richmond to better understand the factors that impact preservation.

The neighbors' questions around the proposed parking impacts warrant a close look too. The ratio of units to dedicated spaces is ambitious. And while it makes me really sad to think of

rejecting homes simply due to car parking concerns, at certain project sizes the question is legitimate.

Still, we can't forget the city's goal for more housing, the private development rights of the property owner (the church), and the church's mission of service that a property sale would support.

This is a high profile property at the corner of two major streets, with access to bus routes and bike lanes, and within walking distance of Carytown. A great project here could be a wonderful addition to the West End.

****1705 Commonwealth - Lavender Hill Coworking and Event Space**

The application as currently submitted is too disruptive to the adjacent neighbors. I am working to identify whether a more modest proposal could support a community resource while respecting the rights of adjacent neighbors. The Planning Commission hearing has been postponed again in order to discuss with neighbors and amend the application.

This is a small building near the corner of Commonwealth & Broad, in a TOD-1 Transit-oriented zone. The zoning allows for commercial uses and very tall buildings, but limits the ability to host outdoor events due to its proximity to residential lots. The SUP is to request the ability to host outdoor events.

The property is currently a coworking space that operates daily with no issues. The owner is proposing to authorize periodic special events in the backyard that may include small team-building events or larger private celebrations with music.

The applicant is a professional event planner with the ability to properly manage events, but neighbors have voiced concerns about the disturbance to their residences from large crowds and amplified music.

The intersection at Broad Street is a busy commercial area, zoned for high-intensity use, so it's reasonable to expect that people and activity can be present on this block. But I also take the noise level consideration seriously, given that the TOD-1 zoning takes proximity to residential into account in its permitted uses. The uses allowed in TOD-1 are required to be confined within an enclosed building unless the activity is more than 100 feet from any residential property. This property directly abuts residential parcels.

My Response:

I have seen descriptions on social media and flyers that overstate the scope of what the application requests, calling it a "music venue" that would operate every night. A more accurate description is the request to host periodic special events which may include music under certain

constraints. Nevertheless I do believe the proposal as currently submitted would be too loud, too close to residencies.

I am also being careful to remember that it's common for us to overestimate the negative impact of changes. We can't let exaggerated or unfounded fears prevent reasonable and fair activity. And I've received numerous comments from community groups in support of the community gathering space that Lavender Hill provides.

I must respect that those who live in this quiet neighborhood are entitled to some level of peace and quiet inside their own homes. And we also must respect that we all share this city. I have been discussing options with the applicant, the neighbors, and our enforcement team to determine if a reduced proposal could be both reasonable and enforceable.

I advise applicants to postpone their hearing until they have a proposal with community support. The applicant and the neighbors continue to discuss the proposal.

****5900 Grove Ave - Office Use in a Home at Grove & Maple**

The Property is currently zoned Single-Family Residential (R-2) District. The owners are requesting a special use permit to repurpose the existing building for office use, for use as an interior design firm and for early childhood tutoring individually and in small groups. There is an information session on Monday, November 3, 2025 at 6 p.m. at the West End Branch of the Richmond Public Library.

****Crenshaw Mews Garages (Alley at Crenshaw/ Ellwood/ Floyd/ Nansemond)**

A prior SUP was approved for some homes in this alleyway, but it has expired. There is a new proposal to build some garages here instead. The reason for the SUP is to allow the garages to be a little taller than the standard by-right, and to legalize their use by people who don't live on the abutting properties. (Currently, garages must be used by people on the adjacent/surrounding block)

My Response: It is hard to get excited about building out any kind of car infrastructure, but the space is already a paved parking lot. The master plan calls for great spaces so there's a good chance this application would require architectural revisions, at least.

****4400 Broad Street Apartment Building**

Next to the self-storage facility on Broad there is a large empty lot. The Broad Street frontage is in Richmond City and the rest of the lot is in Henrico. A County Master Plan for this area hopes to convert it from industrial to residential and mixed use, and this property includes some of the key initial new street connections.

A developer is attempting to kick-start the neighborhood with a 4-story apartment building, surrounded by surface parking around it. This plan is approved by Henrico, but is bumping up against some of our city's goals for a less auto-centric Broad Street. In fact, the front of the building technically doesn't meet the city's requirement that 80% of the property's street frontage be taken up by the building face itself. This is because it has some extra driveway and parking that were necessary to create some mid-block street grids to support the future of the neighborhood.

The SUP is therefore to waive or reduce this 80% building frontage requirement for the portion of the building along Broad that is technically within the city.

My Response:

My office is glad to see empty parking lots being converted into residential homes along the transit-oriented Broad Street. In order to honor the vision and values of Richmond's Master Plan, we asked the applicant to upgrade their architectural features in two ways:

First, the building facade was redesigned to be more consistent with the modern, urban design and materials of Scott's Addition buildings.

Second, since the building itself doesn't take up 80% of the lot frontage, we asked the applicant to expand the frontage to 80% with pedestrian space instead. What the new design includes is sheltered outdoor pedestrian spaces that are integrated into the building design. This will contribute to the transition of Broad Street from an industrial feeling to a walkable and human-focused feeling. I am pleased with this solution and I feel the design they are submitting may be better than what a standard 80% building frontage would have been.

****Lincoln Dealership at Broad & Westmoreland**

The Truck dealership on the Northeast corner (across from Ford) is being converted to a Lincoln Dealership. Most of the property is in Henrico, but the street frontage is in Richmond. Richmond's Transit-oriented TOD-1 zoning there no longer allows for car dealerships, so any expansion or new construction requires a variance now.

Rather than reject their proposal, my office gave the applicant guidance on how to improve their architecture and layout to create more pleasant design that respects the In order to improve the Broad Street appearance. The building was made taller and moved to the corner, and the number of driveways and curb cuts was reduced. Street trees will required.

It is hard to get excited about building any kind of car infrastructure but the property is already a parking lot full of trucks. The new building and layout would be an improvement to the streetscape.

Franklin Street Alleyway Infill

At Roseneath and W. Franklin in the Museum District, there is a rectangular lot between the alleyways that currently hosts a few garages, some green space, and a mature tree. There is a proposal to build some townhomes in this space.

The owners have been engaging in many rounds of discussion and revision with the impacted neighbors, and the latest proposal differs significantly from the original. The latest revision has fewer, smaller homes, retains more green space, and reorients the homes in a way that is more compatible with the context.

I attended another presentation with the neighbors last week. The themes under discussion have included a lot of stormwater remediation, as the alleyways already have issues with flooding into garages. There are also reasonable questions around height, sight lines, privacy, footprint, turning radius, green space, tree canopy, and construction logistics.

My Response:

I think we should be glad to see more homes built in the neighborhood when they are well-designed and properly scaled. I applaud the level of engagement that this property owner is showing to reach an agreement with abutting neighbors. There may still be some architectural revisions to be made, but this project is on much stronger footing than when it began.

Hamilton & Hanover - 4 Attached Homes + No ADUs. Approved.

The final amendment to this application was approved at the Tuesday October 14 Council meeting, with the support of the neighborhood. The applicant and the neighbors have agreed to a proposal for 4 homes (two sets of attached pairs) facing Hamilton, without the right to additional Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).

This project has changed and improved significantly as a result of community engagement. It was originally conceived as a plan to fit ten or more homes in the space of two large corner lots that currently hold two homes.

Initial conversations with neighbors resulted in some major accommodations: the protection of large street trees, the preservation of the two existing homes, and top-floor setbacks to reduce the feeling of encroachment. The project was to be 8 new attached 3-story homes behind the existing two.

After more community meetings and some more revisions, the proposal that passed the Planning Commission was 4 new townhomes (2 duplexes) along Hamilton, with backyards onto Reveille, plus the right to build ADUs in those Reveille backyards.

There remained some consternation that the potential for ADUs might result in a ten-unit development after the discussions had resulted in an agreement for six. To eliminate these concerns, the applicant has agreed to forgo the right to ADUs as long as future property owners have the option to construct normal structures such as tool sheds.

My response: In this case, both I and the Planning Commission pushed back on the project and requested more accommodations for neighbors' concerns.

I met with the neighbors and developers a number of times, sometimes together, sometimes separately. Though I appreciated the initial accommodations, such as preservation of the existing homes and preservation of mature trees, I supported the fact that the impacted neighbors still needed more discussions and accommodations, particularly after they had already been recently impacted by the Grove & Hamilton townhomes.

At the June Planning Commission meeting, the Commission found the neighbors' testimony compelling, especially the fact that neighbors were bringing a feasible alternative they could support. I am grateful for the neighbors who were willing to have those constructive conversations that led to a new proposal for July.

At the July Commission meeting, the discussion was less straightforward. The Commission approved the application, but there remained some ambiguity around the treatment of ADUs in the proposal, so I wasn't able to judge whether the plan met the intention of the neighborhood advocates who worked to broker an agreeable compromise. I was disappointed that this part of the application wasn't more transparent.

On the bright side, ADUs are one of the best avenues for affordable housing in our district. 500-square foot cottages will do more for the affordable housing stock than most other housing types, AND the smaller size mitigates many of the potential impacts of larger homes, such as loss of green space, multi-car parking burdens, or blocked sight lines.

Though most properties in the city can build ADUs in their backyard by-right with no special approval, the configuration of these lots facing Reveille St requires special attention. I was planning to require the applicants to supply additional details around the potential ADU structures before I could approve this SUP. The removal of ADUs from the application allowed us to finalize the discussions and submit the final legislation for introduction. After so many concessions and compromises, I intend to do everything I can to streamline the final stages of approval for the applicant.

Park & Tilden - Empty lot for two years, now for sale

At Park & Tilden is an empty double lot where once stood a single detached home. The home was demolished (first), and then a contentious SUP process resulted in a permit for 4 attached homes on this double-corner lot. However, for two years, the property was left vacant and unmaintained, and the building permits were never filed. The property is currently up for sale. Generally, a Special Use Permit conveys with a sale, but in this case, the permit is about to expire in September.

Residents have asked me whether: a) the permit might get extended past the expiration, or conversely, if b) the City might help them turn this undeveloped parcel into a public green space

Some residents worry that allowing property owners to get a zoning change and then “flip” the property is rewarding bad behavior, especially in a case where residents may feel that the original community engagement process was not done in good faith.

Other residents, seeing a rare undeveloped parcel in a quickly developing area, are hopeful that the space could be taken off the market somehow.

My Response:

Department of Planning & Development Review has confirmed there is no administrative way to extend the expiration of the permit. So the property will revert back to its standard residential zoning. I have also made clear that any new Special Use Permit process will have to go through the full application process. Essentially, this should signal to potential buyers that they are not guaranteed any Special Use beyond the base zoning. I would not want them overpaying for a parcel, believing they are entitled to a Special Use.

When it comes to capturing the space for city park space, the primary hurdle is the acquisition cost. The property is in a valuable neighborhood for residential development. The city does have a goal of ensuring every home is within a 10-minute walk of a park, but the areas around this parcel are already served by Albert Hill, Humphrey Calder, and the VMFA.

Nevertheless, I am hopeful to cultivate more public green spaces and am arranging a meeting with Parks & Rec to understand their “pocket park” policies and strategies. If anyone you know has ideas or resources for capturing spaces for public conservation, please let my office know.

Libbie & Patterson - “The Westhampton Bakery Building”

This project was approved by Council on May 12th. I spent months researching and working on this project and have written a description of the situation in a previous newsletter. [Please give it a read](#). In the end, it was a good project for the neighborhood that improved the area.

“The Grove on Hamilton” - Some Approvals Pulled Back

This project was approved during COVID with a virtual engagement process that frustrated neighbors. Still, the plans approved by the Planning Commission had high architectural standards for the prominent placement on busy Grove Avenue. Unfortunately, there is reason to believe that the later building permit approval process may have failed to enforce these architectural standards, and the resulting buildings do not match the plans from the approved legislation.

My response: I escalated a report from a resident, flagging some gaps in the approval process. As a result, the Department of Planning & Review has pulled back its approval on the unsold units in this development, pending the resolution of some items. At this point, it is difficult to significantly alter the project.

I am also still expecting a formal description of the policy change that this will trigger, so that it does not happen again. The designs in a Special Use Permit are a critical component to guaranteeing that the exemptions we grant are for high-quality projects only.

5004 Grove - Office Use in a Residential home (withdrawn)

The applicant has withdrawn their application.

The SUP at 5004 Grove involved no construction. It was requesting permission for Office use out of the home that fronts on Grove Ave and backs onto Albemarle.

Neighbors raised reasonable questions as to how this could impact traffic & safety, and whether there is any limit on the type of future business that might operate here if the permit were approved.

My Response:

To support a special use, I would need to be convinced of one of the following three cases:

1. Community support
2. Certainty of a lack of negative impact
3. Being prescribed by the city's Master Plan

I do not believe this application benefited from any of these three cases. Given that we have a housing shortage, I had not expected to approve this permit unless I saw new evidence.

Regardless, the applicant has withdrawn their application and the property will remain zoned for Residential use.

Stella's Marketplace Alleyway

Recently, the property behind Stella's Market on Lafayette was disrupted by some construction activity. This is not a Special Use and is the by-right development of additional parking on their property. I confirmed this with our Planning Department - they are conforming with all necessary codes, including drainage and engineering.

I visited the Giavos' family (the owners) to understand the impact and to ensure that they were following an adequate communication strategy with neighbors.

There was one day of restricted access to driveways that neighbors had been warned about, and it may be a few weeks before the site is fully paved and finished. (They must remove a dumpster from the alley before they can pave it.) On the day of final paving, there may be a period of a few hours when alley access is restricted again, and Stella's team plans to once again warn the neighbors when that day is.

Construction is never pleasant, but the additional parking and improvements, such as planters, will be a benefit to the neighborhood.

The Giavos family (owners of Stella's) has encouraged their neighbors (or anyone) with additional questions about the construction to simply enter the restaurant during the day and ask to speak with them directly in person.

More to Come

There are other projects on the way, and more conversations to have about our shared (and differing) goals and values. Let's keep the conversations going.