



RVA First District

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Code Refresh December Update

The Code Refresh Draft Two maps and land use regulations were released in November! Residents are encouraged to leave comments on both the maps and the use regulations using the interactive versions below. We recommend you access these via desktop for the best user experience. The comment period is open until February 15, 2026.

- [Draft Two Map](#) (Interactive)
- [Draft Two Zoning Regulations](#) (Interactive)
- [Draft Two Map](#) (PDF)
- [Draft Two Zoning Regulations](#) (PDF)
- [November 2025 Open House Boards](#) (PDF)

The second iteration represents a significant improvement over the first. The Planning Department clearly heard much of the feedback that residents and I shared. [See my previous statement about this draft here.](#)

Latest Reflections on the Zoning Code Refresh

Recently, I hosted a public forum on the latest draft of the zoning code refresh ([see the video here](#)). My role in this process is not just to vote at the end, but to connect residents to the process and make sure their feedback actually informs the outcome. I thought the forum was helpful.

The panel included Planning Department staff, the Mayor's office, residents who have been deeply engaged in the process, residents who are skeptical of it, and advocates focused on housing affordability. They answered questions about the draft, the goals behind it, and how public input is being incorporated.

What I heard was a mix of urgency and caution. Younger residents, typically renters, are increasingly worried that housing supply is not keeping up with demand as prices continue to rise. Others, typically homeowners, expressed concern that a zoning rewrite - if done hurriedly - could encourage the wrong kind of development in the wrong places. I don't consider these two opinions to be in opposition to each other - we can incorporate the wisdom and perspective of multiple groups in the final product.

One important thing to be clear about up front: **there is no deadline that requires us to approve a zoning ordinance that isn't ready.** While completing the code refresh would free up staff to work on other priorities, I am committed to taking as long as necessary to get this right - and to ensure people have enough time to hear about it and participate meaningfully.

There remain many details and themes to debate and discuss, related to the content as well as the process. I'll be sharing more details and resources over the coming weeks. But a few themes from the December panel really stood out as being important to highlight in my opinion:

Why Infill Housing in Each Neighborhood is Critical for Citywide Affordability

Citywide, Richmond has an affordability problem at every income level. At the lowest income levels, this results in homelessness, displacement, and unsafe living conditions. At higher income levels, it shows up as delayed homeownership, reliance on parents' wealth for down payments or cash offers, and younger households moving to neighborhoods they would not otherwise choose.

The First District contains some of the most expensive homes in the city. Many parents are watching their adult children realize they cannot afford to live anywhere nearby. That shortage of reasonably priced homes in the west end doesn't stay contained - it pushes higher-income buyers into other neighborhoods, bidding up prices and accelerating gentrification elsewhere.

This is why **adding small, incremental infill starter housing in the west end is just as important as the dense apartments in Scott's Addition or Manchester**. Encouraging accessory dwelling units, duplexes, and other modest forms of infill, even at full market rate, does two important things:

1. Creates more starter-sized homes for young families who can currently *almost afford* the area but not quite,
2. Contributes to deep affordability in other neighborhoods, by reducing gentrification and displacement pressure in other parts of the city.

Simply building large apartment buildings along major corridors does not solve the needs of young families, which is why I continue to support proposals for gentle density inside all our neighborhoods.

Keeping things the way they are may feel like the cautious and measured approach, but it also means exacerbating the untenable housing market for the next generation.

Improving *How* Homes Get Built

While housing quantity gets the most attention, I'm also trying to direct attention towards improving our shared built environment. Our current zoning code offers very few protections for things Richmonders care about: tree canopy, neighborhood character, historic structures, and right-sized homes.

The second draft of the zoning code refresh begins to address these gaps (and I will be pushing for the third draft to do even more). It includes minimum tree canopy requirements, penalties when those standards aren't met, and a preservation bonus that only allows second structures when the existing home is preserved. It also introduces early versions of a Cultural Heritage Stewardship Plan and stronger demolition review processes.

Making these standards clear and easy to follow can ensure that home builders know what fits in Richmond and can quickly get to work integrating new homes into the fabric of our neighborhoods.

Church Zoning: What Changed and Why

One curious change in the new draft involves proposed changes to zoning underneath church properties. I believe this should have gotten more of an explanation when it was proposed, and I was surprised to see this change proposed without more commentary.

The previously-proposed “institutional” zoning category did not adequately address the potential alternative uses of church properties when congregations shrink or no longer wish to maintain large buildings. In response, the new draft proposes classifying these properties as MX-3 zoning, which is the *most gentle mixed-use option* in the code.

That does **not** mean churches are being forced to sell, redevelop, or relocate, as MX-3 includes churches as one of its uses. The zoning would expand the legal options available to congregations. In many cases, allowing limited non-residential or mixed uses makes sense because these buildings already serve as community amenities.

That said, the details matter. Churches currently can host quasi-commercial activities, but their nonprofit mission acts as a moderating influence. We need to carefully consider whether new zoning could unintentionally expose congregations to unwanted development pressure or aggressive unsolicited offers. I think the city should hear from churches and congregations about how these zoning changes might affect them.

As neighborhoods evolve, the need for walkable amenities will grow, and existing church sites may be appropriate locations for that evolution. But MX-3 may not be the right answer in every case. This is an area where more refinement is needed, and resident and church input will be key.

Taking the Time to Get It Right

This zoning code refresh is consequential, and it deserves careful, deliberate work. Though I get the impression the administration is eager to complete the process, I believe my fellow City Council members are committed to listening to residents, disseminating information, and making sure feedback meaningfully shapes the outcomes, regardless of how long it takes.