



CITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

ORD. 2020-104: To amend the official zoning map for the purpose of designating certain blocks as “priority streets” and certain street blocks as “street-oriented commercial streets” in the areas surrounding the Science Museum of Virginia, Allison Street, and the Virginia Commonwealth University and Virginia Union University Broad Street Bus Rapid Transit station areas.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Department of Planning and Development Review
Date: September 8, 2020

PETITIONER

City of Richmond
900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

LOCATION

The Pulse Corridor Plan Phase III Rezoning includes the Science Museum, Allison Street and VCU&VUU Station areas, in order to implement the next phase of the adopted Pulse Corridor Plan. The total area is bounded generally by Arthur Ashe Boulevard to the West; I-95/64 and the railroad to the North; Belvidere Street to the East; and West Broad Street, West Grace Street, the alley between West Grace Street and West Franklin Street, and West Franklin Street to the South. Not all properties in this area will be rezoned, though all will be included in the Plan of Development Overlay District. Single- and two-family residential districts will maintain their current zoning.

PURPOSE

To amend the official zoning map for the purpose of implementing the recommendations of the Pulse Corridor Plan.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This Ordinance is one of a set of three which will rezone the areas around the Science Museum, Allison Street and VCU&VUU BRT Pulse Station areas, in accordance with the recommendations of the adopted 2017 Pulse Corridor Plan. This ordinance will designate certain streets as “Priority” or “Street-Oriented Commercial” streets, Ordinance 2020-103 will change the Official Zoning Map and Ordinance 2020-105 will amend the Official Zoning text of the UB, B-4 and B-7 districts. Changes in this ordinance include designating streets as either “Priority” or “Street-Oriented Commercial”.

Staff recommends approval of the ordinance.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Background

These amendments are formulated based on the recommendations of the adopted Pulse Corridor Plan, analysis of the existing zoning ordinance, knowledge of existing development trends and plans, and an extensive public engagement process, both for the plan and for this area rezoning. In a growing city currently experiencing both a development boom and significant population increase, it is important to identify areas appropriate for new dense development and proactively rezone to make the desired development possible.

Master Plan

Designations of “Priority” and “Street-Oriented Commercial” help to create a safer, more pedestrian-centric environment, and are consistent with the recommendations of the Pulse Corridor Plan.

Recommendations from the Pulse Corridor Plan are consistent with recommendations from the draft Richmond 300 Master Plan Future Land Use Map.

Existing and Proposed Zoning

This ordinance will add “Street-Oriented Commercial” and “Priority” street designations to the Official Zoning Map.

These designations are intended to enhance the safety and pedestrian experience along certain street frontages.

The B-4 and B-7 districts permit dwelling units, “provided that when such units are located on streets designated as street-oriented commercial or priority street frontage, as shown on the official zoning map, a minimum of one-third or 1,000 square feet, whichever is greater, of floor area of the ground floor of the building shall be devoted to other permitted principal uses permitted in the district”.

These districts also permit parking decks and parking garages, provided that no portion of the ground floor of the structure on a street designated as Priority may be used for parking and circulation of vehicles.

The rezoning applies the “Street-Oriented Commercial” designation along Broad Street from Belvidere Street to Arthur Ashe Boulevard, and along Grace Street from Belvidere Street to just west of Harrison Street. The “Priority” designation will be applied along Broad Street, Grace Street, Leigh Street, Lombardy Street and Hermitage Road in the study area, and along a section of West Clay Street, east of Hermitage Road.

Attached Summary Document

In order to convey the ideas and reasoning behind this rezoning process clearly and thoroughly, staff created a summary document complete with explanatory text, maps of existing and proposed zoning, exact zoning changes, and explanation of each recommendation. [Please see summary document for further details.](#)

Public Engagement

As part of the development of the Pulse Corridor Plan over the course of 2015-2017, PDR staff held numerous public forums, set up online surveys, attended standing civic association meetings, and tracked public feedback.

In December 2019, staff hosted two public open house sessions at the Science Museum of Virginia with a presentation and a question/answer session on the proposed rezoning. Staff sent a letter to each affected property owner notifying them of the intent to rezone, of the public open houses, and where to get more information. Staff circulated a rezoning summary and posted on the City website. Over the past ten months, staff has had many conversations with property owners in the area, as well as representatives of VCU and Sauer Properties, the majority of whom have expressed support for the rezoning. Please see letters of support and opposition attached.

In addition, staff met with representatives of the West Grace Street Association five times between December 2018 and October 2019, and presented a draft map of the rezoning area in October for their review and feedback. The Director of Planning and Development Review attended the West Grace Street Association meeting February 11, 2020 to discuss the rezoning and answer any questions from Association members.

Members of the West Grace Street Association have expressed concern regarding allowed height in the proposed zoning districts, and staff has worked to address their concerns. In October 2019, upon request of the West Grace Street Association, staff created diagrams comparing the B-5 and the TOD-1 district, in order to illustrate the difference between the two districts and why staff believes TOD-1 is the better district for a small area on the south side of Broad Street across from the Science Museum. As of May 2020, neighborhood representatives wish to postpone any rezoning in favor of further discussion. In response to the concerns of the West Grace Street Association, PDR staff has removed the parcels along the south side of Broad Street from the rezoning area at this time.

Notice of the rezoning has been published in both the Richmond Times Dispatch and the Richmond Free Press, in accordance with Virginia State Code. Letters were sent to each property owner in the rezoning area in November of 2019 and April of 2020, also in accordance with State Code. Staff posted rezoning signs in the rezoning area in accordance with City Planning Commission Resolution 2015-010.

Staff Contact:

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