



# Richmond City Council

*The Voice of the People*

*Richmond, Virginia*

## Office of the Council Chief of Staff

### **Organizational Development Standing Committee**

November 3, 2025

### **Staff Prep Document for Councilmembers**

**Previous Meeting:** October 6, 2025

**Next Meeting:** December 1, 2025

Legistar Link: [Organizational Development - 11/3/2025 at 4:00 PM](#)

#### **Agenda Overview:**

##### Administration Reports:

1. Richmond Region Tourism Annual Update ~ Katherine O'Donnell, President and Chief Executive Officer
2. Federal Government Shutdown Impact Update ~ Odie Donald, Chief Administrative Officer

##### Discussion Items:

1. 2026 General Assembly Session Legislative Agenda Update

Richmond Region Tourism Annual Update

Katherine O'Donnell, President and Chief Executive Officer

Notes

- \$3.9 billion spent by visitors in the region in 2024 (+ 4.7% from 2023)
- Regional cooperation – not a competitive situation among area localities
- HQ Hotel (opening in 2027) as anchor hotel package
- Variety of investments and programs to boost marketing and awareness of Richmond region

Suggested Questions

- Which taxes (local or state) are most associated with tourism?
- What % of meals taxes do we estimate comes from visitors?
- What does your research say about good investments to make to increase tourist spending in the City? For example, should we be investing in soccer fields to increase sports tourism?
- What can you tell us about our hotel capacity and pipeline?
- What local funds go to support Richmond Region Tourism and where is that in the budget?
- What sort of workforce development investments should the City be making to make sure City residents get jobs in this industry?

## Federal Government Shutdown Impact Update

Odie Donald, Chief Administrative Officer

### Notes

- Resilient Richmond - [2025.10-CoR-GovernmentShutdownResponse\\_1.pdf](#)
  - Impact: 54,000 residents rely on SNAP, 3,000 families depend on TANF, plus lots more.
  - DSS is agency at highest risk (page 6) due to close ties with federal benefits programs.
  - Reviews by department (page 7) on likely budget impacts.
  - 60-day financial contingency plan (page 10) in development.
  - Plan to convene a “Federal Funding Task Force” to coordinate interdepartmentally.
- Main SNAP webpage (with updates) – [go.rva.gov/snap](http://go.rva.gov/snap)
  - Virginia Emergency Nutrition Assistance (VENA) food assistance effort established by Gov. Youngkin provides 7-day increments of food benefits for current SNAP recipients.
  - Should be equivalent to current benefits amounts, but on weekly basis (not monthly).
  - Issued on a weekly basis according to existing staggered issuance schedule (Mondays = normally 1<sup>st</sup> of the month; Wednesdays = normally 4<sup>th</sup> of the month; Fridays = normally 7<sup>th</sup> of the month).
  - \$1 million in state funds also going to VA food banks to help meet increased demand.
  - Currently planned to last through November ... no clear plan after that.

### Overall Questions

- How many people in the City and the region are federal employees? How many of those employees aren’t currently being paid?
- Is the City expending any additional local dollars (surplus or reprogrammed) to help support families or businesses impacted by the federal shutdown?
- Can you share a list of infrastructure or other capital projects impacted by the shutdown?
- The “Resilient Richmond” plan says each department is preparing operating plans to bridge short-term funding gaps (page 4) -- can you share some examples or guidance for these plans?
- Will any City employees be furloughed due to the shutdown? If so, when might that happen?

### SNAP Questions

- What outreach have we done to current SNAP beneficiaries about the shift to VENA?
- We’ve already had issues with SNAP theft. How will we continue to combat that under VENA?
- Please outline our outreach to immigrant and non-English speaking residents.

### RPS and Childcare Questions

- Has the federal shutdown impacted RPS and its many federal funding streams like Title I and IDEA funding?
- Please outline our outreach and support for federally supported childcare providers.

Education and Human Services:

*Last Month Meeting Summary (Thu, 10/9):*

- Superintendent Kamras shared good news about recent improvements in graduation rates (84% for economically disadvantaged students; 88% for Black students) and SOL test scores across grade-levels and sub-groups.
- HumanKind CEO, Stan Southworth, shared an overview of the Family Crisis Fund covering September 2024-August 2025. Mr. Southworth shared data on the demographics of recipients (88% black, 80% female) as well as usage of funds (70% for housing, 16% utilities). CMs asked about challenges administering the program and how they refer applicants who live outside of the City of Richmond. Chair Lynch recommended strengthening the branding of the program to help reduce duplicate (ineligible) applications within the same year.
- DCAO HS Amy Popovich shared an update on several items including the Inclement Weather Shelter (IWS) which will be available between November 15<sup>th</sup> and April 15<sup>th</sup> as well as criteria for opening an extended overflow shelter with extra low temperatures and/or snow. Further, Ms. Popovich shared that both SNAP/TANF benefits have already been sent for October and so aren't impacted by the federal shutdown, but other programs may be impacted especially if the shutdown extends into November.
- The Committee considered two papers and recommended the first for approval (Ord. 2025-224: Avula, NextUp RVA as fiscal agent). The Committee recommended continuing the second paper (Res. 2025-R041: Avula, Plan of Services under VJCCC Act). Councilmembers noted that relatively few cases are being referred for diversion by the courts and requested that DJS staff convene other relevant partners and return next month with more detail on the plan and their work to support Richmond youth.

*This Month Meeting Plans (Thu, 11/13)*

- Office of Gun Violence Prevention Overview

## Finance and Economic Development:

### *Last Month Meeting Summary (Wed, 10/15)*

- The committee forwarded seven papers to the full Council with recommendation to approve.
- Matthew Welch from the Department of Economic Development provided a [presentation](#) about the state tourism financing program associated with the two projects in Scott's Addition. The program has strenuous requirements, including a demonstrated gap in project financing and market inefficiency for tourism (such as a lack of walkable hotels), and is structured such that 50% of the debt service for the amount of gap financing is paid by the developer, with 25% each paid by the City and the state via direct transfer of tax revenues to the lender. DED staff expect significant net revenues from these projects. Although the City created tourism zones pursuant to the authority granted by the state in 2016, this is the first time the City has brought projects to be supported by the program to the committee and Council.
- Mr. Donnell Stewart presented an overview of the City's risk management function, which he leads. Importantly, risk management for employee-related concerns, such as allegations of discrimination or harassment on the basis of protected categories, is administered by the Department of Human Resources. The committee may wish to request information about risk management, claims, and settlements under that umbrella.
- Ms. Letitia Shelton, Director of the Department of Finance, presented on the City's major tax relief programs. Much of the back-and-forth centered on the Gap Grant program, which has processed about 200 applications in total and distributed funds totaling just over \$20,000 of the \$3.9 million available since it launched in January of this year. Director Shelton shared that although the program was originally meant to receive applications through the end of 2025, funding will remain available until it is exhausted. The three recently hired part-time staff are expected to significantly boost the capacity of the one full-time staff member handling this paperwork-intensive program when Ms. Shelton began her tenure as department director. Chair Robertson also asked a series of questions related to whether the amount appropriated for tax relief for seniors and the disabled is sufficient to meet the need for that relief. Committee members were surprised that no tax amnesty program has been administered since 2018.

### *This Month Meeting Plans (Wed, 11/19)*

- Budget & Strategic Planning on ARPA Quarterly Update (Res. 2023-R044)
- Budget & Strategic Planning on FY25 Surplus (Sec. 12-242)

## Government Operations:

### *Last Month Meeting Summary (Wed, 10/22):*

- Members considered four papers:
  - Ord. 2025-209 (Gibson & Abubaker, disclosure forms) was continued without discussion as CM Gibson works on an amendment.
  - Ord. 2025-210 (Gibson & Abubaker, FOIA library) and Ord. 2025-240 (Avula, FOIA Library) were heard together as a block. Discussion focused on the risk and potential costs associated with each proposal. Both sides agreed on the importance of codifying a FOIA library. Ultimately both papers were continued to the November Gov Ops meeting.
  - Ord. 2025-211 (Gibson & Abubaker, procurement open data) was recommended for approval at full Council without discussion.
- OOS Energy Program Manager, Dawn Oleksy, shared an update on the FY25 Joint Energy Team (JET) Annual Report. Ms. Oleksy and her team were credited with saving the City hundreds of thousands of dollars and being a “silo-breaker” across agencies to coordinate clean energy and operational efficiency initiatives across City departments. Laura Thomas (OOS Director) also shared an update on the City’s Sustainable Design Standards (SDS) including upcoming technical assistance with the Urban Land Institute on net zero efforts.
- DGS Fleet Manager, Jason Arndt, shared an update on DGS’ Green Fleet including efforts to reduce fuel usage and acquire more Electric Vehicles (EVs). Mr. Arndt shared the pros of EVs (reduced emissions and reduced fuel costs) and cons (higher upfront costs and require special tools/training) as well as challenges including loss of federal EV incentives and lack of options for heavy-duty fleet vehicles. Members reviewed ongoing open audit recommendations (4 of 9) from the recent fuel program audit.
- Chair Jordan discussed recent HR vacancy and overtime reports, both linked in the staff prep memo and being uploaded to Legistar.

### *This Month Meeting Plans (Wed, 11/12):*

- Public Utilities and Services Commission (PUSC) Annual Report
- DPU on Combined Sewer Overflow System Update

## Land Use, Housing and Transportation:

### *Last Month Meeting Summary (Tue, 10/21):*

- Members considered five papers:
  - Ord. No. 2025-239 (Avula) lease agreement with the Toolbank was recommended for approval, 3-0.
  - Res. No. 2025-R044 (Lynch) reversing CAR for a property at 510 West 20th St, recommended for approval, 3-0.
  - Res. No. 2025-R045 (Jordan) initiate an amendment to the City's zoning ordinance to establish a civil penalty for demolition in an old and historic district. Recommended for continuance, 3-0.
  - Ord No. 2025-238 (Avula) authorizes temporary easement Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens, located at 1800 Lakeside Avenue with Henrico Co.
  - Res. No. 2025-R046 (Avula) declares surplus and authorizes the CAO to seek offers, bids, or proposals for the City-owned property located at 8790 Strath Rd. Recommended for continuance, 3-0.
- Members Entertained Presentations of Trails and Affordable Housing:

The Administration gave the Committee a three-part update on trails updates on trail,

- Dironna Moore Clarke, Deputy Director of DPW presenting on Fall Line discussed the regional implications and emphasized the need to raise funds towards its costs.
- Andy Boenau, Program Manager in DPW Traffic Engineering presenting updated the connectivity of trails along roadways.
- Chris Frelke, Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities – updated the committee on trails within the park system.
- Merrick Malone, Director of Department of Housing and Community Development presented on plans for issuing RFPs for Affordable Housing: 212 N. 18th Street and 911 & 913 Hull Street, which are City-owned properties.

### *This Month Meeting Plans (Tue, 11/18):*

- HCD on Affordable Housing being made available throughout the City and strategies to accomplish this goal.
- Maggie Walker Community Land Trust updates the Committee on number of units developed and planned.

## Public Safety

### *Last Month Meeting Summary (Thu, 10/28)*

- Ord No. 2025-222 (Mayor Avula), allowing an increase in towing fees from private property in the City, was recommended for approval, 2-0.
- The Committee heard a very informative presentation from RPD Chief Edwards and Planning and Development Review Director Vonck on the impact of VAPE shops in our City. The Committee learned that there is an estimate of 87 VAPE shops in the City and that are Police concerns about armed robberies at them. We also learned that the Planning and Development Review Department has worked to control the proximity of the shops to schools, houses of worship and how of the shops themselves located within 1,000 feet of each other.
- The Committee had discussions with Chip Decker of the Richmond Ambulance Authority. The Authority alerted us to the expected delivery of seven new ambulances and concerns about monies that the Committee members believed was promised during Council's deliberations on the budget this past Spring. Money will be needed immediately to pay for the ambulances so that the fleet of vehicles can be properly rotated out. The Committee will be working with Staff to follow-up on our concerns.

### *This Month Meeting Plans (Tue, 11/25)*

- The Committee is working with the Administration to have further discussions on the need to address the problems in Shockoe Bottom which might include alternative ways of protecting our streets from displays of firearms in entertainment areas.