



CITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

CPCR.2021.147: To approve and adopt the City Center Innovation District Small Area Plan.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Department of Planning and Development Review
Date: December 6, 2021

PETITIONER

City of Richmond
900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

LOCATION

Certain parcels within the borders of N. 3rd St. to the west, E. Franklin St. to the south, N. 10th St. to the east, and E. Leigh St. to the north.

PURPOSE

To approve and adopt the City Center Innovation District Small Area Plan.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

Following the withdrawal of the Navy Hill proposal, City Council passed Res. 2020-R009, which tasked the Department of Planning & Development Review (PDR) with conducting a new request for proposals process for certain City-owned properties in the City Center area. The approximately 26.2 acres generally includes the area bounded by E. Leigh Street to the north; N. 10th Street to the east; E. Franklin Street to the south; and N. 3rd Street to the west. City Council passed Res. 2021-R024 to accept and approve the biennial real estate strategies plan, which included many of the City-owned properties in City Center. The Pulse Corridor Plan recommends developing a small area plan for the area around the "Government Center" Pulse Station, and one of the "Primary Next Steps" for the "Downtown Core" Priority Growth Node as outlined in Richmond 300: A Guide for Growth was to "develop a Coliseum Area Framework Plan with community engagement."

The objectives for the Plan are as follows: engaging the Richmond community to identify the key elements that must be located in the primary study area and that shall be included in a future request for offers (RFO); setting the stage for potential developers to feel excited about responding to another RFO by gaining general public consensus and thereby minimizing developer risk; guiding the redevelopment of Downtown to establish a mixed-use destination that drives activity outside of typical business hours, providing for regional entertainment attractions, and adding to the Downtown tax base; leveraging adjacencies by connecting with the Convention Center, VCU Health, and the VA Bio+Tech Park; building strong connections with adjacent neighborhoods including Jackson Ward, Monroe Ward, Gilpin, and Shockoe; and incorporating the Plan into the Richmond 300: A Guide for Growth master plan document.

PDR developed the City Center Small Area Plan over an 18-month period that included internal meetings with City staff and leadership, two public workshops, three public surveys, and several focus group interviews and stakeholder meetings. At the beginning of the plan development process, the concept of including a new or renovated arena was part of the development program. However, in December 2020, Henrico County announced their plan to build an arena-anchored development project; therefore, the City removed the arena concept from the City Center Small Area Plan. Planning staff developed the Draft Plan in the first half of 2021 and released the draft for public comment on June 1, 2021. Staff presented the plan at a hybrid virtual/in-person meeting and attended several existing stakeholder meetings to gain input. Staff posted the plan online for direct public comment and issued an open-ended survey to gather comments. Several television, print, and online media outlets covered the release of the draft City Center plan. After the draft comment period, Staff reviewed public and revised the Draft to create a Final City Center Small Area Plan.

The City Center Plan outlines the strategies to become Richmond's Life Sciences Innovation District. By consolidating City government functions and transferring parcels from public to private ownership, the City can use the City Center Plan as a tool to build an innovation district downtown. Mixed-use residential buildings can potentially bring thousands of residents back to the area and provide places for life science workers to live near work. New shared-use paths, bike lanes, ample green space, and activated ground floor uses can make City Center vibrant and inviting to residents, visitors, and other Richmonders. Hotel and entertainment uses can help foster tourism and create added value for patrons of the Greater Richmond Convention Center as well as Innovation District. Additional space for biotech & life sciences companies can provide expansion opportunities for this growing sector and help continue to place Richmond at the forefront of innovation. Additionally, including a STEM-focused high school can provide opportunities for Richmond students to grow into biotech careers. Overall, the City Center Plan is an essential step in establishing City Center as the engine of the Richmond Region's growing life science industries.

Staff recommends approval of the Resolution.

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