



City of Richmond

900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219
www.rva.gov/office-city-clerk

Draft Meeting Minutes Public Safety Standing Committee

Tuesday, October 28, 2025

1:00 PM

Council Chamber, 2nd Floor – City Hall

Committee Members in Attendance

The Honorable Reva Trammell – Chair
The Honorable Stephanie Lynch – Vice Chair (late arrival)
The Honorable Sarah Abubaker – Member

Staff and Others in Attendance

Greg Lukanuski, Deputy City Attorney
Kiley Kesecker, Deputy City Clerk
Pamela Nichols, Council Management Analyst
Candice Reid, City Clerk
Steve Taylor, Council Policy Analyst

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 1:01 p.m. Chair Reva Trammell recognized National First Responders Day and thanked all first responders for their service to the city.

Chamber Emergency Evacuation Plan Announcement and Public Speaker Guidelines

City Clerk Candice Reid provided information on the appropriate way to evacuate the Council Chamber in an emergency along with public speaker guidelines.

Public Comment Period

Juan Braxton, a long-time business owner in Shockoe Bottom and Criminal Justice Chair for Richmond NAACP, addressed the committee regarding public safety concerns in Shockoe Bottom. Mr. Braxton noted that while crime statistics have decreased, the district still has safety perception issues with heavy police presence, barricades, and yellow tape creating an unwelcoming atmosphere. He presented survey results showing that over 45% of respondents feel unsafe in Shockoe Bottom at night, more than 75% are highly dissatisfied with parking, and only 11% described their nightlife experience as satisfying. Mr. Braxton emphasized the need for city leadership to work with the community to create an environment that supports both public safety and economic vitality.

Chair Reva Trammell thanked Mr. Braxton for bringing these concerns forward and noted the challenges facing the police department, including the loss of 160 officers since 2020 and the city's growing population. She encouraged continued dialogue between Mr. Braxton, Council President Cynthia Newbille, and city leadership to address these issues.

Approval of Minutes

[CD.2025.308](#) September 23, 2025 Public Safety Standing Committee Meeting Minutes

There were no amendments or corrections to the meeting minutes of September 23, 2025, and the committee approved the minutes as presented.

Paper(s) for Consideration

The following ordinance was considered:

1. [ORD. 2025-222](#) To amend City Code § 27-302, concerning towing and storage fees, for the purpose of modifying the limits on fees charged for the towing, storage, and safekeeping of certain vehicles removed from private property.

Patrons: Mayor Avula

Lynne Lancaster, Department of General Services, introduced the proposed ordinance to amend Section 27-302 of the City Code concerning towing and storage fees from private property, stating that the purpose is to align the City Code with State Code provisions. She also stated that the ordinance, if adopted, increases fees from \$135 to \$195 for private property tows and administrative fees from \$50 to \$75. Ms. Lancaster further stated that the ordinance also requires that receipts clearly itemize all fees charged. She clarified that the city will not receive any revenue from the ordinance and that it is separate from the city's contract with Seibert's Towing.

A public hearing was held with no speakers in opposition or support.

There were no further comments and Member Sarah Abubaker moved to forward Ordinance No. 2025-222 to Council with a recommendation to approve, which was seconded and approved: Ayes 2, Trammell, Abubaker. Noes None. Vice Chair Stephanie Lynch had not yet arrived.

Presentation(s)

1. Regulating Retail Sales of Tobacco and Hemp

[CD.2025.337](#) October 28, 2025 - Regulating Retail Sales of Tobacco and Hemp Presentation

A copy of the presentation provided has been filed.

Kevin Vonck, Director of Planning and Development Review, and Chief Rick Edwards, Richmond Police Department, presented on the regulation of vape shops and retail sales of tobacco and hemp products. Director Vonck explained that in July 2025, City Council adopted Ord. No. 2025-157 establishing specific regulations for retail sales of tobacco and hemp. He stated that the ordinance defines qualifying businesses as those where 10% or more of floor area, display area, sign area, inventory, or gross revenue is dedicated to selling electronic smoking devices, tobacco, or hemp products. Mr. Vonck further stated that these establishments must obtain a conditional use permit and are required to maintain 1,000 feet distance from residential districts, schools, daycares, parks, libraries, and places of worship, as well as 1,000 feet from other similar establishments. He also stated that drive-up facilities are prohibited.

Vice Chair Stephanie Lynch arrived at 1:17 p.m. and was seated.

Chief Rick Edwards provided current marijuana laws in Virginia and reported that 34% of commercial robberies in the city have occurred at vape shops, with 87 vape shops identified citywide. Chief Edwards reported that the police department has executed 10 search warrants at vape shops this year, seizing over 75 pounds of marijuana and THC products and 10 firearms. He noted that many shops sell products packaged to resemble popular candy brands, making them appealing to children. He also reported that despite arrests and seizures, many shops reopen quickly if they have certificates of occupancy. Chief Edwards outlined plans to address problem establishments through City Code Chapter 11, Article 5, Section 11-156 regarding drug blight, which allows petitioning the circuit court for remedies when patterns of illegal behavior are established.

The committee addressed the following items:

- Member Sarah Abubaker expressed concern about products packaged as popular candy brands being sold near schools and asked about community reporting mechanisms. Chief Edwards encouraged residents to call the non-emergency number (646-5100 or 780-1000) to report suspected vape shops.
- Regional cooperation with Virginia State Police and neighboring jurisdictions, with monthly intelligence sharing meetings already occurring.
- Enforcement options for legally non-conforming businesses that were grandfathered under the new regulations.
- Chair Reva Trammell requested staff research on strengthening nuisance regulations and increasing taxes on liquid tobacco products to curtail vape shop proliferation. She also requested inclusion of relevant items in the city's legislative agenda.

Board Vacancies

[CD.2025.310](#) October 28, 2025 - Public Safety Board Vacancy Report

A copy of the report provided has been filed.

Pamela Nichols, Council Management Analyst, reviewed board vacancies and applications for consideration by the committee.

Member Sarah Abubaker moved to forward the following appointment and reappointment applications to Council with a recommendation to approve, and to continue consideration of one Richmond Ambulance Authority vacancy to the January 27, 2026 meeting, which was seconded and approved: Ayes 3, Trammell, Lynch, Abubaker. Noes None.

Community Criminal Justice Board:

TraQuann Buskey

Jordan Waddell

Richmond Ambulance Authority:

Carlos Hopkins (reappointment)

Andrew Walker (reappointment)

Discussion Item(s)

1. Richmond Ambulance Authority Updates

Chip Decker, CEO of Richmond Ambulance Authority (RAA), presented an update on current operational and funding challenges. Mr. Decker reported that RAA is fully staffed for paramedics with only seven EMT positions open and a waiting list of 135 people for the cadet program. He also reported that in September, RAA responded to 6,408 calls with an average hospital wall or patient offload time of 42 minutes. CEO Decker outlined significant funding challenges including:

- Federal government shutdown resulting in Medicare payments being reduced by eliminating add-on payments (2% urban add-on)
- Anticipated reduction in Medicaid participants due to program rollback
- Missing \$3.1 million in expected capital funding for ambulance purchases that was committed during previous budget discussions but cannot be located in current budget documentation

Mr. Decker explained that seven ambulances are scheduled to arrive (three this month, four next month) that were ordered three years ago, with current lead times remaining at three years. He noted a 26% price increase expected for ambulances ordered next year. CEO Decker reported that the current fleet consists of 32 ambulances, with plans to retire some older units but add to overall fleet capacity.

Committee members expressed concern with recurring funding issues and the critical nature of the ambulance shortage. The committee discussed:

- Impact of insufficient fleet on response times and ability to run non-emergency calls that offset 911 costs
- Need for fleet vehicles to avoid 'hot swaps' that accelerate vehicle wear
- Hospital wait time as a national issue affecting fleet needs and staffing requirements

Chair Reva Trammell and Member Sarah Abubaker requested that council staff work with Meghan Brown, the city's budget director, and the administration to:

- Locate the \$3.1 million capital funding commitment in budget records
- If funding cannot be found, prepare recommendations for meeting the ambulance purchase need
- Provide this information within two weeks

The committee emphasized the critical nature of this issue for public safety and the accountability that would result if inadequate ambulance availability led to an emergency response failure.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:17 p.m.