



CITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Planning & Development Review *Staff Report*

CPCR 2019-024: To declare an intent to amend the Official Zoning Ordinance for the purpose of amending the RO-3 Residential-Office District.

To: City Planning Commission
From: Department of Planning and Development Review
Date: April 1, 2019

PETITIONER

City of Richmond
900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

LOCATION

The RO-3 Residential-Office zoning district is located in a few small areas throughout central Richmond, with the greatest concentration along Franklin Street from Belvidere Street to First Street in Monroe Ward rezoning study area.

PURPOSE

To amend the official zoning ordinance for the purpose of amending the RO-3 Residential-Office District.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

This Resolution is one of a set of five, which together will revise the City's official zoning map and ordinance for the purpose of rezoning certain properties in Monroe Ward, bounded by Belvidere Street to the west, Broad Street to the north, the Downtown Expressway to the south and Ninth Street to the east, in order to increase density and accommodate growth and development pressure while preserving the historic character of the neighborhood. Each Resolution represents one of five elements to this process, a combination of which will reach the desired outcome:

1. changing zoning classification of certain parcels from light-industrial or auto-oriented designations to those more in keeping with the historic building patterns and intent of the Pulse Plan;
2. adding Street-Oriented Commercial and Priority Streets in the area to the official zoning map;
3. creating a Plan of Development Overlay District for the area to ensure development meets the six design elements of the Pulse Plan; and
4. removing the inclined plane requirement from the B-4 (Central Business) District; and
5. amending the RO-3 Residential Office Zoning District.

Staff supports this resolution.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Background

These amendments arise out of the recommendations of the adopted Pulse Corridor Plan, an analysis of the existing zoning ordinance and its application across the City, and an extensive public engagement process, both for the plan and for this area rezoning. There is significant building activity in the Central Business District which continues to move west into Monroe Ward and expansion of VCU's Monroe Park campus has stretched east of Belvidere into Monroe Ward. While Monroe Ward is home to an array of historic structures, there are also a significant number of surface parking lots, several of which take up entire blocks. This proactive rezoning process is in order to ensure that new development is in keeping with the principles of the Pulse Plan.

After the initial round of Resolutions of Intent in October of 2018, staff received multiple letters and emails of concern over the rezoning of Franklin Street to B-4 due to B-4's lack of height restrictions. After consideration of these concerns, staff amended the proposal to keep the RO-3 designation on Franklin Street which has been in place since 1976. However, RO-3 currently has some allowances and requirements which are significantly out of keeping with a walkable urban area, which will be corrected with these amendments.

Master Plan

The area for this rezoning is part of the Arts District Station Area in the Pulse Corridor Plan.

(Note: the Arts District Station Area also includes Jackson Ward, but the character of the neighborhoods are significantly distinct enough to proceed with each area separately. Furthermore, the R-6 designation in most of Jackson Ward is appropriate to the existing character and the Pulse Plan's future land use of the neighborhood, and it is not a rezoning priority at this time.)

Rezoning Monroe Ward to districts that align with the future land use map is the first recommendation for this study area (84). The plan envisions a strong transit-oriented node at each station area along the corridor, and describes Monroe Ward's future land use as high-intensity pedestrian- and transit-oriented development", with tall signature buildings, active commercial ground floors, few driveways cutting through sidewalks, and little to no setbacks for commercial building, adding that new buildings will add to the already "incredibly dynamic and diverse building stock, creating a truly eclectic urban neighborhood" (84). The plan recommends that new zoning does not allow surface parking lots as a principle permitted use.

Existing and Proposed Zoning

Staff has completed an extremely thorough analysis and vetting of exactly the tools needed to accomplish the plan vision and spur development while preserving the historic character of the neighborhood.

As a result, there are five elements to this rezoning process:

1. Rezoning the areas zoned either light industrial (M-1) or auto-oriented commercial (B-3), to transit-oriented development (TOD-1);
2. adding Priority and Street-Oriented Commercial designations in the area to the official zoning map;
3. creating a Plan of Development Overlay District for the area to ensure that new development meets the six design elements of the Pulse Corridor Plan;
4. removing the inclined plane from the B-4 district; and
5. amending the RO-3 Residential Office district.

This Resolution is specific to changing the requirements of the RO-3 Residential Office district, in particular:

- removing surface parking lots as a permitted principal use
- requiring one-third of the first floor of multi-family dwelling units and parking decks/garages to have commercial uses allowable in the district, consistent with other urban districts
- requiring screening of parking in parking decks, consistent with other urban districts
- removing funeral homes, hospitals, motels, and incidental uses within multifamily dwellings, hotels and office building intended only for the convenience of the occupants thereof

Note that this proposal does not include changing the front and side yard setbacks to be consistent with other urban districts. RO-3 has a minimum front yard depth of 15 feet, side yard setbacks for multifamily of 15 feet, and side yard setbacks of ten feet for uses and buildings other than residential. Preserving these setbacks in the RO-3 district may serve to buffer historic homes (and historic dwellings currently in commercial use).

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 (attached) for further details.

Public Engagement

As the Pulse Corridor Plan was developed over the course of 2015-2017, City Staff held numerous public forums, set up online surveys, attended standing civic association meetings, and tracked public feedback.

In July of 2017, staff held two public open houses at the Main Library to discuss the Monroe Ward rezoning, and provided informational maps and comparisons of zoning districts. In addition, a letter was sent to each property owner of over 400 addresses which will be affected by the rezoning. Of the 400 property owners affected, PDR received only two letters expressing concern or opposition, and has subsequently engaged with both parties.

In November of 2018, staff once again sent notices in postcard form to 444 individual property owners, and received one inquiry of concern regarding parking, and twelve letters or emails from Historic Richmond Foundation and members regarding height and protection of historic buildings. Staff also received one letter of support regarding the rezoning.

Staff has considered these letters and weighed these concerns seriously, and continues to recommend the overall rezoning package, amended to retain RO-3 along Franklin Street with these changes.

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