



Richmond City Council

The Voice of the People

Richmond, Virginia

Office of the Council Chief of Staff

Land Use, Housing, & Transportation Standing Committee

May 19, 2026

Legislative Summary

Previous Meeting: April 21, 2026

Next Meeting: June 16, 2026

Legistar Link: [City of Richmond - Meeting of Land Use, Housing and Transportation Standing Committee on 5/19/2026 at 3:00 PM](#)

Agenda Overview:

Presentations:

- **Richmond Department of Transportation:** Traffic Calming Initiatives & Engineering
- **Urban Forestry Division:** Beautification Efforts & Neighborhood Place Making

Two Papers for Consideration:

1. [Ord. 2026-113](#) Establish code enforcement exemptions for Virginia Friendly Landscapes.
2. [Res. 2026-R022](#) Conduct a feasibility study for City purchase of land for the purpose of developing affordable housing.

Next Meeting Preview (Tues, 6/16):

- **Planning and Development Resources (PDR):** Housing and business permitting timelines
- **Housing and Community Development (HCD):** Surplus land and affordable housing
- Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) board vacancy appointment

Presentation: Richmond Department of Transportation – Andy Boenau

Council Staff Summary and Notes:

- Slides 4-5 RDOT frames transportation safety as a quality-of-life and freedom-of-movement issue, emphasizing that people of all ages and abilities should be able to move safely throughout the city regardless of travel mode.
- Slide 15 Transportation funding is heavily grant-dependent, with over 90% of the reported \$1.2 billion in safety improvements coming from federal, state, and regional funding sources.
- Slides 17-20 RDOT prioritizes high-injury corridors and multimodal access, noting that 9% of streets account for 75% of severe crashes and emphasizing transportation systems that support access to jobs, housing, and services across all travel modes.

Council Staff Questions:

Safety & Data

1. The presentation highlights encouraging reductions in serious crashes and pedestrian injuries — what interventions or strategies do you believe have contributed most to those improvements?
2. When RDOT looks at severe crashes involving pedestrians and cyclists, are there patterns in which communities or populations are being most impacted, and how does that shape the department’s approach to safety investments and prioritization?

Land Use

3. How does RDOT see the City’s ongoing Code Refresh and future land use patterns affecting transportation behavior and infrastructure needs over time?

Equity & Implementation

4. In some areas, walking, biking, or transit is a voluntary choice. But in many underserved communities — particularly along large arterial corridors and auto-oriented commercial areas — folks may rely on those modes without safe or comfortable infrastructure. How does RDOT think about both 1) improving conditions for people who already do not have a choice, and 2) creating the transportation options and land use patterns that shift power and give residents meaningful mobility choices over time?
5. More broadly, why should the City care about creating transportation options beyond driving alone — both for residents who depend on those options today and for residents who might choose them if they were safer, more reliable, and more connected?

Presentation: Urban Forestry Division – Michael Webb

Council Staff Summary and Notes:

- Slide 6 The division has a relatively small operational footprint for a citywide program, consisting of 16 staff across operations/maintenance, beautification, and planning functions.
- Slides 7-8 The Beautification Team currently maintains 126 sites citywide, including medians, traffic circles, bulb-outs, and traffic calming infrastructure that integrate landscaping into transportation corridors.
- Slide 17 Richmond's urban tree canopy has significantly declined over time, dropping from 42% in 2010 to 32% in 2025 despite ongoing planting efforts.
- Slide 19 The emerging Richmond Tree Plan is intended to align with Richmond 300 and RVAgreen 2050, using canopy assessment, community engagement, and long-term planning to guide future investment and maintenance strategies.

Council Staff Questions:

Equity, Innovation & Long-Term Strategy

1. How is the City thinking about the difference between an overall canopy percentage and where canopy is actually located? For example, are there cities with lower overall canopy but stronger public realm outcomes because more trees are located in the public right-of-way and pedestrian environments, versus cities with high canopy concentrated on private land that still experience major heat and access disparities?
2. More broadly, how is the field of urban forestry evolving beyond traditional canopy goals, and how could Richmond position itself at the forefront of using urban forestry to advance climate resilience, public health, equity, placemaking, and community wealth-building?
3. How were the current 126 beautification locations selected, and how is the City thinking about equitable distribution of beautification investments across neighborhoods as the program expands?

Public Realm, Accessibility & Placemaking

4. How does the division coordinate beautification and tree planting work with accessibility goals for seniors, people with disabilities, and pedestrians using the public right-of-way?
5. Are there opportunities for the Tree Plan and beautification work to more intentionally incorporate cultural expression, local history, public art, or neighborhood-led design into public realm improvements?

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT REVIEW & OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY

1. Ordinance No. 2026-113

Patron Mayor Avula

Title: To amend City Code § 11-105, concerning weeds and other vegetation, and to amend ch. 11, art. IV, by adding therein a new section numbered 11-101, concerning definitions, for the purpose of establishing exemptions for Virginia Friendly Landscapes.

Council Staff Notes:

- This proposal is intended to align with Richmond 300, RVAgreen 2050, the Richmond Sustainable Design Standards, and the City's Bee City USA commitments.
- It establishes new definitions for native plants, invasive plants, pollinator gardens, rain gardens, wildflower meadows, and Virginia Friendly Landscapes.
- To qualify for exemption, properties must contain at least 80% native plant species, avoid invasive plants, maintain five-foot setbacks, incorporate "cues-to-care," and receive certification or designation.
- The legislation is intended to support biodiversity, pollinator habitat, stormwater management, urban heat mitigation, and lower-maintenance landscaping practices.
- Staff materials indicate implementation would include public education efforts, outreach connected to "No Mow May," and training for code enforcement staff.

Council Staff Questions:

1. How can the City encourage more climate-friendly and native landscaping practices without creating barriers for renters, lower-income residents, or homeowners with smaller urban lots?
2. Please elaborate on plans to provide targeted training to code enforcement, especially on how to apply the new ordinance consistently and equitably. What does that mean in context?
3. The ordinance includes a five-foot setback requirement and an 80% native plant threshold. How were those standards determined, and how might they function on smaller urban lots or properties with existing landscaping patterns?
4. What challenges does the City anticipate around implementation and code enforcement consistency, particularly given that terms like "ornamental," "weed," or "well-maintained" can be subjective?
5. More broadly, how could Richmond use this work not only to support biodiversity and climate resilience, but also to advance accessibility, neighborhood beautification, public education, and more affordable low-maintenance landscaping options over time?

MISCELLANEOUS

2. Resolution No. 2026-R022

Patron Councilmember Robertson

Title: To request that the Chief Administrative Officer cause the Department of Housing and Community Development, in coordination with other relevant City departments, to conduct a feasibility and potential methods study by which the City may purchase real property within the City of Richmond for the development of affordable housing and to provide the Council with written recommendations for implementing the findings of the study

Council Staff Notes:

- The legislation is framed around Richmond's continuing shortage of affordable housing for low- and moderate-income residents.
- The study would examine fiscal impacts, potential funding mechanisms, and the possible use of bonds and borrowing to support property acquisition.
- The proposal specifically contemplates partnerships between the City, developers, community development organizations, and the Economic Development Authority.
- The resolution appears intended to explore strategies beyond the use of existing surplus public land by considering proactive acquisition of private property for affordable housing purposes.
- The legislation could inform future discussions around land banking, anti-displacement strategies, transit-oriented development, and long-term affordability preservation models.
- Key implementation considerations would likely include acquisition timing, holding costs, property maintenance responsibilities, disposition strategies, and community engagement processes.
- The resolution requests that findings and recommendations be returned to Council within 90 days of adoption.