



City of Richmond

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

DRAFT Meeting Minutes **Land Use, Housing and Transportation** **Standing Committee**

Tuesday, May 19, 2026

3:00 PM

Council Chamber, 2nd Floor - City Hall

Committee Members in Attendance

The Honorable Nicole Jones – Chair
The Honorable Ellen Robertson – Vice Chair
The Honorable Andrew Breton – Member

Staff and Others in Attendance

Kiley Kesecker, Deputy City Clerk
Sophie McGinley, Council Policy Analyst
Nahdiah Muhammad, Assistant City Clerk
Candice Reid, City Clerk
Neil Gibson, Senior Assistant City Attorney

Call to Order

Chair Nicole Jones called the meeting to order at 3:02 p.m. and presided

Chamber Emergency Evacuation Plan Announcement and Public Speaker Guidelines

Upon the Chair's request, Assistant City Clerk Nahdiah Muhammad provided information on the appropriate way to evacuate the Council Chamber in an emergency along with public speaker guidelines.

Public Comment Period

Thomas Courtney addressed the committee concerning land use compliance of warehouse construction for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA). Mr. Courtney stated the project advanced without a final written zoning determination and was presented during the 2025 Board of Zoning Appeals process as an institutional accessory use tied to VMFA and Commonwealth control. Mr. Courtney noted that recent Freedom of Information Act responses do not appear to confirm that institutional control before occupancy.

Approval of Minutes

There were no amendments or corrections to the minutes of the April 21, 2026 committee meeting, and the minutes were approved as presented.

[CD.2026.128](#) April 21, 2026 - Land Use, Housing and Transportation Standing Committee Meeting Minutes

Paper(s) for Consideration

The following ordinance was considered:

1. [ORD. 2026-113](#) 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.

Patrons: Mayor Avula

Laura Thomas, Director of the Office of Sustainability (OOS), provided an introduction of the proposed legislation, stating that it would update the City Code to expand definitions related to Virginia friendly landscaping and reduce the burden on residents receiving citations. She noted that the legislation would allow residents to register native landscaping through a certification program that would not trigger code violations. Ms. Thomas cited the proposed legislation would include requirements related to setbacks, registration, oversight by OOS, and would work with Planning and Development Review (PDR) and Code Enforcement to develop the proposed requirements.

Public Hearing

Robin Allman spoke in support of the proposed ordinance. Ms. Allman encouraged the promotion of native plants within the city. She expressed concerns regarding requirements related to dead branch removal, five foot setbacks, the 80% native plant threshold, and certification costs.

Lee Burleson spoke in support of the proposed ordinance. Ms. Burleson echoed concerns raised by the previous speaker. Ms. Burleson recommended using the Digital Atlas of Native Plants of Virginia as a reference for defining native plants and suggested incentives for commercial developments to incorporate native landscaping. She also asked for clarification regarding the purpose of the proposed five foot setback requirement.

The committee inquired and requested information on the following matters:

- Warnings and citations issued by Planning and Development Review (PDR)
- Encouraging the use of climate friendly and Virginia native plants without creating barriers for residents
- Training for code enforcement employees after adoption of the proposed legislation
- Benefits of proposed program for residents
- Data regarding the number of citations issued

Tara Worden, Sustainability Manager for the Office of Sustainability, stated that the proposed five foot setback requirement was developed in consultation with Code Enforcement in response to resident concerns and may be revised through amendments. She stated that the requirement aligns with the city's sustainable design standards and broader policy frameworks, including RVAGreen 2050, the Climate Equity Action Plan, and Richmond 300. Ms. Worden further stated that the ordinance relies on the National Wildlife Federation certification process, with residents registering certified landscapes through a city online portal to identify compliant pollinator friendly properties and reduce administrative burden.

Daniel Klein, Sustainability Coordinator for the Office of Sustainability, stated that the proposed program would require residents to obtain certification through the National Wildlife Federation, and register the certified property with the city via an online form for Code Enforcement monitoring.

Kevin Vonck, Director of the Department of Planning and Development Review, stated that PDR has coordinated with the OOS on the proposed legislation, which he stated would improve enforcement clarity and reduce staff training needs, with signage helping to identify certified properties. He further stated that PDR does not issue warnings and that inspectors are required to issue citations when violations are identified.

Mr. Klein stated that the program webpage would launch alongside a community engagement effort with environmental groups, supported through city channels and partners. He noted that existing programs such as Virginia Conservation Assistance Program and stormwater utility credits could help offset costs for rain gardens, pollinator gardens, and wildflower meadows, and referenced the Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional Program as a training resource for Code Enforcement staff.

Chair Nicole Jones requested data identifying the areas of the city with the highest number of tall grass citations to help assess the equitable implementation of the proposed ordinance.

The committee reached a consensus to continue consideration of the proposed ordinance to allow for the review of potential amendments.

There were no further comments or discussions, and Member Andrew Breton moved to continue ORD. 2026-113 to the June 16, 2026, Land Use, Housing and Transportation Standing Committee meeting, which was seconded and unanimously approved.

The following resolution was considered:

2. [RES. 2026-R022](#) 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. (As Amended)

Patrons: Ms. Robertson, Ms. Jones and President Newbille

Michelle Brown Peters, Deputy Director for Housing and Community Development (HCD), provided an introduction of the proposed legislation, which she stated HCD supports. She requested that the study be incorporated into the city's strategic housing plan update rather than completed within the proposed 90 day timeline, allowing the findings to be included in the One Richmond Housing Plan report to Council on December 16, 2026.

Public Hearing

There were no public hearing speakers.

Vice Chair Ellen Robertson asked about the proper procedure for the committee to make a recommendation regarding amendments to the proposed resolution, specifically to revise the 90 day timeline so it would align with the One Richmond Housing Plan report scheduled to be presented to Council on December 16, 2026.

Neil Gibson, Senior Assistant City Attorney, stated that any proposed amendment would require the legislation to be amended, reintroduced, and brought back for consideration. He explained that if the committee recommended amendments, Council would first consider a motion to amend at its next meeting before considering final approval at a subsequent meeting.

There were no further comments or discussions and Vice Chair Ellen Robertson moved to forward RES. 2026-R022 to Council with the recommendation to approve with an amendment, which was seconded and unanimously approved.

Chair Nicole Jones requested to be added as co-patron to RES. 2026-R022.

Presentation(s)

Traffic Calming Initiatives & Engineering

Andy Boenau, Director of the Department of Transportation (DOT) for the Department of Public Works, presented an overview of the city's traffic safety initiatives, stating that the city's systems based approach to speed management has contributed to reductions in traffic deaths and serious injuries. He reported a 45% reduction in fatal and serious pedestrian crashes from January through April 2026 compared to the previous three-year average, and noted that the city has more than \$1.2 billion in planned transportation safety improvements prioritized through the high injury network.

[CD.2026.139](#) Traffic Calming Initiatives & Engineering

A copy of the material provided has been filed.

Member Andrew Breton inquired about and requested the following:

- Before and after assessments of completed projects
- How the city defines and implements lighter, quicker, cheaper projects and how this approach is being used and managed
- Pipeline of quick build projects planned for implementation over the next six to twelve months
- List of current lighter, quicker, cheaper projects
- Impact of increased population and traffic on roadway safety

Mr. Boenau stated that the city continues to use traffic calming measures such as speed tables and curb extensions and regularly evaluates their effectiveness. He noted that DOT will provide Council with ongoing project updates and before and after safety data. He stated that the city's quick build approach uses low-cost tools like paint, flexible posts, and speed tables to quickly improve safety, address infrastructure gaps, and serve as interim solutions while permanent projects are developed. Mr. Boenau added that several quick build projects are in design, including bridge reconfigurations and dedicated transit lanes, and will be shared with the public as they advance. He concluded that the city's growth strategy is people centered, focused on ensuring safe mobility for all users.

Chair Nicole Jones inquired about and requested the following:

- Potential impact of federal funding cuts
- How DOT monitors citywide traffic pattern changes and evaluates pedestrian safety and equity with varying levels of walkability and infrastructure
- Plans to address peak traffic congestion near schools in the high injury network

Mr. Boenau stated that the city has reviewed potential federal funding shortfalls and current transportation funding remains secure. He noted that the city prioritizes the high injury network and will continue to guide safety improvements, including school safety studies. He concluded that safety challenges vary by neighborhood and require tailored solutions, and that tools such as road diets and street reconfigurations help improve safety while maintaining vehicle access and expanding multimodal connectivity.

Beautification Efforts & Neighborhood Place Making Signs

Michael Webb, Urban Forester for the Department of Public Works (DPW), provided an overview of the city's urban forestry and beautification programs, highlighting the division's role in supporting the mayor's action plan, maintaining and expanding the city's urban forest, enhancing public green spaces, and improving environmental sustainability.

Torrence Robinson, Deputy Director of Operations and Maintenance for DPW, provided an overview of the city's sidewalk maintenance program. He explained that the program maintains more than 800 miles of sidewalks through three categories of work: large scale reconstruction projects, spot repairs performed by city staff, and concrete shaving to address trip hazards. Mr. Robinson reported that the city has reconstructed more than 200 sidewalk blocks, completed over 900 spot repairs, and improved safety at more than 2,400 locations through concrete shaving. He also noted that sidewalk maintenance funding is generally distributed in proportion to the amount of sidewalk infrastructure located within each district.

[CD.2026.140](#) Beautification Efforts & Neighborhood Place Making Signs

A copy of the material provided has been filed.

Member Andrew Breton inquired about and requested the following:

- Requirements to determine where new sidewalks should be installed and how sidewalk infrastructure projects are prioritized
- City use of contractors for maintenance and infrastructure work
- Additional information regarding how neighborhood groups and private partners are supported in tree planting and maintenance activities
- City's plans to address the loss of tree canopies
- Tree removals and replacements

Mr. Robinson clarified that the presentation focused on the maintenance of existing sidewalks. He noted that maintenance funding is generally allocated based on existing sidewalk infrastructure and needs, and that new sidewalks may be installed through development projects or capital improvement funding when available.

Mr. Webb stated that the city uses a combination of in-house staff and contractors to complete projects. He explained that residents may obtain no cost permits to prune trees for clearance purposes, or plant trees within the public right-of-way. Mr. Webb noted that the city maintains an approved species list and conducts site visits to review proposed plantings and ensure they are appropriate for the location. He further stated that the final urban tree canopy assessment is still underway and that canopy loss is largely driven by private development. He noted that a Virginia tree bank requirement could help mitigate canopy loss by requiring developers who cannot meet canopy coverage standards to contribute to a canopy fund or preserve or plant sufficient trees on-site. He added that the city is also exploring grant programs to help fund tree planting on private residential properties as a means of supporting canopy regeneration. Mr. Webb concluded that the city generally plants more trees annually in public spaces than are removed.

Chair Nicole Jones inquired about and requested the following:

- How the selection of the 126 beautification sites and equity considerations are incorporated into the distribution of beautification investments across neighborhoods
- How urban forestry is evolving beyond traditional tree canopy goals and how Richmond is positioning its Urban Forestry Division to support broader objectives
- How Richmond Tree Plan and beautification efforts could more intentionally incorporate cultural expression, local history, public art, and neighborhood-led design
- Coordinating beautification and tree planting initiatives with accessibility goals for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and pedestrians
- Updated heat maps

Mr. Webb stated that many beautification sites originated as transportation and traffic calming projects, and were designed with plantable areas intended for landscaping improvements within the public right-of-way. Mr. Webb expressed that the Richmond Tree Plan is intended to be a community informed strategy focused on addressing canopy gaps, particularly in urban heat island areas. He explained that constraints in the public right-of-way require alternative approaches, including supporting large tree plantings on private property and tree giveaway programs. He noted that the plan seeks to address canopy loss driven in part by private development and advance long term climate resilience.

Mr. Webb stated that planting and beautification decisions are reviewed to ensure compliance with accessibility and safety requirements, including pedestrian visibility, crosswalk safety, and clear access for individuals with disabilities. He concluded that workforce development efforts related to arborist training are primarily led through Groundwork RVA, with ongoing discussions on apprenticeship pathways and city supported service learning opportunities.

Board Vacancies

There were no board vacancies.

Discussion Item(s)

There were no discussion items.

Staff Report

Council staff provided the committee with the May Land Use, Housing and Transportation staff report.

[CD.2026.143](#) May 19, 2026 - Staff Report

A copy of the material provided has been filed.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:36 p.m.