

PARTNERSHIP *for* SMARTER GROWTH

Richmond City Council
LUHT Standing Committee
February 22, 2022

Chair Addison and Members of the Land Use, Housing, and Transportation Standing Committee,

At the Partnership for Smarter Growth, we advocate for a future in which our land use and transportation decisions allow anyone, regardless of age, race, income, or ability to move about the city safely and conveniently, and to live in a safe and affordable home. Three issues before you today have the potential to dramatically strengthen or undermine Richmond's progress toward these goals, shaping the context in which current and future residents make critical decisions about where they live, where they work, and how to make ends meet.

Item 4: Establishment, Department of Mobility and Multimodal Transportation (RES 2021-R086)

PSG strongly supports the establishment of a new department of mobility and multimodal transportation. Transportation departments can be found in other major cities across the United States, and for our city it has the potential to strengthen our commitment to and implementation of better transit, and safer streets for all users, especially cyclists and pedestrians. In partnership with our planning department it would ensure our transportation investments are integrated with the mixed-use, walkable, inclusive and sustainable future envisioned by Richmond 300. We cannot grow without an increased focus and investment in transit, walking, and biking, and parking reforms that will maximize non-auto modes. Without these investments we would see gridlock.

A department focused on transportation will directly support efforts to reduce our carbon emissions (of which more than a third can be attributed to the transportation sector); help reduce poverty through provision of affordable, effective transportation and access to opportunity; and strengthen the urban amenities of our city that have played such a large role in the population and economic growth we are now experiencing. While detractors might argue that the establishment of such a department constitutes an extra expenditure on an already tight balance sheet, we argue that the City cannot afford not to take this step in preparing for the coming decades, wasting an opportunity to reduce our environmental impact and strengthen quality of life for all residents now and into the future.

Item 6: GRTC Board Restructure (RES 2022-R011)

PSG is opposed to the ratification of changes – as proposed – to the Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC)'s charter, in which Richmond, Chesterfield, and Henrico would each maintain

three out of nine members of the Board of Directors. While it is important that all jurisdictions are represented in GRTC's governance and contribute to increasing our transit funding, a structure in which the combined votes of the two suburban jurisdictions would have precedence over the City of Richmond has the potential to fundamentally alter the decision-making process within the agency, leaving Richmonders, of whom a far larger share are low-income, POC, and/or reliant on GRTC's service to meet their basic needs, without adequate representation of their interests.

The City of Richmond has by far the largest number of transit users, most of whom rely on transit to meet their daily needs and cannot afford to own a car. Our system needs to focus first on those most in need of transit for affordable access to jobs and opportunity. We recommend a governance structure in which the number of seats on GRTC's Board of Directors or voting weights are allocated by either the percentage of the agency's total funding contributed by each jurisdiction, or by the distribution of the transit system's total ridership as a percentage of the total ridership across the agency's services. Such a structure would create incentives for involved municipalities to contribute more funds to GRTC's capital improvement and operations needs, or to better align their land use decision-making with investments in transit – both of which would serve residents' best interests, increasing the utility of transit and increasing access to opportunity and ridership.

Item 8: One Richmond: An Equitable Affordable Housing Plan (RES 2022-R008)

Given the rapidly increasing crisis of housing affordability in Richmond (and across the nation), we commend Mayor Stoney for advancing his *One Richmond* equitable affordable housing plan. Last year, we published our [policy platform for affordable housing](#) in the region, and we are pleased to see many of the policies and programs we recommended have been included within the plan. We support the adoption of this plan, but suggest that a number of changes be made to strengthen the impact that the plan can have in ensuring the availability of safe and affordable housing for current and future Richmonders alike.

It is long overdue for the Virginia General Assembly to enact enabling legislation regarding Richmond's ability to enact inclusionary zoning policies, and while lobbying for such legislation has been included among the strategies both within this plan and within the Richmond 300 master plan, efforts by the City and its representatives on this front to win this authority have failed to meet the urgency of the moment, and we ask that a stronger commitment be made.

Additionally, given the large amount of development and redevelopment activity taking place along Richmond's current and future transit corridors, stronger commitments must be made to the inclusion of committed affordable housing units in these areas. Ensuring that vibrant, desirable, transit-accessible neighborhoods resulting are accessible to all kinds of families is absolutely critical in ensuring that Richmond lives up to the equitable, inclusive future our representatives have promised. In order to ensure that all residents benefit from the value we have all had a part in creating, the city should take concrete steps to ensure inclusion of

affordable housing in the sale or development of public land, in our plans and our zoning initiatives – using density bonuses tied to the provision of affordable housing units or through cash-in-lieu to be used for the production of affordable units.

Our growing city is at a turning point, and the decisions we make now will influence the lives of residents and the opportunities available to them for years to come. We are greatly appreciative of your service to our community.

Sincerely,

Sebastian Shetty

Policy Coordinator

Partnership for Smarter Growth

