

Dear Planning Commission members:

My name is James William Askegren II. I am a 29-year-old recent homeowner of a rowhouse in Oregon Hill.

I am writing to ask you to support the changes to the Richmond 300 plan as they pertain to Oregon Hill, as presented in RES. 2022-R033 which was unanimously approved by the City Council on June 27, 2022.

The homes in Oregon Hill are the main reason I chose this neighborhood to live in. It's one of the main reasons I chose to move to Richmond. Neighborhoods like mine are Richmond's "Trolley Cars" so to speak.

San Francisco. Georgetown. Williamsburg. These all evoke a certain image that attract people to these areas. The restaurants, museums, and parks around them are great, but they don't exist if the fabric of their neighborhoods are altered. Change the brick sidewalks, the porches, the site of different plants in a neighbor's yard, to the monolith of an apartment building and the magic is gone. Kill the neighborhood landscape and you kill what gravitates people to Richmond.

Jackson Ward, in the middle of being revitalized, has been successful mostly because it retains its original homes and the sense of community they create. One can only imagine how much greater the "Harlem of the South" would be today if City Planners hadn't demolished blocks of it in the 1940s and built Gilpin Court and other projects. Heck, it may not have even had to go through a revitalization at all. One should also note the residents of Jackson Ward didn't want their homes destroyed. They knew what would happen, but their voices were smothered and their community demolished anyways.

I actually have a backyard, most of my neighbors do too, and I still believe these are not unreasonable or unethical things to want in a city dwelling. Some may point to the housing crisis as a reason to change the zoning to more densely populated, taller buildings. I strongly disagree. There's a housing crisis, but people don't want to live in apartments. They settle for them because those are the only things being built. The push for those abominations is churned by nothing but the greed of developers who don't want to invest in less profitable structures and the promise of more tax money from the inhabitants. Force developers to build more single-family homes by mandating proper zoning, don't be greedy, and watch the city prosper. Don't make the same mistakes that so many planners have in the past. Please don't destroy my neighborhood. I wouldn't destroy yours.

Thank you for your consideration,

James